

# 2023/24 Annual Report

Victims' Commissioner for England  
and Wales

October 2024





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Victims' Commissioner  
for England and Wales

Presented to Parliament by the Lord Chancellor  
and Secretary of State for Justice by Command of His Majesty.

October 2024



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:  
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Clive House 5th Floor  
70 Petty France  
London  
SW1H 9EX  
ISBN: 978-1-5286-5172-1  
E-Number: E03197431 10/24  
Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum  
Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office

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**A note on terminology**  
I am conscious some victims dislike 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 their view. For the purposes of this report, however, I’ve generally used the term ‘victim’ because it’s the term that most agencies use and understand when referring to someone who has experienced victimisation.

In addition, the legislation which underpins my role as Victims’ Commissioner makes clear my remit includes all victims, regardless of the type of crime committed against them, whether they report it to the police and whether or not anyone is convicted.

# Foreword

**Returning as Victims’ Commissioner has been an honour and a privilege. I know first-hand the challenges victims face as they navigate the criminal justice system. Their challenges are my challenges, and their struggles my priority.**

Seventeen years after the tragic loss of my late husband, Garry, my determination to ensure all victims are treated with respect and provided with essential support throughout their criminal justice journey remains as strong as ever.

The passage of the Victims and Prisoners Act (2024) onto the statute book was a milestone, and I am proud to have played a pivotal role in its development. The previous government invited me to return as Victims’ Commissioner to help scrutinise its passage through Parliament. My return was motivated by a desire to ensure it delivered on its promise: a justice system where victims feel heard, respected, and supported at every step.

While the Victims and Prisoners Bill in its original form had much to commend it, the consensus was clear: it needed to go further. We required a transformation in how victims

are treated in our justice system, not more tinkering around the edges. I worked closely with a wide range of stakeholders and my fellow peers from all parties and none to strengthen the Bill, while maintaining close working with Ministers and officials, to whom I am grateful.

The Bill emerged much stronger as a result, with strengthened accountability mechanisms and key concessions, but essential amendments I championed – to safeguard the rights of sexual violence victims and extend support to marginalized groups, such as those affected by anti-social behaviour and homicides overseas – were unsuccessful. I am pleased the Bill has become law; this represents significant progress. However, my dedication to these causes continues.

The past year has been a period of significant progress and persistent challenges. Record-breaking Crown Court backlogs and a deepening prison population crisis have underscored the urgent need to place victims at the heart of our criminal justice system. As Victims’ Commissioner, I am committed to amplifying their voices and I’ve published two victim surveys during my term, including a landmark survey in August. Surveying over 3,000 individuals across England and Wales, it revealed widespread victim frustration with police inaction, delays, and poor communication.

While some victims shared positive experiences when navigating the criminal justice system – a testament to

dedicated and hard-working criminal justice professionals – it’s clear that too many were left behind, often feeling frustrated and unsupported. This was the largest survey ever undertaken by my office and I am committed to repeating this vital exercise later in the year.

Alongside these victim surveys, I have also published research mapping victim advocacy provision in England and Wales. I have long been a proponent of advocates and for good reason: this research underscored the vital role of advocates in supporting victims, helping them stay informed, engaged and protected. As Crown Court backlogs lengthen and victim withdrawal rates rise, advocates become even more crucial. My research underscores this need and provides recommendations to strengthen their provision.

For me, anti-social behaviour is not a statistic. It’s a lived experience, one I share with countless victims across the country. My 2019 report, *Living a Nightmare*, exposed the harsh reality faced by victims. It made a number of recommendations. Sadly, little progress has been made in addressing the issues I identified five years ago. My updated review revealed a persistent pattern of neglect: victims were often ignored, deprioritised, and passed from one agency to another. Systemic change is required to improve how victims of anti-social behaviour are treated and supported by statutory agencies. My new recommendations offer a clear path to improve support and treatment for

victims of anti-social behaviour. I hope – this time – they will be adopted by government in full.

My office is embarking on crucial research into the full impact of court delays. By directly engaging with victims, victim service providers, and justice system personnel, this research will examine the broader impact on victim services and the overall effectiveness of the justice system. By analysing best practices in areas like communication and case listing, I aim to identify solutions that ensure victims’ needs are at the forefront of any government strategy.

The criminal justice system undeniably faces immense challenges. While new victim legislation is set to lay the foundations for better victim treatment in future, we still face significant difficulties in the here and now. The voices of victims must be at the heart of our efforts to rebuild the justice system.

The justice system must listen to victims, not just talk at them. It should share information willingly and with sensitivity. It should give victims a voice, make them feel like a participant and not an onlooker. A justice system that does all of the above will help heal some of the victim’s wounds. It can bring catharsis, regardless of the outcome. It can also give other victims the confidence to come forward and report crimes committed against them.

On the other hand, a justice system that does none of these things will only add to the trauma of the crime and create disillusionment, with victims and witnesses simply walking away saying: never again.

**Baroness Newlove LLD (hc) DCL**  
Victims’ Commissioner for England and Wales



The Victims’ Commissioner pictured attending the Victims’ Code campaign launch at the Ministry of Justice, February 2024.

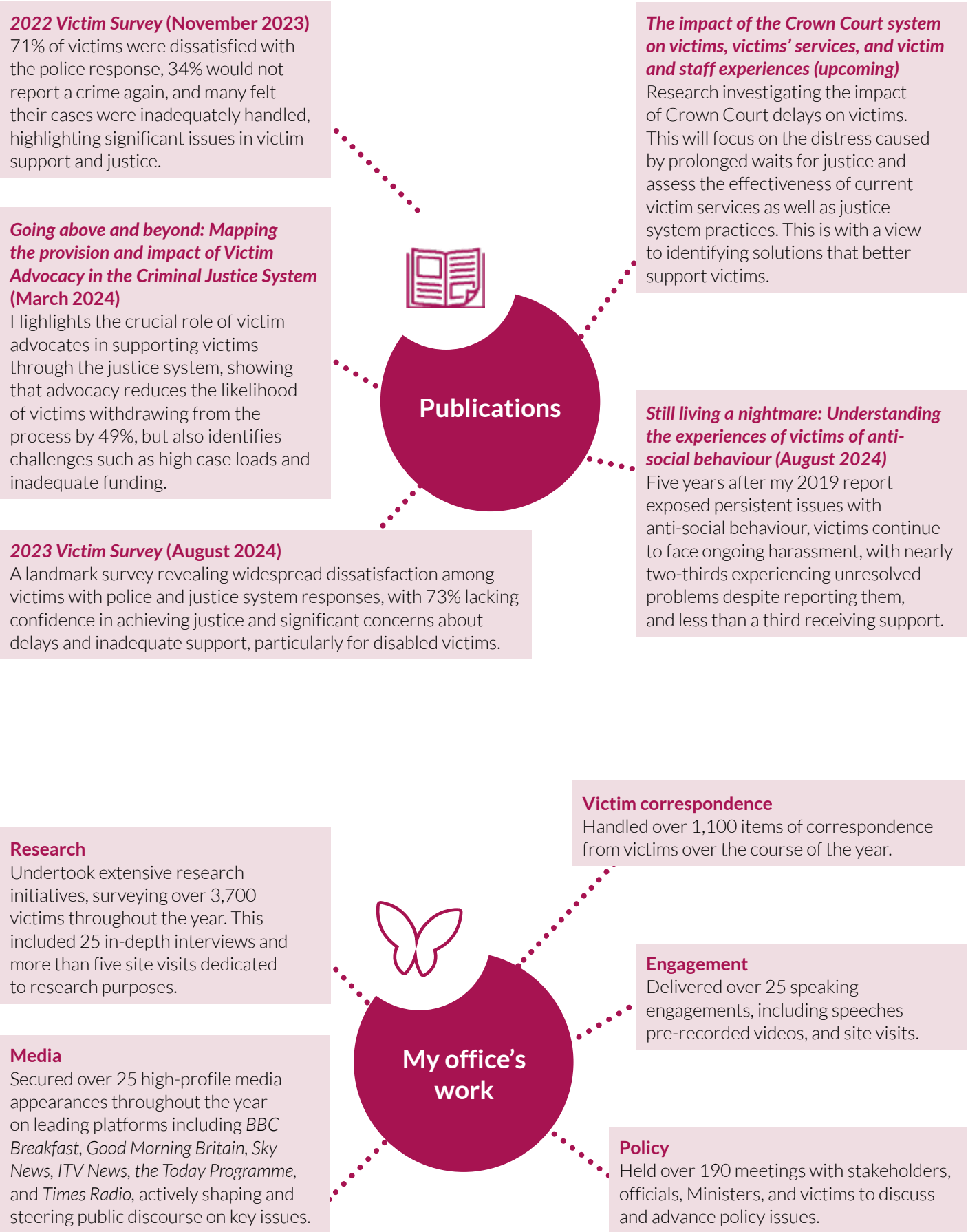
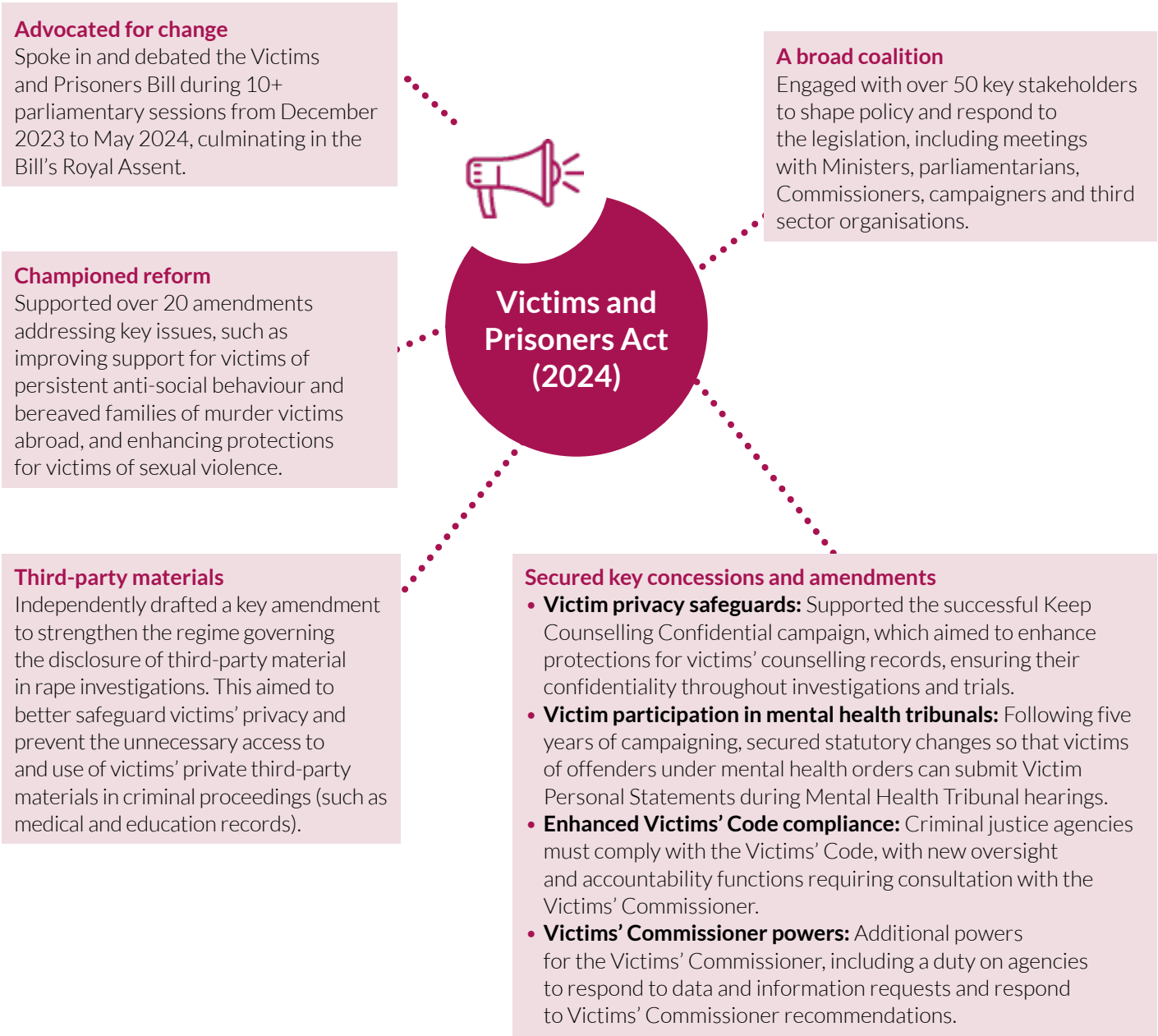
73%

**of victims were not confident they could receive justice by reporting a crime**

**2023 Victim Survey**



# Year in review



# Victims and Prisoners Act

## Delivering compliance and accountability

The overarching theme for the Bill had to be victim empowerment, with victims being better informed, listened to, able to challenge and be appropriately supported.

My motivation for accepting the then Lord Chancellor’s offer of re-appointment as Victims’ Commissioner was first and foremost to work with the previous government on what was then the Victims and Prisoners Bill, now the Victims and Prisoners Act (2024). I have been calling for such a Bill for the past 10 years: a vehicle for delivering transformational change of victims’ experiences of the criminal justice system.

The overarching theme for the Bill had to be victim empowerment, with victims being better informed, listened to, able to challenge and be appropriately supported. To make this a reality, I wanted to see the Bill:

- make necessary provision to ensure criminal justice agencies can be held to account in their delivery of victim rights under the Victims’ Code (the code);
- provide vulnerable victims with the specialist support and rights they need;
- and extend the remit of the Code to include victims of serious crime who are currently wholly or partially excluded.

This report sets out these three priorities in greater detail. The first, Victims’ Code compliance goes to the core of what this Bill was all about.

### Victims’ Code

The Victims’ Code sets out the rights victims should expect to receive, from the moment they report a crime to the end of the trial. They include help to



In October 2023, as the Ministry of Justice announces her appointment as Victims’ Commissioner, Baroness Newlove highlights that her primary focus will be the Victims and Prisoners Bill.

understand the process, updates on their case, respectful treatment, procedural justice as well as emotional and practical support when needed.

However, there is no means of monitoring the delivery of victim rights set out in the Code, nor can we hold agencies fully to account should they

**“As Victims’ Commissioner, Baroness Newlove will play a crucial role in scrutinising the Victims and Prisoners Bill as it progresses through Parliament, ensuring it serves its purpose to improve victims’ experiences of the criminal justice system.”**

**Government press release announcing the appointment of Baroness Newlove, 16 October 2023.**

fail to deliver. This is not sustainable. Victims tell me time and again that their treatment falls below the standard required by the Code. According to my victim surveys, less than a third have even heard of the Victims’ Code. In a recent report, Victim Support found as many as 60% of victims were not receiving their Code rights. Clearly this must change.

### Compliance and accountability

The Bill’s initial form offered a positive step towards transparency and accountability. It mandated Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to collect data on compliance with the Code at a local level. Statutory guidance, outlining specific data requirements, would ensure consistency of data collection across regions. This data would be analysed and published in an annual report for public scrutiny. Furthermore, a national Ministerial Taskforce would be established to oversee compliance efforts.

But in my view – and the view of many of the stakeholder groups I consulted following my appointment – the Bill needed to go much further if it was to deliver the level of change required.

Importantly, there needed to be greater independent scrutiny, much of which should fall primarily to the Victims’ Commissioner. There also needed to be more transparency and clearer lines of accountability.

My team and I engaged closely with Ministers and officials on these

points and I am pleased the previous government listened to our concerns and reviewed its proposals. In response, it gave a commitment to issuing statutory non-compliance notices to those areas who consistently underperformed. It would be transparent in setting trigger points for these notices, and it was also agreed that the minutes of the Ministerial Taskforce for overseeing compliance would be made public.

The then government also tabled new provisions to ensure future Victims’ Commissioners can provide rigorous scrutiny of this compliance data. It made a despatch box commitment to place the Commissioner on the national taskforce, to consult throughout the process of assembling the annual compliance report, as well as consulting them on the issuing of non-compliance notices.

There is still a great deal of detail to be worked through on these new arrangements. My team and I will

be taking a close and active interest and listening closely to stakeholders, particularly PCCs.

There are significant logistical difficulties to overcome, such as collecting data across many different systems and identifying insightful qualitative data on how Code entitlements are being delivered. This will take time. We should regard the development of effective monitoring systems as a journey and not an event. At the same time, we need to be clear-sighted on the required outcome.

### Role of the Victims’ Commissioner

The Bill also includes further measures that will embed the role of the Victims’ Commissioner into the justice system.

The government already included provisions to require all agencies to respond to Victims’ Commissioner recommendations – a welcome and long overdue development.

**“The Victims Bill doesn’t do enough to protect victims. Our justice agencies have been found wanting, with few repercussions when they fail to deliver. It is time for change.”**

A joint op-ed by the Victims’ Commissioner and Domestic Abuse Commissioner, expressing their concerns about the Victims and Prisoners Bill. Published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 23 January 2024.





**“Justice should always treat victims with decency and respect. It should listen to victims instead of talking at them. It should share information willingly and with sensitivity. It should give victims a voice, make them feel like a participant and not an onlooker. A justice system that does all of these things can help heal the wounds. It can bring catharsis, regardless of the outcome.”**

**Quote from Baroness Newlove’s speech in the House of Lords during the Second Reading of the Victims and Prisoners Bill, 18 December 2023.**

Future Commissioners will also have a statutory right to be consulted on statutory guidance and any changes to the Code.

A further amendment was tabled requiring agencies to cooperate with the Commissioner. In my time as Commissioner, to varying degrees, agencies have always been cooperative, but it is important that this is seen to be a statutory obligation and not a favour. The government eventually accepted a version of this amendment and I’m pleased this will become a legal requirement. These important changes to the role of the Victims’ Commissioner will assist

future Commissioners in providing effective scrutiny – consistent with the original purpose of the role when it was first created in 2004.

**Culture change**

It is important we do not confine ourselves to compliance monitoring. We need to tackle the culture of our criminal justice system when it comes to the treatment of victims. We need to understand why the Code is perceived to be of secondary importance in the eyes of so many criminal justice practitioners.

Defendants have rights under the law, victims do not. The Code

was once described to me by a government lawyer as “persuasive guidance”. Many victims, myself included, would question its actual ‘persuasiveness’!

I regularly meet with criminal justice agencies and have no doubt they are well-intentioned when dealing with victims. But all too often, the culture is more “...let’s do what we can” rather than “...supporting victims goes to the heart of what we are all about”.

Tackling this culture will require a commitment to training criminal justice practitioners on the Victims’ Code. This needs to happen hand-in-hand with criminal justice leaders emphasising the ethical duty their respective organisations have towards supporting victims of crime.

**Conclusion**

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 represents a significant step forward for victims’ rights in our justice system. The measures outlined in the Act, particularly the focus on compliance, independent scrutiny, and a strengthened role for the Victims’ Commissioner, offer a framework for real change.

However, the journey is far from over. As the Act is implemented, ongoing vigilance and commitment from all stakeholders will be crucial. This includes ensuring effective data collection and analysis, fostering a culture whereby victim needs and rights are considered alongside those of the offenders, and holding those who fall short of their obligations accountable.

Ultimately, the success of the Act will be measured by the experiences of victims themselves. By ensuring they are informed, supported, and treated with respect throughout the criminal justice process, we can build a system that truly delivers for victims of crime.

# Victims of mentally disordered offenders

## Finally given a voice at the Tribunal

My calls for parity of treatment between victims going through the parole process and those going through the Mental Health Tribunal are finally heeded.

In June 2023, Nottingham reeled from the horrific murders of three people and the attempted murders of three others. The perpetrator was later assessed as having a serious mental illness and committed to a secure hospital facility. The bereaved families, still grappling with this unimaginable loss, have understandably sought information to understand the events of that day and the subsequent decisions made. My heart goes out to them.

For bereaved victims to come to terms with their profound loss, it is crucial that they have a complete understanding of the circumstances surrounding their loved ones’ deaths and a sense of justice. For this to happen, they need to feel they have a voice throughout every stage of the criminal justice process. This applies equally to all victims, regardless of whether the perpetrator is detained in a hospital or sentenced to imprisonment. The pain is no less profound. A criminal justice system which feels an ethical duty of care towards all victims should make no distinction between the two groups.

Unfortunately, these families, already shattered by loss, often feel the justice and mental health systems prioritise the rights of the offender before the needs of those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. I share this sense of unease.



**“The law rightly distinguishes between offenders who were of sound mind when committing their crimes and those whose judgment was impaired by mental illness. That is not disputed, but the trauma and distress inflicted on the victim by these crimes is no less if the perpetrator is held in a hospital rather than a prison. They all deserve support. They all deserve to have their voices heard.”**

**Baroness Newlove advocating for an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill that ensures equal treatment for victims of mentally disordered offenders, January 2024.**





Baroness Newlove interviewed on *BBC Newsnight*, discussing the challenges faced by victims of mentally disordered offenders, March 2024

In 2018, **my review** on the entitlements and experiences of victims of mentally disordered offenders highlighted the disparity between victims in the parole process and those before the Mental Health Tribunal (Tribunal). It called for parity of treatment between the two.

Victims of offenders detained under the Mental Health Act did not have the opportunity to submit a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) to the Tribunal, nor to attend the Tribunal hearing to present their statement. For victims whose offenders go through the Parole Board, these entitlements had been put in place ten years earlier.

My review proposed seven recommendations, including the right to submit a VPS and attend hearings. Disappointingly, upon

revisiting this issue, I found this key recommendation unimplemented nearly six years later.

The VPS is not meant to influence medical or risk assessments, but to give victims a voice and acknowledge the crime’s impact. It offers a sense of catharsis, even if it doesn’t affect the decision. The Parole Board has successfully incorporated VPS for over sixteen years without legal challenges. There’s no reason the Tribunal can’t do the same.

Scotland’s Mental Health Tribunals allow victim representation, proving it can work well. Their legislation allows anyone with an interest to make oral or written representations. This happens at a separate hearing, where the patient is absent. If Scotland can do it, so can England and Wales.

In the Victims and Prisoners Bill, I championed amendments granting parity of treatment – the right to submit a VPS and attend the Tribunal – to victims of mentally disordered offenders. The Report Stage in the House of Lords saw a crucial step towards fairness. The government agreed to amendments that will ensure equal treatment for victims of mentally disordered offenders.

Hopefully, now the Act is on the statute book, it will not be long before these provisions will be enacted, finally removing a long standing and inexcusable unfairness.

# Violence against women and girls

## More work to be done to address victims’ privacy concerns

Many victims are currently left to navigate a system that can feel intimidating and overwhelming, especially when faced with demands for personal information from the police.

Navigating the criminal justice system can be challenging for victims of rape and sexual assault. Unlike other crime types, victims often face intrusive scrutiny of their behaviour and personal history. This was certainly true when I departed as Victims’ Commissioner in 2019 – and sadly, it still resonates today.

I am heartened to see significant progress in how rape is investigated and prosecuted, thanks in large part to the 2021 end-to-end rape review and its action plan. Increased police referrals, charges and Crown Court cases surpassing 2016 levels clearly mark a step in the right direction, and I remain cautiously optimistic about this progress.

I have been particularly encouraged by Operation Soteria, which aims to transform how police investigate and

the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutes rape cases by shifting the focus of investigations away from the victim and towards the alleged perpetrator.

This approach is essential, as an increasing number of victims are withdrawing from the justice process. While this can be attributed to several factors, the fear of handing over personal information can act as a significant barrier to reporting and seeking justice. Many victims withdraw from the justice system after reporting due to precisely this concern.

### ‘Keep Counselling Confidential’

I was a strong proponent of the ‘Keep Counselling Confidential’ campaign as it took aim at precisely this issue. Led by Rape Crisis England & Wales, the End Violence Against Women Coalition, and the Centre for Women’s Justice, the campaign fought for victims’ right to privacy.

Counselling offers a vital safe space for survivors to heal from trauma. However, the fear that therapy notes could be accessed during investigations, and potentially disclosed to the defence, created a chilling effect. This forced many to make an impossible choice: seek justice or protect their privacy.

The campaign demanded robust legal safeguards, ensuring police can access therapy records only in the most exceptional circumstances. I was proud to champion this cause in the House of Lords during debates on the

Victims and Prisoners Act (2024) and, thanks to tireless campaigning from all involved, the previous government made key concessions in this area.

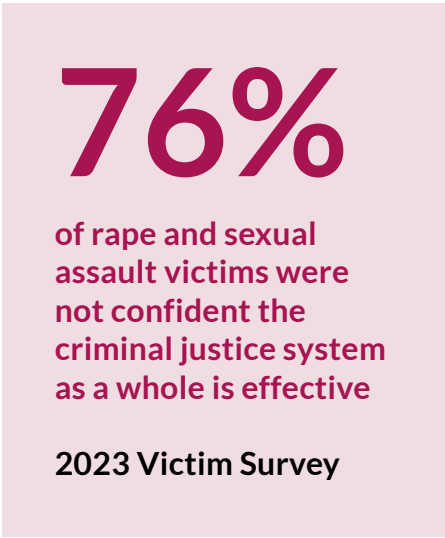
The Victims and Prisoners Act now contains a crucial amendment: police now no longer request these records pre-charge unless they hold “substantial probative value” to the case. This is a welcome step forward for victims, removing a major barrier to seeking help.

But there is still more work to be done and victims’ privacy concerns extend beyond notes of therapy.

### Third-party materials

Police routinely access other sensitive personal information, including medical notes, social service records, and education files held by individuals or institutions other than the victim. These records (third-party materials) can span decades and often contain not just facts, but also professional opinions – potentially coloured by biases – about the victim. Victims may be unaware these records exist, let alone their content or potential impact on an investigation.

I frequently hear of investigations being closed because something in a victim’s background called into question their credibility. We are not talking about admissions of fabricating the allegation, but rather minor or irrelevant matters, such as a history of depression or a social worker’s view of them when they were a child. Because there is







From left to right: Nicole Jacobs (Domestic Abuse Commissioner), Baroness Newlove, and Claire Waxman (London Victims' Commissioner) pictured together after giving evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into the escalation of violence against women and girls, November 2023.



**“I met a woman who had reported her attacker to the police. Her medical records were used in this way in court: to cast doubt on her and her account. They revealed sensitive information to her parents, who were sitting in the public gallery, which was used to suggest to the jury that she lacked credibility, that she was promiscuous. As if that meant that she could not have been the victim of rape. Sadly, this is not a one-off. I also frequently hear of investigations being closed because something in a victim’s background aroused suspicion.”**

**Baroness Newlove delivers the keynote speech at the Saint Mary’s SARC Annual Conference, April 2024.**

a chance (however small) that this information might cast doubt on a victim’s credibility at trial, the case is simply dropped. If the victims refuse access to the material the investigation usually ends.

In the rare instances where matters do go to court, private information about victims can be used to undermine their credibility as a witness and victims can be blindsided by questioning about the contents of private records during the trial.

In effect, victims are being forced to choose between justice and their right to privacy. That is no choice at all.

**Amending the Bill**

The previous government took a step in the right direction by acknowledging that police trawling of these records was an issue. To address this, they established a framework for requests for third-party material, aiming to curb so-called “fishing expeditions.” This amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Act requires police requests to be relevant, necessary, and proportionate, and for victims to be notified. These steps, however, fall short of a robust legal safeguard and simply consolidate the existing inadequate legal framework.

The previous government argued that accompanying guidance will strengthen these measures. However, non-binding guidance is unlikely to significantly alter entrenched police practices. A more substantial legislative framework is needed to ensure meaningful protection for victims’ privacy.



Let's compare this to the success of the Police Crime Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act (2022). Prior to 2022, "digital strip searches" – the intrusive practice of mass phone data downloads – were commonplace. My predecessor, Dame Vera Baird, successfully challenged this practice and helped establish a robust framework in the PCSC Act to safeguard against excessive requests. Importantly, this includes measures to prevent victim coercion. Since its implementation, victim support services and Operation Soteria academics report a significant decrease in such requests, demonstrating the effectiveness of a strong legal framework.

I worked hard to persuade the previous government to replicate the

PCSC Act's success in the Victims and Prisoners Act. This would involve requiring police and prosecutors to seek a victim's non-coerced agreement when accessing personal data. Unfortunately, I was unable to convince Ministers. As such, the government clauses in the Victims and Prisoners Act insist that the police merely serve notice on a victim of their intention to ask for the material. Police can do this regardless of any victim challenge. This approach simply allows the practice of trawling through victims' records to continue. The fight for a legislative framework that genuinely protects victim privacy continues. As Victims' Commissioner, I am committed to advocating for the changes necessary to safeguard victims' right to a private life.



Baroness Newlove pictured with the Minister for Victims and Violence against Women and Girls, Alex Davies-Jones MP, September 2024.

Free, independent legal advice

While legislative changes are crucial, they alone are insufficient. To achieve real, lasting change, we must empower victims to understand and assert their rights throughout the entire process. This requires a systemic shift, and the answer lies in a national rollout of free, independent legal advocacy for rape victims. Many victims are currently left to navigate a system that can feel intimidating and overwhelming, especially when faced with demands for personal information from the police. Free legal advice, provided by qualified professionals, would be a game-changer. Legal support, provided by qualified professionals, would empower victims of crime. This support can help them understand their rights throughout the legal process, including those related to privacy and the disclosure of personal information. Additionally, legal professionals can guide victims through court proceedings, ensuring they feel informed and supported throughout their justice journey.

A 2018 pilot program of legal advice in Northumbria was shown to successfully reduce requests for sensitive information and boost victims' overall confidence in engaging with the justice system. Its introduction would be a significant step forward for victim privacy.

I was pleased to see the new government commit to providing this free advice in their election manifesto. Victims of rape deserve a justice system that respects their rights and empowers them at every stage.

Free, independent legal advice is a critical piece of the puzzle to rebuild victim confidence in the criminal justice system.

Courts

Justice delayed is justice denied

Justice is not being delivered in a timely or effective way, and it is victims who are paying the price.

I am concerned that chronic and unacceptable delays are becoming ingrained in the system. This year, the Ministry of Justice's initial target of reducing the backlog to 53,000 by March 2025 proved overly optimistic. They were forced to significantly revise this estimate upwards, with the Crown Court backlog now predicted to remain above 64,000. At the time of writing, the situation has demonstrably worsened, with a record backlog of over 67,000 cases.

More than a quarter of all Crown Court cases are now outstanding for over a year and this proportion is steadily increasing. Waiting times are worsening as the prison overcrowding crisis continues and more people are held on remand. This is causing victims real and undue distress, as they face a wait of months and possibly years before they see justice being done.

These delays compound victims' trauma, affecting victims' mental health and family relationships. The continued

delays can prevent them from moving on with their lives. This has real consequences for our justice system, with many victims unable to last the distance, resulting in prosecutions having to be dropped.

Every month, almost 700 trials are unable to go ahead on their scheduled day and fall back into the queue because of myriad logistical issues, including defendants not being transported from prison, a shortage of barristers and overbooked courts running out of time to hear cases. Almost 8,000 such "ineffective" trials were recorded last year – making up a quarter of the total – and the figure is expected to rise further.

A major constraint is there is simply not the workforce needed to service the courtrooms. The unavailability of legal professionals stopped more than 1,400 cases in 2023. The crisis of recruitment and retention among both barristers and solicitors impacts directly on the pipeline of judges, who are recruited from the same ranks.

In its May 2024 report, the National Audit Office warned that court buildings were not fit for purpose and will add to difficulty in reducing the backlog. With an estimated £1bn backlog of maintenance and repair issues, problems are expected to become critical in the coming years.

Despite the ongoing challenges, Ministers (past and present) and officials deserve credit for their efforts. Crucially, there are now unlimited sitting days and HMCTS continue to use some of the Nightingale Courts, providing additional capacity to the court estate. Indeed, the crown courts sat for over 107,000 days in 2023–24 – the highest number in seven years. The national roll out of pre-recorded evidence has been a welcome development and the significant increase in technical capacity for remote hearings is also a key success.

But there is a glaring lack of national oversight and scrutiny over listing practices, with no courts inspectorate in place to look at efficiency and victim considerations. Victims often find out a couple of days before they are due to attend court, or even on the day itself, that the trial has been adjourned and relisted for another time. I hear of victims who have faced multiple adjournments spanning several years, where each time they must do all the preparation only to be let down by the system again. There must be a better way.

As court wait times lengthen, frontline victim services also face increasing pressure. Victims remain

**“If I had realised that it would take 5 years and possibly more for this case to be put before the court for a jury to make a decision I would not have agreed to be involved.”**

**Quote from a victim, writing to the Commissioner to share their experience of the courts.**



in the system longer, leading to unsustainable caseloads and ultimately, a reduction in the critical support they need. I fear victim services and the staff who support victims daily are having to carry the burden of court backlogs.

My office is conducting in-depth research on the full impact of court delays. We'll gather insights directly from victims, victim service providers, and those within the justice system itself. This research will delve deeper than the individual victim's experience, examining the broader impact on victim services and the overall effectiveness of the justice system. By analysing best practices in areas like communication and case listing, I aim to identify solutions that ensure victims' needs are at the forefront of any strategy.

I'm not naive – addressing this crisis is not a quick, overnight fix, there will be many more hurdles along the way. Whatever the challenges – and they are significant – we cannot ignore the human cost of these delays. An efficient and responsive justice system fosters public confidence. When victims see that the system is working efficiently and that their needs are being met, it, in turn, reinforces their faith in the criminal justice system.

33%

of victims felt they had to wait too long before the case came to trial

2023 Victim Survey



Introductory meeting between the Victims' Commissioner and Nick Goodwin, Chief Executive of His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), March 2024.



Baroness Newlove with Stephen Parkinson, Director of Public Prosecutions, at the Crown Prosecution Service, September 2024.

Court transcripts

I recognise there are victims whose recovery would be aided by having a better understanding of what happened at trial.

A sentencing hearing can be a day of strong and conflicting emotions for a victim of crime, particularly victims of sexual and violent crime.

There is a sense of relief that the trial is over, and a guilty verdict has been handed down, mixed with anxiety about whether the sentence will reflect the damage caused to you and your family.

Hearing your victim personal statement (VPS) being read out in open court, for the first time explaining the level of harm caused, brings with it the realisation that you need to start the lengthy process of recovering from the trauma and pain of what has happened to you.

The judge's sentencing remarks are important. They set out what has happened, the offender's culpability and the impact on the victim. The rationale behind the eventual sentence is set out in detail and can be hard to follow for those not familiar with sentencing law and

guidance. All too often, the hearing is a blur, with victims leaving the courtroom remembering very little of what has been said.

The costs for applying to the court for a copy of the sentencing remarks range from between £60 and £120. This is why I have always believed every victim who has sat through a sentencing hearing should be entitled to request a free transcript of the sentencing remarks.

Bereaved victims in homicide cases have always been entitled to a transcript of sentencing remarks, but I am not convinced how widely this is known and whether bereaved victims are routinely being made this offer. I do not recall being offered this after my trial. We need to make sure there is awareness of this entitlement on the part of court staff, prosecutors, and the Victim Contact Scheme.

In response to demands for victims to be offered full transcripts of the whole trial, the last government announced

42%

of victims disagreed that victims are fully supported by the courts

2023 Victim Survey

a pilot, whereby victims of sexual offences will routinely be offered a transcript of sentencing remarks. I welcome this initiative and will take a close interest in its operation.

However, I have raised with Ministers my disappointment that the pilot does not include victims of serious violent crime, including actual bodily harm and attempted murder. These victims are often left with life-changing injuries and significant trauma. For the same reasons victims of rape and sexual assault might value having a transcript of sentencing remarks, these victims would also benefit from this scheme. I will continue to press for their inclusion in the pilot.

I recognise there are victims whose recovery would be aided by having a better understanding of what happened at trial. At the same time, I understand officials' concerns that providing a transcript of the whole trial would be prohibitively expensive.

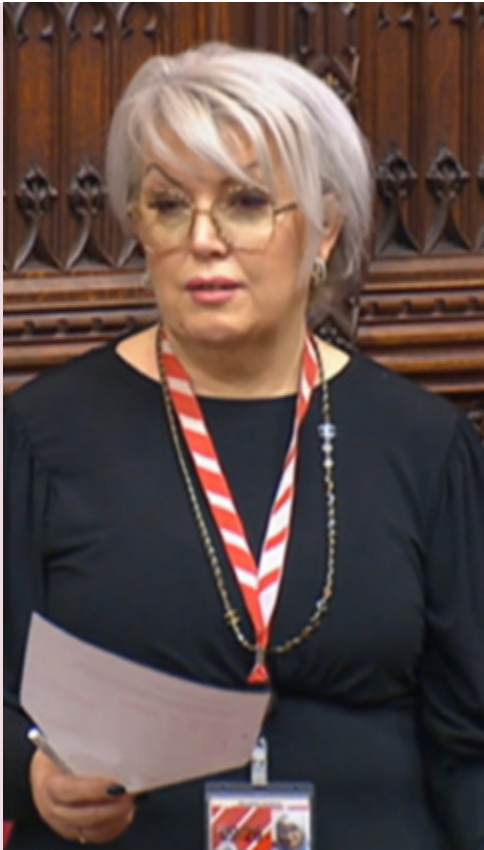


Introductory meeting between the Victims' Commissioner, Attorney General, Richard Hermer KC, and the Solicitor General, Sarah Sackman MP, July 2024.



“Surely, we can have a copy of the transcript – the direction, the sentencing, how it was all resolved – for whenever a victim decides to pick it up. It is at their discretion, but surely we should not be looking at the monetary value of their damage, of the direction of the sentence and the direction for the judge, because it is so important to victims. I ask my noble and learned friend: could we have further discussions and make sure that every victim of crime, not just those of rape and sexual abuse, has the opportunity to have that document whether in their hand or digitally?”

**Baroness Newlove addressing the House of Lords during the Victims and Prisoners Bill debate, advocating for victims’ access to court transcripts, January 2024.**



However, I hope the government will consider giving officials the discretion to commission a copy of the judge’s summing up remarks to provide to the victim where there is reason to believe it will aid their recovery. The summing up is invariably comprehensive and insightful and is likely to provide many victims with what they are looking for.

Finally, I am aware that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) commissions a transcript of sentencing remarks in every case that will eventually go to the Parole Board to determine release. The document will form part of the parole dossier. I have long made the case for all victims within the Victim Contact Scheme to be provided with this transcript. I have been contacted by victims who are frustrated that they know this transcript is being held on file, but despite asking, they have been told they are not allowed to see the document.

In cases where the crime took place many years ago, the HMPPS transcript might be the only existing record of what was said by the sentencing judge.

I am told the reason for not sharing the document is that the sentencing judge has not given his approval. In many cases the judge will have long retired. This rationale is hugely frustrating to victims and to me. Sentencing remarks are made in open court and there can be no good reason why they are not shared with the victims of the crime. If the Parole Board and the offender can see the document, it is ludicrous to suggest the victim cannot.

I want to see officials and the judiciary resolve this issue quickly so that those victims for who the trial has played such a significant part in their lives can have the opportunity to find out exactly what was said when sentence was handed down.



# Homicide abroad

## Unfinished business

Where there is a political will, we can move mountains. However, on this occasion, the political will was not in evidence.

When the Victims and Prisoners Bill came to the Lords, I supported an amendment to give bereaved UK victims of homicide statutory recognition within the Victims’ Code.

To lose a loved one to homicide is a truly devastating experience, as I know only too well. When the death happens in the UK, the system wraps itself around you and you are guided through what can feel like a surreal process of inquests, court hearings, meetings with police and barristers, and support workers.

When that death happens in another country, as is the case in 60–80 cases a year, the experience of the bereaved family is very different.

You are suddenly confronted with an alien legal system, often a different language and logistical problems such as

how to get the body repatriated or finding out what is happening with the police investigation. All at a time when you are grappling with grief and trauma.

You also discover that here in the UK, the country you call home, where you have lived all your life and where you pay your taxes, you are not formally recognised as a victim of crime. More importantly, the Victims’ Code does not apply to you.

You may be given a police Family Liaison Officer. If the body is returned to the UK, there will be a coroner’s inquest. You will be offered access to the National Homicide Service. If the perpetrator is repatriated, you will be offered access to the Victim Contact Scheme. However, you do not fall within the Victims’ Code and, as such, you have no

statutory entitlements. Instead, you will find yourself reliant upon “discretionary” support:

- A Family Liaison Officer may be allocated to you, but only at the discretion of your chief constable.
- Access to the National Homicide Service is given at the discretion of the Ministry of Justice.
- Access to financial assistance can often appear to be at the discretion of National Homicide Service caseworkers.
- Any support you receive from the Victim Contact Scheme is entirely discretionary. It is not set out anywhere in law.

“You would expect them to hold your hand a bit because it is such a bad process to go through and you are in shock, in mourning. There should have been some help there. There should be a process, steps that you can follow. You should have a direct line to contact a FLO or investigating officer.”

**Victim testimony from a case study featured in the Victims’ Commissioner’s 2019 report, *Struggling for Justice: Entitlements and Experiences of Bereaved Families Following Homicide Abroad*.**





**“To lose a loved one to homicide is truly devastating, and I stand here because I know that only too well. However, the families I have met whose loved ones have been murdered abroad have to go through significant additional financial, legal and logistical burdens in a different language and a different system.”**

**Baroness Newlove speaking in the House of Lords during the debate on the Victims and Prisoners Bill, advocating for amendments to support victims of homicide overseas, January 2024.**



Neither will you have a Code of Practice, like a Victims’ Code, you can refer to. The agencies who work with these victims (the police, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, Ministry of Justice) do have a memorandum of understanding, but this document is for officials to use – it is not intended for victims.

Clearly, the Victims’ Code cannot apply to a foreign jurisdiction. I recognise that, as do the victims’ families.

However, for many years, I have been of the view we need to give these families the same recognition we afford other bereaved victims of homicide. I want to see the discretionary support offered by UK agencies here at home be brought within the remit of the Victims’ Code.

In other words, I want to see these families move from *discretionary* support to *statutory* entitlements, where compliance becomes a legal requirement and not simply an act of goodwill. This would mean that where agencies fail to comply, there are clear lines of accountability.

The costs of such a move are minuscule, but the impact on the families would be huge. For the first time, they would be a part of their home justice system, which is where they belong.

The last government dismissed an amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Bill, citing that it would create an ‘unwelcome precedent.’ I do not agree.

In 2015, following the Sousse terror attack on UK holiday makers on a beach in Tunisia, the then government, directed by the Prime Minister David Cameron, set up a cross-government taskforce, to which I was a member, to coordinate support for the victims and their families. It achieved a great deal and in a short space of time. It even established a statutory compensation scheme for the victims.

It showed me that where there was a political will, we can move mountains. However, on this occasion, the political will was not in evidence.

I am disappointed we have not been able to make this small but important change. In the words of one of my colleagues in the Lords: the matter is not closed, it is simply unfinished business. I will continue to fight to get these victims the recognition they rightly deserve.



# Victims and parole

## Balancing justice and transparency

I feel the time has come to have a fundamental review the role of decision summaries.



behind their decision. These “decision summaries” were a big step forward in recognising victims had a legitimate interest in parole outcomes.

Over the past five years, as a victim, I have received a number of decision summaries and, whilst I have welcomed them, I have felt frustrated by how little information has been provided and how inconsistent the summaries are. When you have received a few of these summaries, you are able to piece together a sense of what the key areas of risk are and the extent to which the offender has addressed them. However, I am not sure it should fall to the victim to piece this together.

More recently, I saw a High Court judgment relating to my case. This is a public document providing information about the case in question in much greater detail than anything I had ever received from the Parole Board.

This raises the question if the High Court can provide these details, it must be possible for the Parole Board to do the same.

I have raised this with the Parole Board as I feel the time has come to have a fundamental review of the role of decision summaries. We need to find out if they are genuinely providing information the victims want and should reasonably expect to receive.

The Board has responded positively to my concerns and I hope we can make progress on this important matter.

As a victim of crime, I have now attended several Parole Board hearings to present my Victim Personal Statement. This has given me first-hand experience of the parole process from a victim perspective.

In my role as Victims’ Commissioner, I have always enjoyed a good working relationship with the Parole Board and with HMPPS officials responsible for the Victim Contact Scheme. They have responded positively to my suggestions and are genuinely committed to improving the victim experience.

**Private hearings**

In 2019, the government announced its decision to allow victims to apply to observe Parole Board hearings. I welcomed this decision as it would give victims a better understanding of how parole decisions are made. However, I expressed my concern that some victims might be retraumatised by this experience and they needed to be given support.

The Parole Board has been piloting victim observations in the Southwest of England and Manchester. These are called “private hearings” where the victim is able to attend (as opposed to “public hearings” which can be attended by members of the press). I understand the pilots have gone well and, in general, victim feedback has been positive.

The Parole Board and HMPPS are now ready to roll out private hearings across the whole of the England and Wales. The time has come to give all eligible victims the right to apply to attend hearings. There is no reason for further delay, and I hope the new government will move quickly to instruct national roll out.

**Decision summaries**

Following a landmark case in 2018, when victims successfully challenged a Parole Board decision, the Board has been required to provide victims with a summary of the rationale



# Prison population pressures

## No easy solutions

Clear communication with victims and those supporting them is essential if we are to maintain victims’ trust and confidence.

**“Rigorous oversight is crucial to ensure this new regime effectively prioritises victim safety, while putting our justice system on a more sustainable footing.”**

**Baroness Newlove in press statement following government announcement on early release, July 2024.**

Throughout the past year, Ministers have been grappling with the prison population crisis. When we reach a point where our prisons are nearly at capacity, there are no easy solutions. I recognise that if our prisons are full, this has serious consequences for the whole criminal justice system.

Whilst it is for others to debate how we arrived at this point and what are the best steps forward, my focus has been on the impact this crisis will be having on victims. Their safety must not be compromised, and they must be kept informed of any changes in sentencing.

In July, the government announced plans to reduce the point at which some standard determinate sentence prisoners are automatically released from the 50% point in the sentence to the 40% point of their sentence. This change is designed to create capacity within the prison estate.

When hearing about these plans, my immediate concern was the safety of vulnerable victims. In particular, those cases where the offender’s potential risk of harm was targeted at specific individuals, for example victims of sexual offences, domestic abuse or stalking.

I was therefore reassured the changes to the standard determinate sentence would not apply to those offenders convicted for a sexual offence, stalking, controlling and coercive behaviour, non-fatal strangulation, breaches of restraining or non-molestation orders, or those who received a sentence of over four years for a violent crime.

However, these exclusions, as welcome as they are, have limitations and cannot address every potential risk. It’s essential that no early release takes place before appropriate release plans have been put in place, enabling the probation service to manage these offenders robustly in the community.

Clear communication with victims and those supporting them is essential if we are to maintain victims’ trust and confidence. We know victim confidence is already fragile and must not be eroded any further. This means contacting all victims in cases where release dates are brought forward

and where appropriate, giving victims the opportunity to request protective measures, such as exclusion zones or no contact conditions.

The Probation Service plays a critical role here. It must be properly resourced to effectively manage license conditions and exclusion zones, which are vital for public safety and victim reassurance.

This change in sentencing lays bare the significant long-term challenges facing our justice system. I hope the government will develop long-term solutions to this crisis, where the needs and interests of victims are considered throughout.



# Anti-social behaviour

## Ending the nightmare

It pains me that, 17 years after Garry’s death, I still meet victims of persistent ASB who are having the same experience we had.



Baroness Newlove featured as part of a Sky News documentary film following victims of persistent anti-social behaviour, September 2024.

It was as a victim of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in 2007 that I got my first insight into the criminal justice system.

We lived in a quiet and respectable neighbourhood until a group of youths targeted us and, for months, made our lives a living hell. As the problems escalated, we, together with our neighbours, repeatedly turned to the police and were either ignored or patronised.

It gradually dawned on me the police had no conception of the harm being caused to us as families and as a community. I remember saying to

my neighbour: they won’t do anything until someone gets killed. Little did I know this person would be my husband, Garry. Neither did I have any idea his brutal murder would take place outside our family home and in front of our three young daughters.

It will therefore come as no surprise to anyone when I say that I am passionate about supporting victims of ASB. It also pains me that 17 years after Garry’s death, I still meet victims of persistent ASB who are having the same experience we had.

This is why I gave my full support to an amendment to the Victims

and Prisoners Bill, which sought to ensure victims of persistent anti-social behaviour are recognised as victims of crime and are provided with their Victims’ Code rights.

There is no statutory definition of ‘persistent anti-social behaviour’. So, in my report on ASB (**Living a Nightmare**, published in April 2019), I defined it as the trigger point for victims to request an ASB Case Review (formerly known as the ‘Community Trigger’). This means three reported incidents of ASB by the same victim(s) and in relation to the same perpetrator(s) over a six-month period.



**“For me, anti-social behaviour is not a statistic. It’s a lived experience, one I share with countless victims across the country.**

**In 2007, a campaign of violence tore apart my family’s ordinary life and led to the senseless murder of my husband, Garry.**

**My story is unique only in its tragic outcome. The relentless harassment, the ignored pleas for help, the sense of powerlessness – these are the grim realities countless ordinary families face every day.”**

**Victims’ Commissioner’s foreword to her September 2024 report, *Still living a nightmare: Understanding the experiences of anti-social behaviour victims.***

This trigger point is important as once there is a pattern of ASB, in all likelihood, the behaviour will have crossed the threshold of criminality, whether that be harassment, criminal damage, threatening behaviour, hate crime, etc.

However, many victims who meet the threshold are not treated as victims of crime. The police, council or housing providers choose to treat the matter as a misdemeanour or neighbour dispute and not pursue criminal charges. As a result, they fail to inform victims of their statutory entitlement to access victim support services.

This infuriates me as it highlights a culture of trivialising ASB as “low level” and a “nuisance”. Yet, we know persistent ASB can cause real and significant harm. The impact is derived from the continuous nature of the conduct. This failure to understand the impact on victims is exacerbated because criminal justice agencies view incidents in isolation rather than looking at the whole picture.

This cumulative impact can devastate victims’ lives, affecting their sleep, work, relationships, health, and feelings of safety in their own home. Recent research conducted by the charity Resolve and YouGov found one in ten



Baroness Newlove appeared on Good Morning Britain in April 2024 to advocate for amendments to the Victims and Prisoners Bill, aiming to better support victims of anti-social behaviour.

respondents had moved home because of the impact ASB was having on them. This is not an option for everyone – nor should it need to be.

ASB left ‘un-policed’ can escalate with devastating consequences. The deaths of Dr Suzanne Dow, Fiona Pilkington, Bijan Ebrahimi, Matthew Boorman, Stephen and Jennifer Chapple, David Askew, Louise Lotz and of course, Garry Newlove, can be directly attributed to ongoing

campaigns of anti-social behaviour; whether they died by suicide or homicide or, in the case of David Askew, who collapsed and died on his own doorstep, “an unlawful death after years of torment”.

The first step in tackling this is to provide victims of persistent ASB with the support they need. This means the police identifying when the criminal threshold has been met and referring victims to victim support services.

At present, this is not happening. Even if victims find their own way to local victim services, they are often turned away. Police and Crime Commissioners’ funding for victims’ services is ringfenced for victims of crime, and, without a police referral, they wrongly assume the victims are not eligible for locally commissioned victim services.

In fairness, some PCCs do provide limited support to ASB victims by using their discretionary funding. But most do not. It is quite literally a postcode lottery.

By giving victims of persistent ASB the same rights as other victims of crime we could ensure they get the same level of support as other victims of crime. My proposed amendment to the Victims and Prisoners Act would have ensured victims who meet the ASB Case Review threshold are referred to victims support services and receive the help they need to cope with this nightmare that they are having to endure on their own.

Unfortunately, the amendment was not accepted by the last government. When put to a vote, it was defeated by just 7 votes.

However, the last government did acknowledge the problem. In a commitment made at the despatch box, Ministers agreed to review ASB guidance and the Victims’ Code to make it explicit that, where ASB victims meet the criminal threshold, their Victims’ Code rights apply, and they must be referred to local support services. The last government also promised to review guidance given to PCCs on this matter.

I will work with the new government to make sure these commitments are honoured, and that the new arrangements for monitoring Victims’ Code compliance are used to monitor whether ASB victims are being given the help they need.



An op-ed by the Victims’ Commissioner highlighting the plight of victims of anti-social behaviour made the front page of the Daily Mirror in April 2024.



Baroness Newlove joins the BBC Breakfast sofa to discuss her calls for better support for victims of persistent anti-social behaviour February 2024.



Giving victims a voice: reforming the ASB Case Review

A major theme of both my tenures as Victims' Commissioner is the importance of giving victims a voice in the criminal justice system. This can take many different forms. For example, victims being able to read their Victim Personal Statement to a sentencing court, or before a Parole Board or Mental Health Tribunal. It can also mean victims having a specialist advocate to support them and speak on their behalf, such as an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) or an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA). Giving victims a voice can simply mean the opportunity to challenge, for example, a decision not to charge, or an unduly lenient sentence of a Parole Board release decision.

The anti-social behaviour Case Review was introduced in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (2014) and is intended to be a process whereby victims of anti-social behaviour (ASB) can apply for a review of the actions taken in their case. Formerly known as the 'Community Trigger', it should

"I don't believe any more that there is any help. No one wants to know and if you don't fit their brief to be helped they don't. I have spent so much time writing to people, or talking to people only to be told – no we can't help."

Correspondence sent to the Victims' Commissioner by a victim of anti-social behaviour.

give victims a voice and the right to challenge when they feel the response to their complaints has been inadequate.

The agencies most likely to be responsible for handling Case Review applications are local authorities, the police and social housing providers. The threshold advice in the statutory guidance is three incidents of ASB having been reported in the last six months.

At the review, agencies meet to discuss the handling and the adequacy of the response to date.

In my report published in April 2019 *Living a Nightmare*, I welcomed the intention of the legislation but found that, all too often, it was not delivering for victims. In many cases, the victim was not invited to attend the Case Review, nor were they consulted on the level of impact the behaviour was having on them and what action they wanted the authorities to take. The meetings were attended and chaired by the agencies responsible for dealing with the behaviour, giving an impression of officials marking their own homework. There was no independent review process if the victim was dissatisfied with the outcome.

Five years later, as you will see from my survey of ASB victims, I found little has changed. ASB Help, a charity supporting victims of ASB published a report in January: *The ASB Case Review – the victims' voice or a box-ticking exercise?* The report is based on data gathered by Freedom of Information requests submitted to every local authority in England and Wales.



Baroness Newlove pictured being interviewed for Times Radio to discuss victim of anti-social behaviour December 2023.



The Victims' Commissioner speaking with BBC Radio Manchester discussing anti-social behaviour February 2024.

The report concluded Case Reviews were being used as a box-ticking exercise.

The Criminal Justice Bill, which was on its passage through Parliament before the general election was called, contained provisions that would give Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) a statutory responsibility to review Case Reviews when requested. This was a recommendation in *Living a Nightmare* and I was pleased that, for the first time, PCCs would have had a formal role in scrutinising reviews in their local area. I hope this can be reconsidered by the new government.

In its report, ASB Help found 56% of those who responded confirmed they gave the victim an opportunity to attend the hearing, although some confirmed the right to attend was caveated. This is an improvement on five years ago, but we still have

some way to go before all victims have the right to attend. It is hard to understand how a Case Review can give victims a voice if they are not allowed to join the meeting.

Just 49% of the 230 responses confirmed they provided an independent chair to hold Case Review hearings. Although 74% of those defined 'independent' as someone who is from within their organisation. That suggests just one in eight Case Reviews have an external, independent chair.

Statutory guidance recommends an independent chair and that the victim be invited to attend. But ASB Help's report and my own survey tell me guidance is insufficient.

The right to attend and have an independent chair are essential if the Case Review process is to be perceived as open and fair. I would like to see both of these requirements placed in statute under the new government.



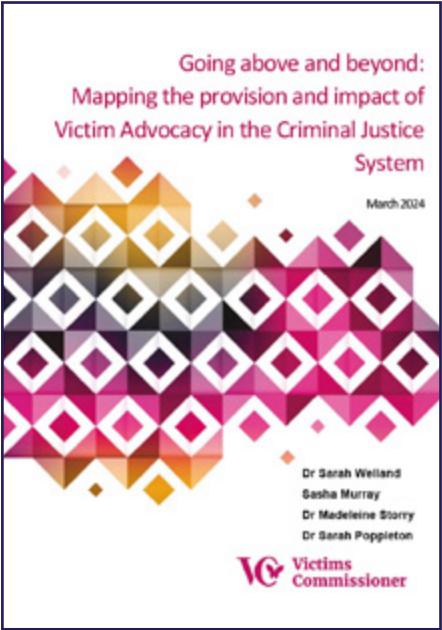
ASB Help's 2024 report, *The ASB Case Review – the victims' voice or a box-ticking exercise?*



# Research

## Research activity and reports

Research is fundamental to my role. By understanding victims’ needs and experiences, I can effectively advocate for their interests.

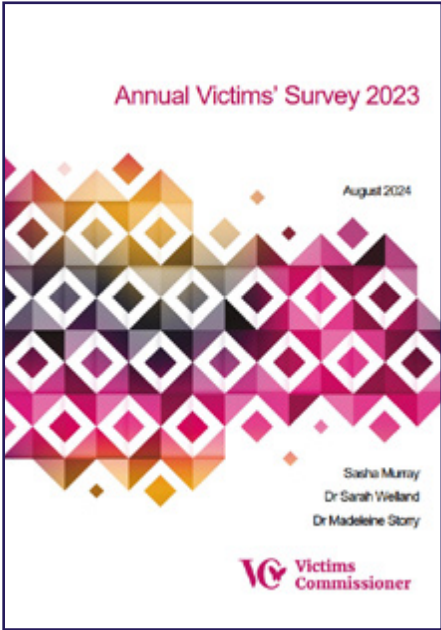


Victims’ Commissioner’s March 2024 report, *Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System*.

To date, I have published four reports, with a fifth currently underway. These reports include key recommendations for government and criminal justice agencies to consider.

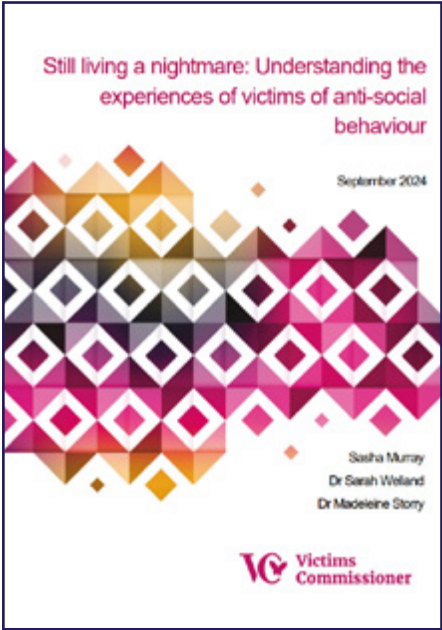
### 2022 Victim Survey (November 2023)

Commissioned and launched during my predecessor’s term, approximately 500 victims from across England and Wales shared their perspectives, and the report analysed their priorities, comparing



2023 Victim Survey, published August 2024.

these to previous survey findings (conducted in 2021 and 2020). Consistent with past research, victims overwhelmingly prioritised respectful treatment and procedural justice. Over half of the respondents valued these aspects more than securing a conviction. They expected their reporting of a crime to be investigated and wanted regular updates on their cases. Many victims expressed disappointment with criminal justice agencies, and just one-third indicated they would report



Victims’ Commissioner’s September 2024 report, *Still living a nightmare: Understanding the experiences of anti-social behaviour victims*.

a crime to the police again. These findings were key in informing my work around the Victims and Prisoners Bill as it made its way through Parliament.

### Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of victim advocacy in the criminal justice system (March 2024)

Victim advocates are dedicated professionals providing comprehensive assistance and advocacy to a wide range of victims. Their role is crucial in

ensuring victims’ rights as well as their emotional and practical needs are met, by offering support and advice.

This report examined the current state of victim advocacy in England and Wales, identifying effective practices and service gaps. Victims emphasised the crucial role of advocates in improving their engagement with the criminal justice system. They provided emotional and practical support, held agencies to account, and helped to facilitate recovery from victimisation. Advocates also helped victims understand their rights, navigate complex criminal justice procedures, and access essential support, while at the same time empowering them to rebuild their lives.

The report also highlighted significant challenges facing the advocacy sector. Services encountered problems with commissioning, with holding excessive caseloads, and with difficulty retaining staff. They also struggle to gain a formal recognition within the criminal justice system. To address these issues, the report recommended enhanced and sustainable funding for advocacy services, a standardised training and accreditation process for advocates, limits on caseloads, and greater recognition of the advocate’s role within the criminal justice system.

### 2023 Victim Survey (August 2024)

In November 2023, I commissioned YouGov to conduct a comprehensive online survey of crime victims. This was the largest survey of its kind ever undertaken by a Victims’ Commissioner, gathering responses from over 3,000 individuals who had experienced crime since 2020. The data, representative of all adult crime victims in England and Wales, provided a robust foundation for understanding victims’ experiences.

The survey findings revealed significant challenges within the justice system. A pervasive theme was

dissatisfaction with police handling of cases. There was a notable feeling the police were not actively pursuing leads or taking their case seriously. Victims also commented on a perceived lack of communication and support. These issues were exacerbated for marginalised groups, particularly disabled victims, who reported lower satisfaction rates, a reduced likelihood of future reporting, and disproportionately poor treatment. This is concerning given the heightened vulnerability of disabled individuals to crime.

In response, I made 15 recommendations to enhance the Victims’ Code, improve victim interactions with criminal justice agencies, and expand support services for undeserved groups, including older victims. I called for guaranteed access to independent specialist advocates for disabled victims to ensure their rights are upheld and they remain engaged in the justice process.

### Still Living a Nightmare: Understanding the experiences of victims of anti-social behaviour (September 2024)

My 2019 report, *Living a Nightmare*, exposed the harrowing reality of persistent anti-social behaviour. Victims described feeling ignored, isolated, and trapped in a cycle of inaction. The report’s findings clearly resonated; after its publication, my inbox swelled with accounts of persistent anti-social behaviour. That steady stream of messages has continued ever since. Five years later, the question remains: has anything changed?

This report delved deeper into the ongoing impact of anti-social behaviour on victims and examined the current landscape of reporting, resolution, and support. For a staggering 40% of those who reported the offending behaviour, their ordeal pre-dates my previous report and is still ongoing today. Despite reporting the incidents, nearly two-thirds of

victims in our survey faced persistent anti-social behaviour. Burdened by evidence gathering and often dismissed by authorities, less than a third receive any assistance. Victims are forced to navigate a fragmented system, with little or no support while the problem persists.

To address this crisis, I proposed 11 recommendations for police, government, and local authorities. These measures aimed to enhance victim support, improve interagency collaboration, and strengthen the Case Review process to ensure more victims are able to reach a resolution.

### The impact of the Crown Court system on victims, victims’ services, and victim and staff experiences (upcoming)

No victim should be expected to wait years before their case gets to court. Yet, justice is not being delivered in a timely or effective way. Over a quarter of all Crown Court cases are now outstanding for over a year and this proportion is steadily increasing. This is causing victims real and undue distress, as they face a wait of months and possibly years before they see justice being done.

To fully grasp the impact of these delays, my office is beginning to undertake in-depth research gathering insights directly from victims, victim service providers, and those within the justice system itself. This research will delve deeper than the individual victim’s experience, examining the broader impact on victim services and the overall effectiveness of the justice system. By analysing best practices in areas – like communication and case listing – I aim to identify solutions that ensure victims’ needs are at the forefront of any strategy to tackling this crisis.



# Policy

By building strong partnerships across government, with criminal justice agencies – and those working in the victim sector, I work to ensure victims’ perspectives are central to policy development and implementation.

As Victims’ Commissioner, I am committed to influencing policy to improve the treatment of victims within the criminal justice system. Over the past year, I have responded to a range of formal and informal consultation exercises. I have met with a broad range of senior leaders and policy officials, shared policy documents, attended and facilitated

round tables, engaged through correspondence, and more. Here I set out some of this work.

### Consultations and engagement

As Victims’ Commissioner, I am invited to complete a range of consultations across a broad spectrum of victims’ issues. Some of these are formal consultations, and whose response

I aim to publish on my website where possible. Since I assumed the post in October 2023, we have submitted six public consultation responses. These include:

- A consultation response on proposed changes to whether hearings in criminal injuries compensation cases are held in public or private – December 2023.



From left to right: Matthew Rycroft, Home Office Permanent Secretary, Baroness Newlove, and Jess Phillips MP, the Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, attending a Home Office event, September 2024.



The Victims’ Commissioner chairing a roundtable discussion with Welsh PCCs and PCC representatives at the Victim Support National Contact Centre in Wales, September 2024.

- Evidence submitted to the Justice Select Committee inquiry into the use of pre-recorded cross-examination (‘Section 28’) – December 2023.
- A response to the call for evidence on the challenges that Local Criminal Justice Boards face and how they can be supported – February 2024.
- A submission to the Ofcom consultation on proposals for new regulations to protect people from illegal harms online – February 2024.
- A submission to the Independent Pornography Review, overseen by Baroness Gabby Bertin – February 2024.
- Formal response to Ofcom’s consultation on internet service provider duties in relation to content harmful to children – July 2024.

All of these are available to read on my website. We have been actively engaged in a range of informal consultations and feedback processes. We have contributed towards the inspection programmes of both His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and His Majesty’s Inspectorate of the CPS (HMICPS). I have collaborated with the Home Office on statutory guidance for digital download clauses within the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2021). We have provided feedback on the Independent Office for Police Conduct’s (IOPC) guidance on victim-blaming language and I was consulted by the Home Office on their ENOUGH campaign to challenge abuse towards women and girls.

We have worked with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to feed into the Murder Manslaughter and Terrorism working group and responded to the consultation on Victim Personal Statements for victims of mentally disordered offenders. Moreover, I was involved in ongoing discussions surrounding the National Operating Model (NOM) for policing, specifically in relation to rape and Operation Soteria, as well as in the production of the guidance for the NOM. Furthermore, I provided input to the Law Commission reviews on a number of key areas relating to rape, including evidence in Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) trials.



# Victim correspondence

## Understanding the true victim experience

The correspondence I receive from victims continues to provide valuable first-hand insights into the issues they face.

Statutory restrictions on my role as Victims’ Commissioner mean I am unable to take on case work or champion individual cases. However I value engaging with victims through correspondence, so I can ensure as Victims’ Commissioner I remain connected with the true victim experience.

Through this contact, I can also effectively represent victims’ experiences, and highlight the recurring challenges victims face in the media and in my policy and research work. I will continue to amplify victim voices to drive change, including in my conversations with Ministers, criminal justice agencies, and victim support services.

From the start of my term as Victims’ Commissioner in October 2023 through to September 2024, there have been over 1,000 items of correspondence shared with me and my office. This correspondence includes victims raising enquiries about their options and rights, and those that simply wish to share their experiences of the justice system and beyond. With the support of my brilliant Correspondence Manager, I have handled on average around 90 items of correspondence each month. I have also met with victims and their supporters; these meetings provide powerful insight into the issues victims face and I thank all those who spoke with me and my team for their time.

When I write to victims, I welcome feedback. I do recognise victims’ frustrations that I am unable to

October 2023 – August 2024 Count of Correspondence	
Crime Type	Count
Anti-social behaviour	201
Burglary and theft	17
Domestic abuse	153
Fraud	45
Hate crime	64
Homicide	61
Road incident	13
Sexual offences	143
Stalking and harassment	39
Violent crime	54
Other (including general queries and issues falling outside of our remit)	150
Unknown or unspecified crime	111
Total	1,051

Table showing the number of items of correspondence received by the Victims’ Commissioner by crime-type, October 2023 to August 2024.

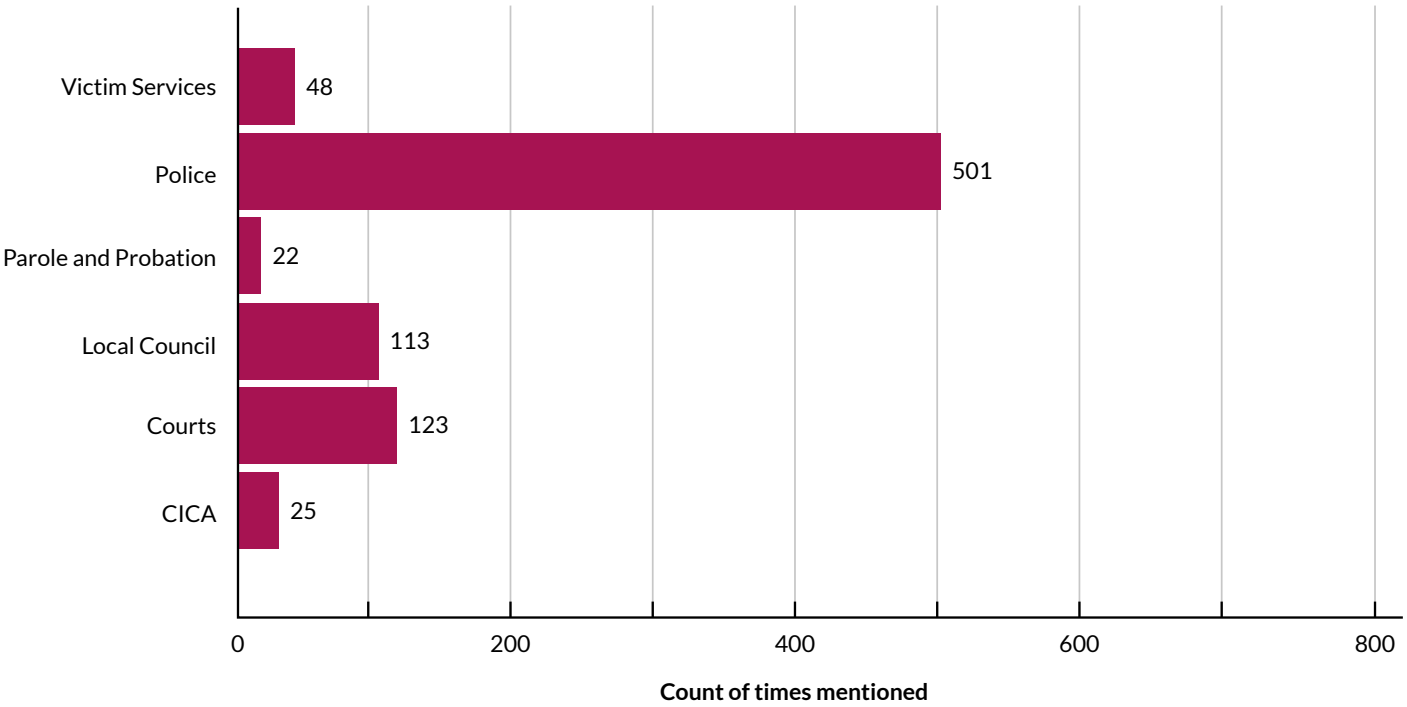
intervene in their cases and hope that they are able to find the support and information they need through the specialist services that help victims of crime.

Looking ahead, due to the powerful insight victim correspondence provides, I will continue to develop how my office collects and uses case studies. I recognise that for some victims, they hope that by sharing their experiences, they can make a difference and influence change.

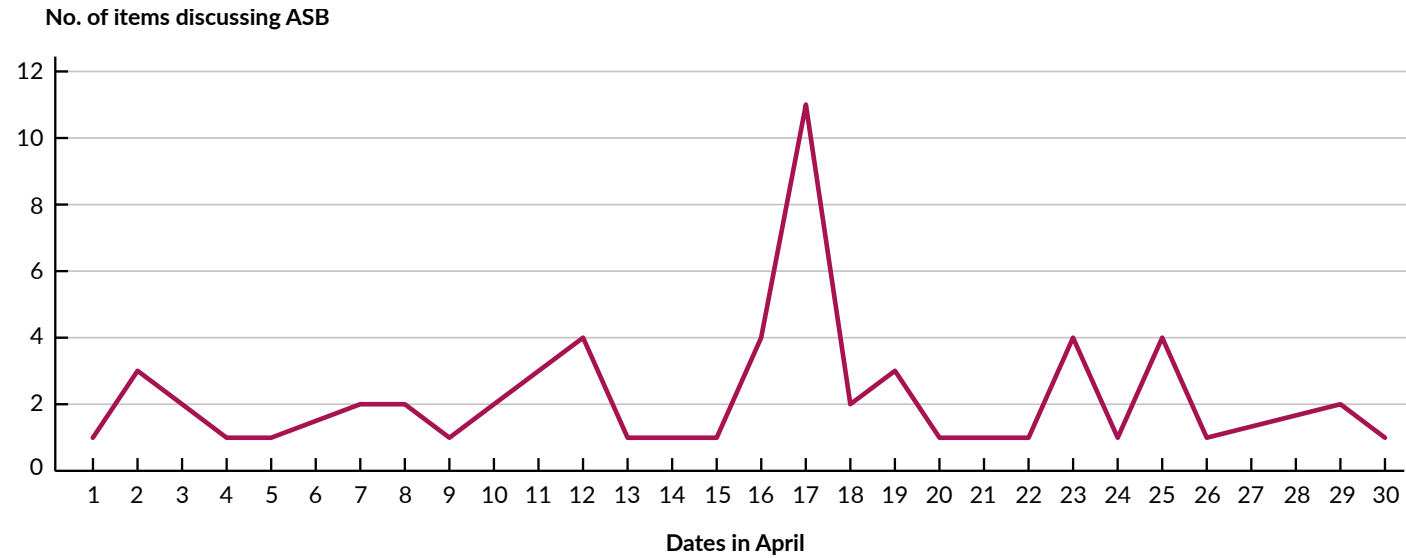
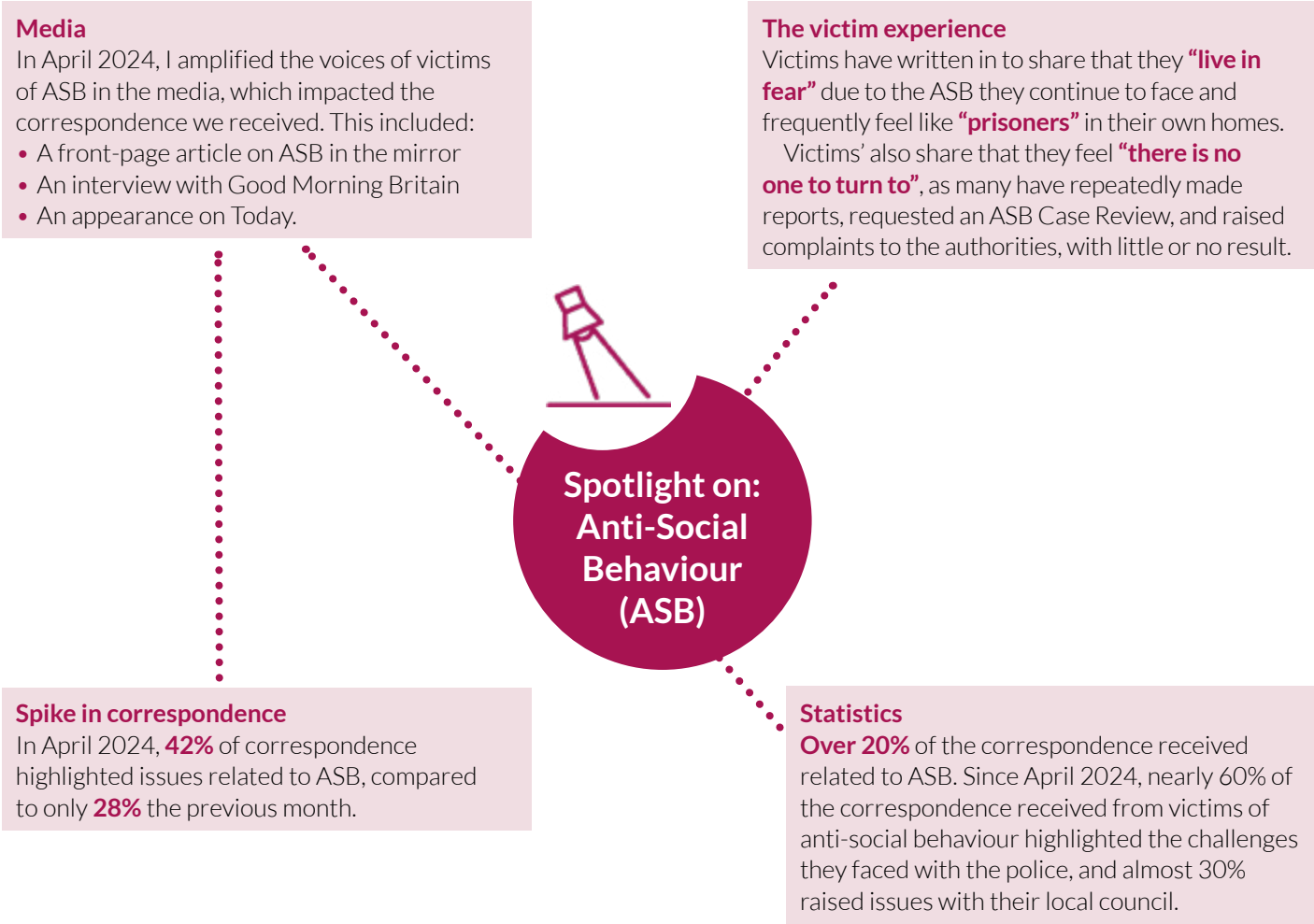
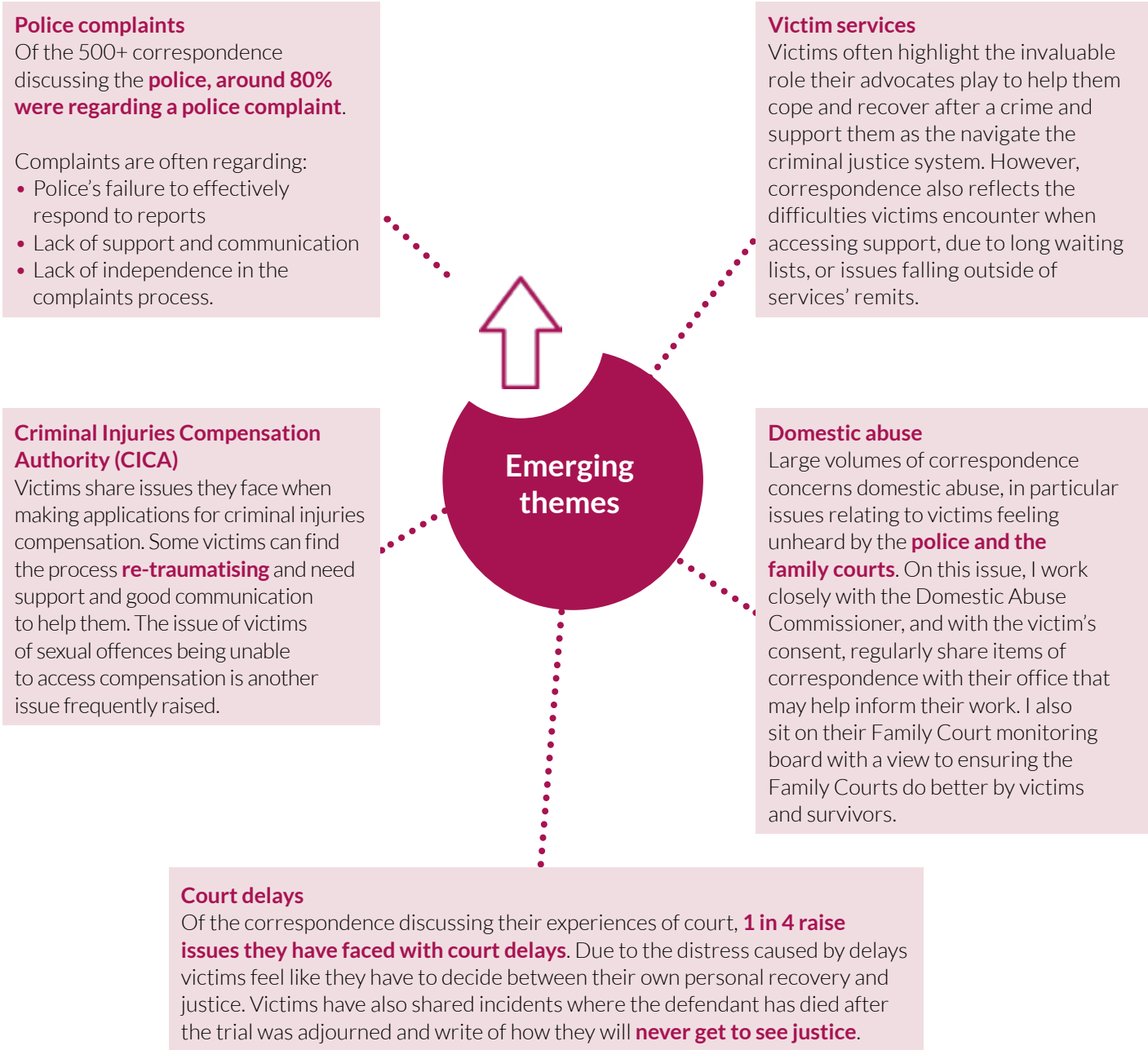
I will continue to use case studies and engage with victims to ensure that the victims’ voice is present in my research, reports, and media engagements – and help drive the call for change.



Count of themes in correspondence



Bar chart illustrating the frequency of key themes mentioned in correspondence from October 2023 to August 2024.



Line graph depicting the surge in correspondence received by the Victims' Commissioner following Baroness Newlove's media appearances on April 17th.



# Media and stakeholder activity

Engaging with the media and attending various events is a significant part of my role.

Over the past year, I have had the privilege of meeting numerous individuals working to support victims in locations across England and Wales. A crucial aspect of my work involves discussing current policies and future changes with Ministers, members of the judiciary, leaders of criminal justice agencies, and government policymakers. These interactions allow me to share insights, address concerns raised by victims, and ensure their voices are heard.



**Opposite page, clockwise:** The Victims' Commissioner features in an ITV News special report, 27 August 2024, following the publication of her 2023 Victim Survey.

Front page article in *The Independent*, 15 February 2024, in which the Victims' Commissioner addresses the issue of sexual abuse in mental health facilities.

Matthew Rycroft, Home Office Permanent Secretary, Baroness Newlove and Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, speaking at a Home Office event, September 2024.

Introductory meeting with Baroness Newlove and Andy Cooke QPM DL, Chief Inspector of Constabulary and His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services, April 2024.

**On this page, clockwise:** Baroness Newlove being interviewed at Times Radio for Cathy Newman's *The Ladder* podcast, July 2024.

The Ministry of Justice's Victims' Code campaign launch, February 2024.

The Victims' Commissioner filming with victims of anti-social behaviour for the Sky News documentary, August 2024.



Baroness Newlove features in the August 2024 edition of Resolve's anti-social behaviour *Resolution Magazine*.





**On this page, clockwise:**  
Introductory meeting with Baroness Newlove and Geraldine Hanna, Commissioner Designate for Victims of Crime in Northern Ireland, November 2023.

Baroness Newlove at Victim Support's National Contact Centre in Wales, September 2024.

Baroness Newlove speaking to staff at the HMPPS Public Protection Group in Croydon, September 2024.

The Victims' Commissioner with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Eleanor Lyons, May 2024.

Baroness Newlove pictured alongside Cathy Newman at Times Radio, July 2024.

# Office of the Victims' Commissioner

## Role of the Victims' Commissioner

This section provides an overview of the Victims' Commissioner's role and funding, the office supporting my work and VCAG – the group of professionals advising me on how to best fulfill statutory obligations

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.**

### Strategic plan

I published my strategic plan a month after I took up office and this underpins the work of the team.

My five key strategic objectives are:

**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 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 (now Act).



Office of the Victims’ Commissioner

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.

My office

I returned to the role of Victims’ Commissioner on 16 October, with a term of 12 months, so that the Ministry of Justice could go through a recruitment campaign to find a new Victims’ Commissioner.

Prior to my arrival, the role had been vacant since September 2022, following the resignation of my predecessor. Despite my short term of office, I was keen to make sure it was business as usual.

I was delighted to find a much larger team than the one I worked with before. My previous CEO, Russell A’Court, agreed to return to the role to support me, particularly in relation to my work on the Victims and Prisoners Bill (now Act).

Dr Madeleine Storry heads up my Policy and Research Team, which produces my reviews, surveys, reports, responses to consultations, speeches and articles for publication. Tom Cracknell is responsible for my communications and stakeholder work. He and his team deal with all my media engagement, including social media and my website, as well as responding to correspondence with victims, our communications with stakeholders and management of my diary.

The Victims’ Commissioner’s Advisory Group

The Victims’ Commissioner’s Advisory Group (VCAG) advises me on how best to fulfil my statutory obligations, including what policies and practices I should be advocating.

I appointed a small Advisory Group to help me throughout the year and I am grateful to all of the members for their support and advice.

- The Group members are:
- Lord Russell of Liverpool
  - Baroness Bertin
  - Sarah Champion MP
  - Julian Hendy (Director of Hundred Families)
  - Andrea Simon (Director of End Violence Against Women)
  - Rebecca Bryant (CEO of Resolve)
  - Rachel Williams (Founder of Stand Up to Domestic Abuse)
  - Dr Tara Young (Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Kent).

Funding

The budget for the Office of the Victims’ Commissioner for 2023–24 is set out in this table.

There was an underspend for the year as a result of the Commissioner role being held vacant for half the year, as well as some vacant posts within the team.

2023/24	Budget	Actual	Outturn
Staff Cost	£820,000	£621,773	£198,227
Non-Pay Breakdown			
IT and Telecommunications	£2,000	£5,329	–£3,329
Staff Travel & Other	£9,000	£9,405	–£405
Printing, Postage & Office Expenditure	£11,000	£1,104	£9,897
Other Expenditure	£12,928	£29,242	–£16,314
Sub Total	£34,928	£45,080	–£10,152
Total	£854,928	£666,854	£188,074

Table showing the budget, actual, and outturn for the 2023/24 financial year.



E-Number: E03197431  
ISBN: 978-1-5286-5172-1