

## **VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND AND WALES THE SECOND TERM STRATEGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this document is to set out the broad outline of the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales' (VC) strategy for the remainder of her second term, which expires in March 2019.

It builds on the work that she has undertaken in her first term of office (2013-16) which is set out in the VC annual reports of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16. During the first term, the VC set up her office and published a range of reports looking at victims' services and made recommendations for improvement. She established the role of the VC with victims, service providers and policy makers and built a large network of contacts. She also successfully championed the cause of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system.

Looking ahead, the VC is determined to build on these achievements, working with victims, criminal justice agencies and third sector organisations to ensure that victims receive the emotional and practical support that they need to cope and recover from the crimes committed against them.

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

### **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.

If the Commissioner makes a report to the Secretary of State:

- (a) the Commissioner must send a copy of the report to the Attorney General and the Lord Chancellor;
- (b) the Secretary of State must lay a copy of the report before Parliament and arrange for the report to be published.

The Commissioner must provide advice if required to the ministry of the crown.

## **CONTEXT**

During the next three years there will be a number of key developments which will change the landscape in respect of victim services.

Firstly, many victim services devolved to Police and Crime Commissioners will create a new set of challenges in monitoring compliance with the Victims' Code. There will be divergences in practice as local managers develop their services to reflect local needs. Whilst this opens opportunities for innovation and good practice, it also raises the possibility of differential service provision.

Court reforms and digitalisation will in a rationalisation of the court estate and many more cases being dealt with on line or through virtual hearings. In particular, more child witnesses and victims should be offered the opportunity to give evidence remotely. Speedier justice, whilst welcome, may undermine victims' access to some of their entitlements. The needs of vulnerable victims and witnesses will also come under closer scrutiny.

The possibility of a Victims' Bill offers the opportunity for a national debate on the rights and entitlements of victims. Policy makers often refer to the need to place victims "at the heart of the criminal justice system". This debate will provide a chance to set out what this might mean in practice.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse will shine a light on the institutional failures of the past. We need to ensure that these victims and survivors are fully supported in moving forward and rebuilding their lives.

Cyber crime, online grooming and bullying, hate crime and modern-day human slavery are all rising issues of concern. There is increasing pressure on policy makers and service providers to find appropriate means of supporting the victims these crimes create.

## **STRATEGIC AIMS 2016 - 2019**

The VC's overriding focus is to ensure that victims of crime are supported in coping and recovering from the impact of crime. This means that they not only receive their entitlements as set out in the Victims' Code, but that they are also treated with humanity and decency by all those within the criminal justice system who come into

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

The VC has five overarching strategic aims:

**A. Work with all criminal justice agencies to ensure that victims of crime and witnesses are treated with humanity and decency at all times, so as to aid their ability to cope and recover from the impact of crime;**

**B. Monitor and report on criminal justice agencies' compliance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the Witness Charter; identifying areas that are deficient and making recommendations based on evidence of best practice;**

**C. Review the provision of victim services on the basis of the four principles identified in "What Works", namely: communication, procedural justice, inter-agency cooperation and professionalisation, and make recommendations on how services should develop and improve;**

**D. Through regular contact with victims and practitioners of victims' services, articulate a view of the criminal justice system from the perspective of victims; review and challenge decisions taken by policy makers and those responsible for developing practice.**

**E. Through gaining first hand knowledge and understanding of victims' services, identify and actively promote examples of best practice and excellence.**

## **BEHAVIOURS**

How the VC and her office works will determine what it is able to achieve.

The behaviours which characterise the work of the VC and her team and which are necessary to achieve her strategic objectives are:

- **Independent:** Taking into account with equal measure the views of all victims and stakeholders, making independent and impartial assessments of policy and practice and offering a perspective independent of government.
- **Decency and Humanity:** Treating all victims and witnesses who come into contact with the office of the VC with decency and humanity.
- **Analytical:** Ensure that a strategic approach to the use of research and analysis is in operation in accordance with the *HM Treasury (2011) Magenta Book: Guidance for Evaluation*, including employing a rigorous analytical approach to all aspects of the remit of the VC.
- **Collegiate:** A collaborative, respectful working relationship between the VC and members of her team, as well as with all stakeholders. Willingness to provide and receive both support and challenge.

- **Transparent:** A presumption of openness and disclosure about the work of the VC.
- **Reflective:** Reflective about the work and performance of the VC and her team and how it can be improved. Open to different approaches. Empathetic to the experience of victims and witnesses.
- **Fairness:** Ensure we deal with each individual fairly and with sensitivity. A commitment at all times to identify where there is inequality in the services provided to victims, potentially according to their demographic characteristics, crime type, geographical area or the services and criminal justice agencies that they encounter.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The VC's strategic aims will be underpinned by a number of objectives. Some of these are underway already; some need to be developed. Most objectives will contribute to more than one aim but for simplicity's sake are grouped separately:

### **A. Ensure that victims of crime and witnesses are treated with humanity and decency at all times.**

- Invite heads of criminal justice agencies, PCCs and heads of third sector organisations involved in the support of victims to sign a public pledge to increase their staff's awareness of the needs of victims as part of a concerted and ongoing victim awareness campaign.
- Continue to work with agencies and third sector organisations to develop training and messages for staff in respect of victim awareness.
- Engage with law schools and colleges in order to talk to students and future legal practitioners about victim awareness with a view to changing the practice and culture of future prosecutors and judges.
- Include the quality of engagement between practitioners and victims as a part of all future reviews.
- Continue to raise victim awareness through media and speaking opportunities

### **B. Monitor and report on criminal justice agencies' compliance with the requirements of the Victims' Code and the Witness Charter.**

- Undertake regular reviews of areas of the Victims' Code and publish findings and recommendations.
- Develop a Quality Assurance policy and procedure for the research and statistics that come out of the VCO, in order that the findings of VC reviews withstand rigorous scrutiny.
- Follow up and monitor the Government's response to VC recommendations and seek to evaluate the impact where recommendations have been fully implemented.

- Raise with Ministers, policy makers and PCCs persistent non-compliance with the Code and highlight non-compliance through the VC reviews and website.
- Continue regular engagement with PCCs, challenging them when areas of poor compliance come to light.

**C. Review the provision of victim services on the basis of the four principles identified in “What Works”**

- Ensure that all reviews are linked to one or more of the four principles.
- Use media and speaking opportunities to explain the four principles and identify examples of best practice.
- Engage with other stakeholders in identifying joint reviews of work that will assist in developing practice consistent with the four principles.
- Facilitate the emergence of a community of practice, and contribute to its development by providing infrastructure, facilitating the physical and virtual space for practitioners to come together to learn about what works in supporting victims of crime.

**D. Through regular contact with victims and practitioners of victim services, articulate a view of the criminal justice system from the perspective of victims.**

- Continue to build the Victims’ Reference Group and use it to offer feedback on VC activity and reviews.
- Continue to meet with and lobby ministers in respect of victim service policy and practices
- Continue to build the VC’s press and social media profile, so that victims know about her work and how to contact her.
- Develop the website so that it offers a continual update on all of the VC’s work.
- Increase transparency of meetings between the VC and ministers and heads of agencies so that victims have a greater awareness of her work.
- Continue the VC’s commitment to meet victims and service providers and review first hand the services being provided to victims.

**E. Identify and actively promote examples of best practice and excellence.**

- Develop the VC website so that it offers practitioners new examples of best practice.
- Work with policymakers and service providers to develop a clearer understanding of “what good looks like”.
- Undertake “best practice reviews”.

**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

**Progress:** The successful implementation of the Decency Pledge

**Progress:** The instigation of the Community of Practice

**Progress:** Regular feedback from the Victims Reference Group

**Progress:** Increased press and social media coverage of VC activity

**Outcomes:** VC recommendations accepted and implemented

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

**Outcomes:** Greater awareness of the VC'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 best practice being implemented more widely

There will be a range of other measures that need to be looked at different levels and with different frequencies. In addition, progress on key objectives will be monitored.

## **RISKS**

We are in the process of developing a strategic risk register, but the VC's key strategic risks are likely to include:

**Budget:** Insufficient funds to deliver the strategy;

**Political instability:** A change of political direction due to Ministerial appointments;

**Staff recruitment:** The VC is unable to recruit the staff she requires, who have the necessary skill set, in timely way, therefore having a detrimental impact on her small team's output of work;

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

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

It is important that the VC receives buy-in to the strategy from those who will have to implement it, namely her team, as well as internal and external stakeholders.

This delivery of this two 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.