

2019/20 Annual Report

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner
for England and Wales

HC 625

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Presented to The House of Commons pursuant to section 49
of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

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Welcome

What a year for the start of my new role as Victims' Commissioner!

For much of 2020, the Coronavirus lockdown has put an end to travel and face to face meetings. Social distancing has radically changed the victims' experience of the criminal justice system, including the support offered by victims' services

PRIOR TO the outbreak, much of November and December was spent in "purdah" when a public appointee like me is required to stay out of the public eye during electioneering.

I have few statutory powers at my disposal and so the power of my voice in championing victims is so important. Only by listening to victims' lived experience can we know what they need. And that is what I do. This means lockdown and purdah have been frustrating. My legitimacy comes from regular contact with victims of all types of crime and those who work on their behalf.

Although I have been prevented from visiting frontline organisations, we have adapted and coped well. We have held more than 250 calls, meetings and virtual meetings in the nine months of the year I have been in post. Our list of contacts has grown hugely and I thank all the individuals and organisations with whom we now have an ongoing and mutually helpful relationship.

As we recover from the COVID19 lockdown, court backlogs are increasing and delays getting worse. We know there will be greater pressure on those services supporting victims

Another side of my role is ensuring the victim's voice is heard across government, the courts or anywhere else where their interests might be affected. This has been my focus and I am now represented on a broad range of bodies across the criminal justice system to the health and social care sector.

I am unashamedly ambitious for victims
Throughout my career I have fought against injustice. As a defence barrister and QC for many years, I understand the criminal justice system. I am clear that improving the treatment of victims and witnesses is

not an attack on the rights of defendants. Given the growing body of evidence linking victimisation to subsequent offending, I believe positive change can benefit all.

Justice for victims means their voice is heard; they are considered throughout the criminal justice process and treated with respect; their entitlements under the Victims' Code, including to be kept properly updated and given support to cope and recover are delivered.

We know almost half of all witnesses who have attended court say they would never do so again. In part, this is caused by delay in getting cases to trial, especially with vulnerable victims of violent and sexual offences. Poor communication is another factor.

As we recover from the COVID19 lockdown, court backlogs are increasing and delays getting worse. We know there will be greater pressure on

those services supporting victims. There cannot be two standards of justice, one pre-COVID and one after. It is imperative the needs of victims are listened to and taken into account before any fundamental changes are made.

We need reliable data, both on compliance with the Victims' Code and on criminal justice outcomes. Currently there are huge gaps, making it almost impossible to hold criminal justice agencies to account. This must change.

We also need to recognise the Victims' Commissioner, supported by local Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), has a key role in keeping the operation of the Code under review, making sure victims are getting the support they are entitled to.

Victims need quality services to help them to cope and recover. These are delivered by PCCs with local knowledge, but we need national standards for service provision and I want us to shape these together going forward.

I am pleased this report is the first ever Victims' Commissioner's annual report to be laid before Parliament rather than sent to Ministers. I welcome closer Parliamentary scrutiny; it highlights the needs of victims and brings them into public and political debate

My report shows much has been done, but there is much still to achieve. My ambition for victims is greater than ever. By listening to victims and striving to succeed, we can achieve.



The Role of the Victims' Commissioner

I was appointed Victims' Commissioner and took up my post on 24 June 2019.
My term expires on 23 June 2022, with the option for renewal

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.



One of my first acts as Victims' Commissioner was to make a bid for a larger team to give the capacity to improve my stakeholder engagement and undertake more reviews on the operation of the Victims' Code

The Office of the Victims' Commissioner

I HAVE a small but dedicated team who support me in carrying out my duties.

At the time of publication, my CEO is Russell A'Court, who was previously Head of the Public Protection Casework Section in HMPPS.

The Head of Reviews and Analysis is Dr Sarah Poppleton, who joined us on having formerly worked for the Sentencing Council. She is ably supported

by a Senior Research Officer, Dr Julian Molina who used to work in the Prison and Probation Ombudsman's office.

My Communications Manager is Laura O'Hara, who joined us on 30 March, previously having been the Media Manager for the Police Federation and at one point, a serving police officer.

Natasha Pizzuto used to work for the Court based Witness Service and now looks after

my diary. Joss Mistry is our Correspondence Manager, having previously worked in Prisoner Casework Section of HMPPS.

We have two vacant posts in the team and are in the process of recruiting. Once post will be a VAWG and Domestic Abuse Policy Manager and the other is a Stakeholder Manager.

Team Changes

During the past 12 months we have been sorry to lose three members of the team. Dr Elaine Wedlock was our former Head of Reviews and Analysis and left in April to join the Sentencing Council. She was responsible for leading on or overseeing all VC reviews over the past four years and will be greatly missed. Lorraine McBride was our former Communications Manager and did a great deal of work in re-designing our website and corporate communications

and building our media and social media profile. Anna McCreadie left recently, having done some really good work on our stakeholder engagement, particularly in relation to VAWG and domestic abuse.

Building Capacity

One of my first acts as Victims' Commissioner was to make a bid for a larger team to give the capacity to improve my stakeholder engagement and undertake more reviews on the operation of the Victims' Code. I believe these are critical to the effectiveness of my role, enabling me to meet my statutory obligations and to reach out to more victims and those who work to support them.

The bid was not successful, but I plan to review the operational requirements of the team ahead of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. ►





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Victims' Commissioner's Advisory Group

AS WELL as my office, I also have the able support of my Advisory Group which meets four times a year to discuss current victim related issues, and advise me on how I should handle them.

One of my first acts, as Victims' Commissioner was to appoint a new Advisory Group, expanding it to 23 members. This has allowed me to draw on a much wider pool of talented individuals and the group discussions have been insightful and informed.

As can be seen at the back of this report, the members come

I've again generally used the term 'victim' because it's the term that most agencies use and understand when referring to someone who has experienced victimisation

from a range of backgrounds with diverse skills and experiences.

Definition of victims

As was acknowledged in my predecessor's joint report with University of Portsmouth, 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 again generally used the term 'victim' because it's the term that most agencies use and understand when referring to someone who has experienced victimisation.

I accept the definition given in the Victims' Code when considering relevant policy areas. But the legislation which underpins my role as Victims' Commissioner, makes clear my remit includes all victims, regardless of the type of crime committed against them or whether they report it to the police.



First Term Strategic Plan

Following my appointment in 2019, I published my First Term Strategic Plan which sets out the broad outline of my strategy for my first three year term, which expires in June 2022.

I am committed to ensuring 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 of England and Wales. This means they are able to access victim services that are tailored to their needs, they receive their entitlements as set out in the Victims' Code, and they are treated with respect and decency by all the agencies who come into contact with them.

I am committed to working towards a Victims' Law, so that these aims become their legal rights and I want to see the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 utilised to ensure equality and diversity of provision and support.

I am committed to championing the cause of victims in all forums where their interests are at stake, including Crown and Magistrates' Courts, Coroners inquests, Parole Board hearings and Mental Health Review Tribunals.

I am committed to be a voice for all victims, and determined to inform my message to policy makers and service providers by reference to victims and witnesses' lived experience.

I have five key strategic aims:

1. Work with criminal justice agencies to ensure victims of crime are treated well, with a focus on the treatment of victims in the court room, so as to aid them to give their best evidence as well as the support on offer to enable them to cope and recover from the impact of crime.

2. 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; improve public awareness of entitlements.

3. 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 and its constituent agencies, including to victim support services and any related or other agencies whose activities may impact on victims.

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

5. Through gaining first-hand knowledge and understanding of victims' services, identify and actively promote examples of good practice and excellence.

Black Lives Matter – Black Victims Matter

People from minority groups are more likely to be victims of crime, but are less likely to ask for support. ... Services should always be flexible and responsive enough to support people from all backgrounds, and if there's more expertise needed, teams should work with local specialists to make sure individuals get what they need.

Catch-22 report, "The changing needs of victims: and how to support them better".

THE TRAGIC death of George Floyd caused by the brutal treatment of police officers and the global resurgence of the Black Live Matter movement has prompted me to give a great deal of thought to the experience of black and minority ethnic victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system. My analysts have put together a range of data which raises some troubling questions. It has prompted a renewed determination in me to work even more closely with those charities and organisations which work with minority groups and seek to answer those questions.

We know that ethnic groups had the highest proportion of adults who were victims of all crime listed by the Crime Survey for England and Wales in the year ending March 2019 were Mixed other (25%), Mixed White and Asian (27.5%), Mixed White/Black Caribbean (23%), and Arab (21%). These were all higher than the proportion of White adults who were victims (15%).

Crime Survey data from the 12 months prior to March 2017, shows that 0.8% of white women were victims of rape, compared with 3.4% of Mixed ethnicity women

Equally, the results of the Government's 2017 race disparity audit showed lower levels of confidence in the police among black people, especially among younger black adults.

Evidence from frontline services suggests that minoritised women – especially migrant women with insecure immigration status – have concerns about disclosing incidents due to immigration enforcement duties held by police, social services and other statutory agencies, which create additional barriers to disclosing sexual violence.

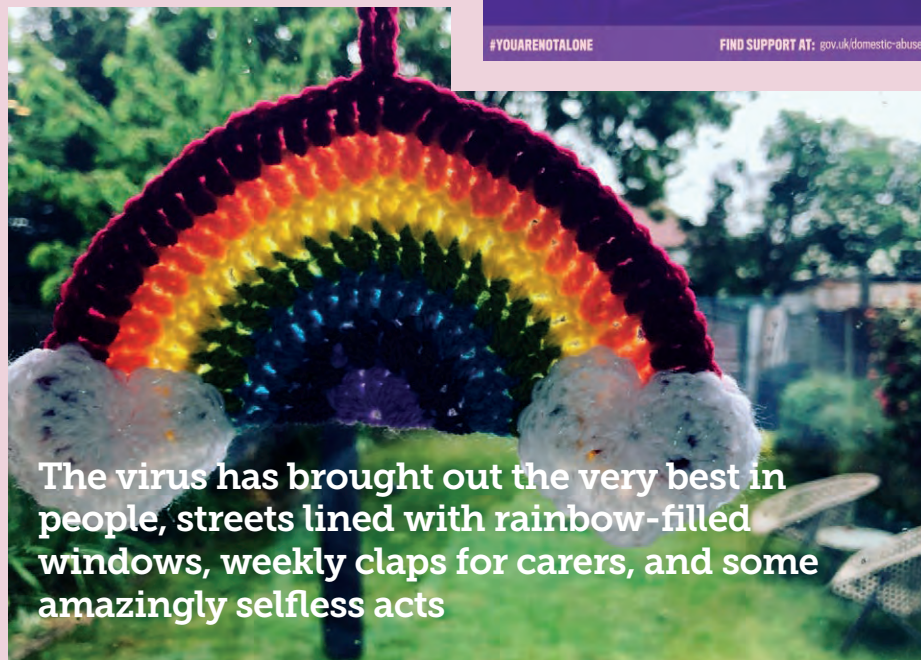
Crime Survey data from the 12 months prior to March 2017, shows that 0.8% of white women were victims of rape, compared with 3.4% of Mixed ethnicity women, 0.3% Asian or Asian British women, 1.6% of Black or Black British women, and 1.7% of Other ethnic group women).

Based on London Met Police Data on victim attrition, outcomes in sexual violence cases shows that white suspects are significantly more likely to avoid further investigation, especially if a victim is from a minoritised group, whilst offenders are more likely to be prosecuted if they are from a minoritised group. BME women were less likely to be believed and encounter racialised victim blaming.

These are depressing findings and show how much work we have to do to give BAME communities the confidence to report crime and to receive the support and respect they deserve.

Working for victims during Coronavirus – exposing the hidden harms of lockdown

SINCE DECEMBER 2019 the world has been gripped by the Covid-19 global pandemic. The virus has seen extraordinary circumstances and unprecedented measures designed to protect society put in place. The virus has brought out the very best in people, streets lined with rainbow-filled windows, weekly claps for carers, and some amazingly selfless acts. But it also shone a light into the very darkest corners of society - exposing the usually private places and revealing what goes on behind closed doors. For many, home is not the safe place it ought to be. As a result, for the last few months, the main focus of my work has been Coronavirus-related as it was clear from the experience in



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other countries that this virus would create more than medical victims. Domestic abuse charities witnessed calls to their help lines exponentially increase, rises in the number of calls related to honour-based violence support services as well as a rise in reported elder abuse were also reported. – as well as anecdotal reports of more incidents of child on parent violence. Police report a huge influx of people falling victim to virus-related frauds. There have also been big rises in reports of anti-social behaviour. Not everyone has caught the virus, but its impact has spread across every part of society. However, the pandemic has highlighted some key issues afflicting our society and the government and charities have worked together to make changes which will hopefully have longevity and continue to help those at risk long after the crisis has passed. And there has been welcome additional funding for services which provide support to victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence, as well as a public awareness campaigns.

I should add that this funding has taken far too long to reach the bank accounts of service providers. Government departments need to look at designing swifter and more efficient processes and bringing about more joined up working. As lockdown starts to lift and the public adjusts to the “new normal” of living with social distancing, the government faces the huge challenge of getting the criminal justice system fully functioning once more. This will not be without its challenges. But whilst huge logistical problems face us, there are

opportunities to do things differently and better. With lockdown, much of the criminal courts’ business slowed or stopped. Jury trials ended and only the most serious matters were really taken forward. Hard work has led to the start of a few jury trials but social distancing, court dimensions, and other factors mean it is unlikely to exceed a trickle. The backlog of cases is mounting, and we face the prospect of even longer delays before we get cases to court, with more victims withdrawing from the justice process as they give up on waiting for their day in court. As we adapt court buildings to meet the rigours of social distancing, the Courts Service and the judiciary need to make sure any changes meet the needs of victims otherwise they will fail.

Victim input is needed at every stage of planning. It will be a real test of the government’s commitment to victims the extent to which they consult on the changes. And victim engagement should not just be being discussed in Westminster briefing rooms, but implemented on the ground. Local courts need to be working closely with victim hubs as they prepare to get cases up and running again.

We have seen that where Witness Care Units are co-located with victim hubs, this collaboration works so much better. This needs to be the standard model for the future.

Victims often find going to court a terrible ordeal. The added fear of attending a busy public building can only add to the stress. If ever there was the right time to make maximum use of remote evidence centres, it is now. These centres can offer more local and intimate surroundings, and remove the risk of victims bumping into defendants or their entourage. However, we must always remember that the final decision whether or not to give evidence remotely must always be taken by the complainant.

Pre-trial video-recording of cross examination of vulnerable victims has only been made available in around one in five Crown Courts. Once a vulnerable victim has videoed their evidence, it is sent to the defence, who can cross-examine, again on video and after a relatively short period of time. Once the cross examination is



VC Dame Vera Baird with DA Commissioner Nicole Jacobs - Oct 2019

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complete, the victim has finished the court process and resume their life, irrespective of when the rest of the trial takes place. Now is the right time to make this more readily available across all parts of the country. It is particularly important that child victims are not adversely affected by backlogs in the courts – and pre-trial video-recording is the answer.

And some of the big strides taken by the court service in using digital technology to facilitate meetings and direction setting must become the new normal.

These and other talked about changes to the court process that will ensure court business may be conducted in compliance with social distancing regulations will have a big impact on victims. It is important that working groups set up to design and implement these changes include independent victim representatives, so that we can be sure victim needs are taken into account from the outset and not as a last minute afterthought. We have heard from the police how the temporary drop in crime levels has allowed

them to undertake more proactive policing. This is welcome and I want them to keep it up. The government’s commitment to recruit 20,000 police officers must not be delayed by this virus.

I have been impressed by the way in which frontline victim support services have moved to re-design their support packages to reflect the demands of social distancing. Virtual contact with victims, web chat and higher levels of engagement have all been positive developments.

But I have one word of caution. For traumatised and vulnerable victims, face to face engagement remains the best way of helping them to cope and recover. We must never forget this.

The Covid-19 outbreak has been an unprecedented time for all. It has brought into sharp focus the issues surrounding victims, victim care and victim support. As the crisis abates, I will now work to ensure that the good that has come from such a terrible situation is sustained and built upon to benefit victims now, and in the future.

Victims' Services and the Victims' Code

I am required by law to “review the operation” of the Victims' Code. I am also committed to making sure all victims receive the high-quality services they deserve and are supported through the criminal justice system. Through my reviews, and the advice I have offered to government, I have sought to play a significant role in improving the operation of the Code and enhance service delivery



The Victims' Code

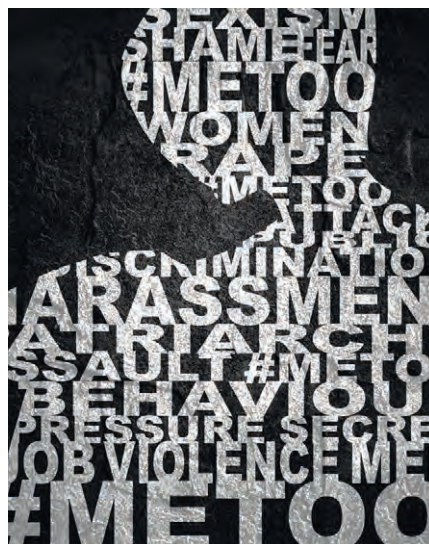
This year the government has been actively reviewing the Victims' Code. It has launched two public consultations, the second offering a draft Code of Practice based upon twelve victims' “rights”.

I have broadly welcomed the new draft Code, but have repeatedly made the case that reviewing the document, by itself, will not deliver the improvements we all want to see for victims.

Public Awareness

In my report: “An analysis of victimisation data in the Crime Survey for England and Wales” (CSEW) published on 25 March, which analyses victimisation data within the survey, I highlight that fewer than one in five victims are aware of the existence of the Victims' Code. This means they do not know what support and information they are entitled to receive. Crucially, it means they cannot hold agencies to account if they fail to deliver.

The Code must be made more accessible and easy to follow. In its current form, it is unwieldy for practitioners and impenetrable for many victims. I welcome the proposal to shorten the document and to present it in twelve separate sections, aligned to the



The Code needs to be set out in plain English, with an abbreviated “easy read” version, with a version for children available on platforms children are likely to be familiar with

statutory rights. I also welcome the plans to have separate guidance on the Code, one for victims and one for practitioners.

The Code needs to be set out in plain English, with an abbreviated “easy read” version, with a version for children available on platforms children are likely to be familiar with. As well as traditional means of providing public information, such as leaflets and online pdf documents. The use of videos, infographics and apps should also be explored. I also have concerns about how familiar many criminal justice practitioners are with the provisions of the Code. I want the Ministry of Justice to spearhead an internal awareness campaign, through staff training, so that all practitioners can advise and signpost victims appropriately. There needs to be a duty on all criminal justice agencies to draw the Code and its contents to the attention of every victim of crime and, if possible, supply a copy or at least indicate with clarity where one can be found.

Challenge

I want to see a clear and transparent complaints system. Victims come into contact with a range of criminal justice agencies and are often unclear which is responsible for what. Each agency has its own separate complaints system. This can be

bewildering, particularly if you are struggling with trauma and injury.

We need to consider how the multitude of complaints processes in place for victims can be streamlined, for example, having a single system and single point of contact for processing all initial victim complaints.

And victims should be able to refer the matter directly to the Parliamentary Ombudsman (PSHO). At present, they can only take a complaint to the PSHO through their local MP. In practice, the PSHO only receives a handful of complaints each year, with the clear implication that this route is little known about and thus inaccessible.

Compliance Systems

The 2006 Victims' Code was accompanied by a compliance framework, and yet, since that time, we have never had clear picture of compliance across England and Wales. This has limited our ability to identify problems and improve the service victims receive.

In 2018, the government agreed to a cross-departmental approach aimed at improving data and transparency on whether victims are receiving their entitlements under the Code. Police and Crime Commissioners took responsibility for compiling performance data for their local area and now oversee a new

monitoring process, measuring criminal justice partners' compliance with key entitlements in the Code. The Ministry of Justice didn't pay for the data to be collected at first, but I am pleased to see they have now agreed to do so.

The new monitoring arrangements have been beset with difficulties, including poor and inconsistent data; variable communication with criminal justice agencies about how the new monitoring system would operate; and PCCs being unable to compel other agencies to provide information.

PCCs are best placed to compile local data and I want to see the model work effectively. Issues around IT systems and data collection must be resolved quickly.

All national criminal justice agencies must issue clear guidance to local managers instructing them to comply with PCC requirements for data, if necessary, using the Victims' Law to give PCCs statutory powers to require it.



Fewer than one in five victims are aware of the existence of the Victims' Code. This means they do not know what support and information they are entitled to receive

Rape Victims denied Justice

It is a shocking and unacceptable fact that in 2019 only three per cent of rape complaints result in a suspect being charged. What is even more shocking is that this figure is likely to fall even further in 2020

IN EFFECT, what we are witnessing is the de-criminalisation of rape. In doing so, we are failing to give justice to thousands of complainants. In some cases, we are enabling persistent predatory sex offenders to go on to re-offend in the knowledge that they are highly unlikely to be held to account. This is likely to mean we are creating more victims as a result of our failure to act.

Despite the outcry of charities who support victims of sexual violence, the reasons behind this catastrophic decline in rape prosecutions have yet to be reversed. And no measures have been put in place to address it.

Yes, the government has set up an "end to end" rape review to identify the reasons behind this collapse in prosecutions. I am a member of this review and do not doubt the genuine commitment of other members to resolve this unacceptable failure in public policy. But a year after it was set up, we are nowhere near to completing the review and making recommendations for change. How much longer can victims be expected to wait?

The start of this this dramatic fall appears to coincide with a series of CPS roadshows in which a senior official in the CPS is reported to have urged rape prosecutors

to adopt a "touch on the tiller" against prosecuting "weak" rape cases in order to ensure a conviction rate of 60% and higher.

The results have been stark. In year ending March 2017, police referred 6,611 cases to CPS and in the year ending March 2019, 5,114 cases, a 22.6% decrease. However, in the year ending March 2017, the CPS prosecuted 3,671 cases, whereas in the year ending March 2019, this had fallen to just 1,758 cases,

This kind of digital interrogation of the victim does not happen in any other kind of case

a collapse of 52%. This means whatever the size of the bundle of cases referred by the police, the CPS now prosecute less than half as many of them as they were prosecuting two years ago.

Anecdotally, some police officers say the reason they made fewer referrals was precisely because they knew that CPS were prosecuting fewer cases after 2017.

The CPS denies a change of prosecution policy, but so far, it has failed to offer any convincing explanation to account for the

fall in the number of cases being prosecuted. Nor have they put forward any plans to address it.

If the CPS is unwilling or unable to deal with this failure effectively to prosecute rape, then the government must act. The current situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Policy on whether to prosecute is not the only obstacle to victims of sexual assault and rape accessing justice. We know many victims of sexual abuse are reluctant to come forward

and report the terrible crimes committed against them.

Many fear they will not be believed or supported. They feel they may be judged harshly by the criminal justice system, their families and their peers. After all, many myths about rape still persist, with victims being unfairly blamed due to what they were wearing at the time or whether they were under the influence of alcohol. I am committed to working with charities who support victims to challenge and dispel these myths.

Other victims refuse to come forward, or withdraw their complaints as they cannot face the unwarranted and unacceptable intrusion into their privacy.

Complainants can end up feeling that they are having to submit to being investigated themselves before they can be considered to qualify for the chance of a prosecution. This is because many will be required to handover their mobile phones so that the data can be downloaded to see if it has any bearing on a possible criminal prosecution.

The reality of modern life is that our mobile phone holds data covering every aspect of our lives, our most intimate details, our finances, photos of loved ones, the list is endless.

Its own inspectorate criticised the CPS for 'disproportionate' demands of an over-intrusive nature for rape complainants' phone contents and personal records. Prosecution demands for information like this do not happen in any other kind of case.

In early 2019 the police and CPS issued a form for complainants to sign, effectively giving the police free rein to extract data from their mobile phones. Violence Against Women and Girls charities, and Police and



Honour-Based Abuse – No Place to Hide

FORCED MARRIAGE only became a criminal offence in 2014. I was keen to meet with the charity Karma Nirvana, which supports thousands of victims of honour-based abuse every year, to hear what progress was being made in raising awareness of these crimes and successfully prosecuting offenders.

It seems reports to the police of honour-based abuse has increased by over 50% since that time, but the number of prosecutions has dropped significantly year-on-year since then. The latest CPS Violence Against Women and Girls report indicates honour-based abuse prosecutions have dropped by more than 60% since 2014/15. This alone indicates we need a thorough examination of how these cases are being handled across the criminal justice system.

Karma Nirvana tell me they recognise the positive action taken by the Home Office in tackling this crime but have concerns about how it is being handled by the police and CPS. Evidence from victims and practitioners is that police often fail to identify the crime, in part as a result of a poor understanding.

Specifically, Karma Nirvana raised concerns that many of the recommendations from the 2015 HMICFRS inspection on the police's handling of HBA are still outstanding five years on (<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/the-depths-of-dishonour/>). It is discouraging that this well-intentioned inspection, which provided a solid platform for shaping policing practices around HBA, has not been used as a catalyst for effective change. Indeed, Karma Nirvana says that in its experience of dealing with victims, police work 'on the ground' has deteriorated since the HMICFRS inspection, rather than improved.

I am keen to do whatever I can to ensure victims of HBA are receiving proper support and access to justice. I therefore wrote to the Home Office to request a meeting to discuss Karma Nirvanas concerns and what further action might be taken to address them. It is disappointing we have not received a response. I intend to pursue this issue.

I want to be confident victims of this crime, so often hidden from view, feel able to come forward and report, knowing they will receive the support they need to escape abuse and live their lives without fear.

Crime Commissioners warned the forms could pressurise rape complainants into "consenting" to potentially unlawful full phone downloads as a result of police advising that a case might not proceed if they didn't.

In the 15 months since the notices were introduced, charities have reported hundreds of rape complainants who have been forced to hand over personal data in fear of otherwise being denied justice. In some cases, their assailant is completely unknown to them, making it impossible to understand why examining the data on their phone is considered to be a reasonable line of enquiry.

Hundreds more will have shrunk from the intrusion demanded into their privacy, and

that of their families, and as a result there have been instances where otherwise 'strong' cases have been dropped.

Rising concerns about the overbearing intrusion into victims' privacy prompted a complaint to the Information Commissioner. Her report which was published recently questions the lawful basis of the form is called into question and it must be withdrawn and replaced.

This report must be the line in the sand. This situation has to change.

Victims of rape and sexual assault are being badly let down. Any victim of sexual violence must feel able to come forward and report in the knowledge they will be supported, treated with respect and given access to justice.

Victims' Services

I believe victims deserve to receive first class quality services whichever part of the country they live in. These services are vital in helping victims to cope and recover from the trauma of crime

IN A letter to the Lord Chancellor on 16 December I welcomed the new government's manifesto commitment to set out the level of support victims should be entitled to expect. For me, this means the Government providing clear national standards of service delivery, so that victims across all parts of England and Wales can expect a minimum level of provision for locally provided victim support services.

However, decent services need to be adequately resourced. Over the past five years, the budget for victims' services devolved to Police and Crime Commissioners

has been frozen, despite the fact that the demand for these services has significantly increased. I have sought, and will continue to press for, a guarantee the Ministry of Justice will be submitting a robust case in the forthcoming Her Majesty's Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review for increasing the budget for all victim support services to a level that enables providers to meet demand, whilst underpinning the high standards of provision we want for all victims of crime.

As well as a general commitment to resource victim services, I want to see a

specific commitment adequately to resource mental health and counselling services for victims of serious violent and sexual crime. Many victims report delays in accessing these services and this must change.

We also need to review the distribution of funding in respect of victim support services across all statutory agencies, including Police and Crime Commissioners, the NHS and local government, to ensure there are no gaps in provision and that all of these agencies have sufficient funding to deliver the services that fall within their areas of responsibility.

My Reviews and Analysis

During the year, I've published five reviews and reports I have also commissioned three pieces of research with top academics in the field which I plan to publish in the next

financial year. My predecessor also published one report.

Sowing the Seeds: Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality

On the 1st April 2020 I published **Sowing the Seeds: Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality**. This built on a review of published literature in this area, which was published in March (see below). I published Sowing the Seeds in the midst of the global Coronavirus pandemic. The UK was in lockdown, with families required to stay at home and only venture out when absolutely necessary. These measures, whilst containing the spread of the virus, presented an unprecedented risk for victims of domestic abuse, who were compelled to stay within their home with an abusive partner or family member. Together with those responsible for delivering domestic abuse support services, I was concerned



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levels of abuse will grow sharply, with frontline services struggling to cope and more children living in households of domestic abuse.

Before the coronavirus dominated the headlines, we were focused on the need to deal with another virus afflicting all parts of our society: a surge in gang-related crime, appalling violence inflicted by children onto other children through knife crime, as well as so called "county

lines" dealing in drugs, with children pulled into dangerous criminal activity.

My review found an overlap between children's experience of domestic abuse and children's offending behaviour. I called for children who experience domestic abuse to be recognised in statute as victims of crime. I also sought targeted interventions and support to help these children and young people recover from domestic abuse. ➤





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I want to ensure children are not made more vulnerable to exploitation by sending them far away from their homes and support networks when they are taken into care. Therefore, I called for all care homes to be regulated, including those for young people aged 16 who can be just as vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation as those under 16. I also called for a more comprehensive strategy for children as victims of criminal exploitation, serious violence and organised criminal groups.

I will be following up with Government departments and the relevant agencies about my recommendations. I also intend to work with key partners who were involved in the research to develop a shared strategy for supporting young victims of child exploitation, beginning with a round-table session to discuss our findings, agree aims and discuss key activities to take forward.

Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality: A literature review

In March 2020 I published a review of literature about children's experience of living in households with domestic abuse and the overlap between this and their offending behaviour. The review was co-authored by Dr Julian Molina from my Office and Jade Levell from the Open University.



The research challenges the notion that children are merely witnesses to domestic abuse and acknowledges children are directly affected by living in households with domestic abuse. The report looks at the overlap between children and young people's experience of domestic abuse and criminality. However, while some children and young people experience both domestic abuse and offending behaviour, it doesn't mean that one experience will automatically follow the other. If a child experiences domestic abuse it doesn't mean they will necessarily go on to offend.

The findings from this literature review along with the gaps identified in it were used to inform my subsequent 'deep dive' review into children's experience of domestic abuse and offending behaviour published in April 2020: Sowing the Seeds: children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality.

Victims statistics, year ending March 2019

In March 2020 I also published a statistical bulletin of victim-related data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). The bulletin included statistical data from the CSEW about victims' contact with the police, courts, attitudes to the criminal justice system and the Victims' Code and Witness Charter.

The findings show that some interactions between victims and those working in the criminal justice system are positive. For example, most of victims are satisfied with their initial contact with the police, feeling they have been treated fairly and with respect. Similarly, most victims think they were treated fairly by court staff and with respect. However, the report also found there is growing dissatisfaction amongst victims with how cases are handled.

The **Victims' Code of Practice** sets out what support and information victims are entitled to receive. Yet the CSEW data shows four out of five victims of crime have never heard of the Victims' Code.

This research makes clear that agencies are not universally doing as they should and the risk is that the public starts to withdraw support from the police and the courts. The launch of the new code should indicate the gravity of not complying; that the Government intends to develop a mechanism for accountability from the leadership of all the agencies, with robust systems in place to monitor compliance.

I have used these findings to inform my response to the government's consultation on changes to the Victims Code of Practice and the data will also be used to inform my recommendations for provisions in the planned Victims' Law.

Struggling for Justice: Entitlements and Experiences of Bereaved Families Following Homicide Abroad

In October 2019 I published a report examining the entitlements and experiences of bereaved families who have lost a love one to homicide abroad.

The report found families can face an up-hill struggle in their battle for justice in another country, whose culture, language and justice system are completely alien. Victims highlighted practical difficulties, like getting documents translated, trying to get information about the progress of the criminal investigation or problems getting their loved one's body released after post-mortem. They often need legal support and some struggle with the costs of accessing

such support, as well as covering the cost of interpreters, translation of documents and travelling to and from the country concerned.

In the report I called for entitlements for bereaved families of homicide abroad to be included in the Victims' Code and in turn for them to be eligible to apply for Criminal Injuries Compensation. I included these recommendations in my response to the Government's consultation on revisions to the Victims' Code.

I called for other improvements in support for these bereaved families including the translation of key legal documents and support with repatriating their loved one's body if they can't afford to do so themselves. UK citizens should not have to have their loved ones cremated abroad because they can't afford to bring their body home. I am continuing to work with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to improve the support for bereaved families of victims of homicide abroad.

I am in correspondence with the FCO, Met Police, NCA and Ministry of Justice about taking these recommendations forward and will report back on my progress.

Victim Personal Statements

In August 2019, I published an in-depth statistical analysis of survey data about Victim Personal Statements from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

The review found that for the year ending March 2019, few victims reported being offered the opportunity to make a VPS by police, and that their VPS was read aloud in court. Both levels have remained consistent since the question was first introduced to the Crime Survey for England and Wales. In over half of incidents where victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS, victims decided to do so.

There was a sharp drop in the proportion of victims who feel that their statement has been taken into account by the criminal justice system.

Following on from this, and as set out later in this report, I have been working with the National Police Chiefs' Council to look at ways to target information on victims'



entitlements to make a Victim Personal Statement at those who would benefit most. I want to see the police piloting new and innovative ways of delivering the VPS in a way that makes a bigger impression on victims and results in a higher take-up.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In April 2019, my predecessor Baroness Newlove published the report **Anti-Social Behaviour - Living a Nightmare**. This report was co-written with academics from Nottingham Trent University and the charity ASB Help. In it, Baroness Newlove found examples of police and council staff failing to appreciate the cumulative impact of persistent anti-social behaviour (ASB) on its victims with each incident being treated in isolation and the underlying causes being ignored.

She also found evidence of a culture of playing-down ASB as being 'low-level'; which in turn was leading to a failure to recognise the impact it was having on its victims, including their mental health, their ability to hold down employment and the strain on their family relationships.

Baroness Newlove called for the Victims' Code to be amended to include victims of ASB who reach the threshold to activate the Community Trigger, a process which ➤



allows members of the community to ask the Community Safety Partnership to review their responses to complaints of ASB. She called for a review of the operation of the 101 non-urgent police telephone line. The costs to callers of the 101 line have now been scrapped following this recommendation.

She called for the Community Trigger to be made more available and suggested improvements for its operation.

Although this report was published before my term, I am fully supportive of her findings and recommendations. I have continued to seek these improvements for victims of ASB, and I am currently in discussions with Home Office ministers about the operation of the Community Trigger. I am also in contact with ASB charities and the Local Government Association to engage their support for change. The reaction from the Home Office so far has been disappointing, but I intend to continue making the case for victims' voices to be heard and taken seriously by those responsible for finding remedies to address persistent anti-social behaviour.

As well as being used to inform my future work and my responses to Government consultations, I will publish these commissioned research projects on my website along with my other reviews and reports. Some of the contractors involved are also keen to develop their work further and write articles for peer reviewed journals about this research and I look forward to working with them on this in the coming year.

Commissioned Research

Constitutional Research

I have commissioned a research team, led by Pamela Cox, Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Essex to carry out a comparison of the constitutional powers of other commissioners, arms' length bodies, regulatory and inspectorate organisations. The Government has committed to introducing a Victims' Law and Professor Cox's research will help me to consider the role of the Victims' Commissioner in statute and to make recommendations to the Government on how the Victims' Commissioner can further support victims and witnesses in the UK.

International Comparisons

I have also commissioned a piece of research by Sisters for Change, who have carried out an international comparison of the role, rights and entitlements of victims in other adversarial jurisdictions. This work, which has just been completed at the time of publishing this report, will provide an evidence base that I can draw on in my response to any future Government consultation on a Victims' Law.

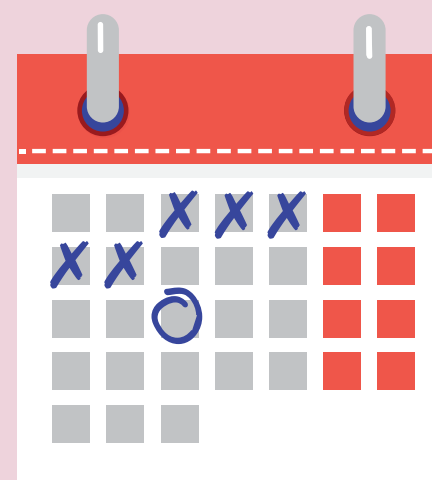
Special Measures Literature Review

In March, Dr Samantha Fairclough undertook a review of literature on the availability and use of Special Measures to support vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in giving evidence. This summary of the best available evidence on the current state of Special Measures will help to inform my next 'deep dive' review which will seek to make recommendations regarding how Special Measures are provided in the future.



Speaking Up for Victims

An important part of my role is to meet with ministers, the judiciary, heads of criminal justice agencies and government policy leads to discuss current policy and future change relevant to victims and their entitlements. I also use these meetings to feed in my own thoughts on what needs to be done, sharing issues of concern raised by victims and making sure their voice is heard



I liaise regularly with ministers either face to face or over the telephone to discuss a wide range of issues affecting victims

I PLACE great importance on these meetings as an opportunity to influence policies and practice, based on the feedback I receive from meeting victims.

The table in Annex A sets out the meetings I have held with agencies, policy makers and Ministers since following my appointment in June 2019.

Whitehall

I liaise regularly with ministers either face to face or over the telephone where we discuss on a wide range of issues affecting victims. I am grateful to them for giving me advanced notice of announcements and the opportunity to raise questions.

Shortly after my appointment, I joined the National Criminal Justice Board. I also sit on three NCJB sub groups, looking at cross-cutting issues, including the end-to-end rape review, exploring the reasons behind the collapse in the numbers of rape prosecutions, the handling of digital

downloads of personal data within criminal investigations and case progression.

I am a member of the MoJ Victims' Panel and sit on the Home Office Advisory Group on Anti-Social Behaviour. Given the strong overlap between women being victims of crime and committing criminal offences, I was pleased to be able to continue my involvement on the MoJ Advisory Board on Female Offenders.

Following the COVID-19 lockdown, I was asked to sit on the MoJ Silver Command Group looking at cross-cutting issues affecting victims as a result of the pandemic. Disappointingly, it took some months before I was asked to join the two working groups set up to oversee the recovery of the Magistrates' Courts and the Crown Courts.

The decisions being made by these groups will have a direct impact and it is vital there is an independent victim representative feeding in.

I have taken a close interest in the work of

the Family Courts and the Civil Courts and how they work to support victims. I have been pleased to have the opportunity to hold several meetings with the MoJ Family Court Panel, and I welcome its far-reaching report which reviewed the operation of the Family Court.

I have met regularly with policy leads on a range of criminal justice issues, from both MoJ and the Home Office, giving me the opportunity to feed into the development of policy from a victim perspective. ➤



VC Dame Vera Baird with Victoria Atkins, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vulnerability and Safeguarding



Wales

I'M DELIGHTED that my role covers Wales - the land of my grandfather - and that my first major public engagement in this role was in Wales.

From the outset, I have been keen to engage with the Welsh Government, so that I am fully able to fulfil my statutory responsibilities to victims in Wales. My very first task following my appointment was to give evidence to the Welsh Criminal Justice Review, led by Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, where I was able to explain both my role and the needs of victims within the criminal justice system.

In February I met with Welsh Assembly Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt to hear about the work the Welsh Government was doing to support and protect vulnerable victims. We have agreed to meet regularly going forward and to share information between our respective offices.

I have also attended and spoken at two conferences in Wales.

Top: Welsh Womens Aid Visit

Left: VC Dame Vera Baird with Welsh Assembly Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt



Police

AS A former Police and Crime Commissioner, I am only too aware of the many pressures facing police forces, but equally, I know the police have a critical role to play in supporting victims and delivering their entitlements under the Victims' Code. Since my appointment, I have held a wide range of meetings with relevant lead members of the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), including the chair, Martin Hewitt. I have also met with the CEO of the National Crime Agency to discuss its work.

These discussions have been helpful and constructive, re-enforcing my view that police across the country are keen to support victims as best they can.

DCC Louisa Rolfe is the NPCC lead for domestic abuse and DCC Sarah Crewe leads on rape and sexual offences. I have valued my meetings and discussions with them and welcomed their desire to bring about real improvements in policing in these critical areas.

Equally, Simon Bailey, the Chief Constable of Norfolk and NPCC lead for child exploitation and non-recent sexual abuse at NPCC has been extremely helpful in keeping me updated on the work police are doing in tackling these crimes.

I have also welcomed the opportunity to meet with ACC Neil Basu, the NPCC lead on counter terrorism to discuss the support being given to victims of terror attacks.

Victim Personal Statement

There are two key operational concerns for me which apply to all victims of crime. The first is whether victims are always being made an offer of a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and the second is how police maintain ongoing communications with victims during investigations.

My report on the VPS, published in August 2019, showed just 14% of victims recollect being made the offer of a VPS. These figures are consistent with data from similar reports published by my predecessor over the past four years. This is a disappointing finding and suggests many victims are not being given the opportunity to have their voice heard in court.

I know some forces dispute the data,

stating their internal records show the offer being made in nearly every case their officers are called out to. Whilst I don't dispute this local data, if six out of seven victims have no recollection of the offer being made, it calls into question the efficacy of the way in which the offer is explained.

Like my predecessor, I have raised the issue at police conferences, most recently at the Police Superintendents' Conference in September. However, I am not convinced that simply highlighting the issue is going to take us very much further forward.

I met with AC Nick Ephgrave, NPCC lead for the Criminal Justice in November to explore how we might devise a multi-agency approach to increasing public awareness of the VPS and its purpose, as well as the range of options available to victims for making their statement. I pressed him to look to set up pilots, looking at new and innovative ways of delivering the offer of a VPS, possibly at different points in the victim's journey through the justice system. We need to think about how we deliver this key victim entitlement in a way that resonates with victims and gives them their voice.

He agreed and ACC Emma Barnett, the NPCC lead for Victims and Witnesses has been asked to take this work forward. In my meetings with ACC Barnett, again I have been clear that working alongside other agencies, we need to pilot new options for the effective delivery of the VPS.

ACC Barnett tells me that in order to achieve a more consistent practice and better compliance with Code entitlements, she has set up a National Governance Group, with members reporting on how they support victims and to oversee progress of the NPCC Victim and Witness Strategy of which delivery of a consistent, good quality service to victims and witnesses is a key aim. All of this is welcome, but it must not detract from the key priority of finding new and effective ways for delivering the VPS.

I look forward to taking this work forward with the NPCC in the coming year.

Police Communications

My report published in March analysing victimisation data within the Crime Survey

for England and Wales showed more than half of victims dissatisfied about how the police kept them informed with the ongoing investigation. I am also aware many crimes are now being dealt with over the phone and the victims in these cases also deserve ongoing contact.

I sense the police generally make a positive impression when they meet victims at the point at which the crime is reported, and the data from my report supports this. The Victims' Code is clear the police have a duty to maintain contact with victims, but all too often it is not happening. This failure has in part contributed to rising numbers of victims withdrawing their support from the criminal justice process. This will be an issue I plan to discuss further with the NPCC as well as my former Police and Crime Commissioner colleagues.

Tackling Fraud

In October I met with Commander Baxter of the City of London Police and who leads on the police national fraud reporting system. The meeting was prompted by the recent investigation by The Times into Action Fraud and the treatment of victims. Commander Baxter was able to reassure me that steps were in place to ensure that the services provided by Action Fraud were being reviewed to ensure victims could expect to be treated with decency and respect.

I am aware that fraud is the fastest growing areas of crime, with 86% being cyber related. It is pernicious in that it is a crime committed against people in their own homes, as witnessed by the recent increase in reported fraud during the COVID-19 lockdown.

My concerns are that there should be clear pathways for support for victims of fraud, that victims should be encouraged to step forward and report and that they should know that are not alone. This is an issue we will be exploring further in the coming year.

Liaison with Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

I have raise concern about delays in police forces sending information about the

claimant's case to the CICA. This delay is unacceptable, significantly holding up the processing of victims' claims. I have raised this with the NPCC but there are still delays of different lengths nationwide.

Association of Police and Crime Commissioners

I have maintained my close contacts with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and am invited to attend its Victims and Witnesses Portfolio Group. These contacts keep me up to date with how they oversee operational policing. Throughout the lockdown period I set up and held weekly calls with a group of PCC offices to collect frontline information on how COVID19 was impacting on frontline victim support services. This information was fed back to the Ministry of Justice. ➤



Commander Karen Baxter - NPCC lead on Fraud and Economic Crime 2019



West Yorkshire Victim Strategy launch - Feb 2020



Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)

I HAVE met with the Chief Executive of HMCTS, Susan Acland Hood and with her officials during this year.

Special Measures

Based on my experience as a Police and Crime Commissioner, one of my primary concerns has been whether victims and witnesses entitled to special measures in the courts were being properly identified in advance of trials.

I am concerned about the extent to which remote evidence centres are being utilised to offer a safe place for vulnerable and intimidated victims to give their evidence. More needs to be done to promote the use of remote links. This means vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses being identified early in the process and where cases are getting to court that have not been correctly identified, judges taking the initiative to raise the issue themselves.

One of the difficulties in assessing the extent that this is an issue is that there is little data on offer. I want to see the rollout of the common platform and new models

for providing court support and staff with training addressing this issue.

The CEO informed me of the facilities audit undertaken across the HMCTS estate in 2017. On back of this, there was some funding to provide improvements for victims and children's rooms, but all too often, facilities in the family courts for vulnerable people fell short of those in the criminal courts, because of their different history and changing use. This needed to be addressed.

The CEO has also acknowledged some of the difficulties in collating accurate data, not least because police forces have different IT systems, and the collation of certain pieces of information depended on who happened to be in the court room at the time.

It is so important that data on use of remote evidence links and section 28 is being collected across the whole of the estate and on a regular basis. It isn't the police who are responsible for recording the use of these facilities, this must fall to HMCTS since it is part of the court process.

The latest facilities audit has been completed and I am keen to see the detailed findings. There are systemic issues affecting the whole of the court estate, including the criminal courts. We know that technology is poor and reproduction of the voice is often not synchronised with the film. Vulnerable victims and witnesses are not always being identified and hence don't get their entitlements.

In response to these concerns, I have decided that in the coming year, my research team will undertake a comprehensive review of special measures, their availability, the extent to which they are facilitated by the court estate and their impact on victims' ability to give best evidence.

Section 28

I have also followed the progress of the rollout of s.28 pre-recorded cross examination. Despite a problematic start to this project, 18 Crown Courts are now licensed for its use but that needs to be greatly increased as a matter of urgency given the backlog of cases, and the impact of delay on the kind of vulnerable victims that this process can help. Further data on this is essential and Section 28 should be used as much as possible in every available court.

In the coming year I will be scrutinising s.28 to see whether use of the technology is being fully optimised.

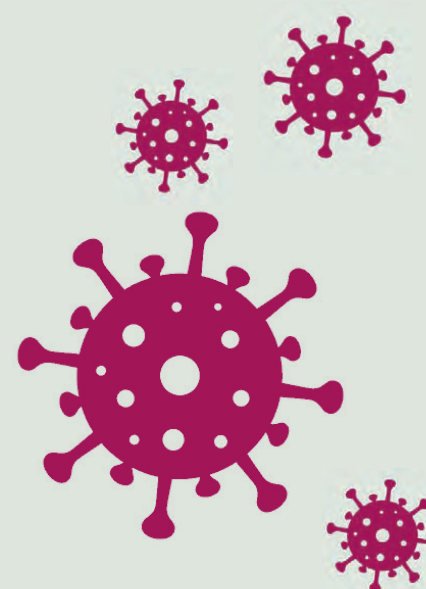
In the coming year, my research team will undertake a comprehensive review of special measures

COVID19 Recovery

I have taken a close interest in the courts during the COVID19 lockdown period. I am concerned that the impact this will have on the backlog of cases awaiting trial will be significant. This will have a detrimental impact on victims, and we have already seen a significant increase in victims withdrawing their support for prosecutions, in part because of the time it is now taking to complete investigations and get cases to courts.

Two groups have been established by the Ministry of Justice and the Lord Chief Justice to consider options for post-lockdown recovery of the Magistrates Courts and the Crown Courts. It is disappointing that it took some months before I was asked to join the two working groups set up to oversee the recovery of the Magistrates' Courts and the Crown Courts. The decisions being made by these groups will have a direct impact on victims and it is vital they have someone who can champion their needs.

Plans for recovery will only be effective if they have the confidence of victims and those who are responsible for supporting them.



Family Courts

Like many others, I am concerned about the treatment of victims in the Family Courts, the cross examination of victims of domestic abuse by the perpetrators, the support available to victims attending court and the extent to which courts understand the concepts and reality of domestic abuse, control and coercion. I welcomed the Government's decision to set up a special panel to review the operation of the Family Courts, although I regret that victims have not been specifically represented on the panel. I have had the opportunity to meet with officials and one of the panel members to discuss emerging findings and this has been helpful. The findings have been published and I welcome its far reaching recommendations which I hope will feed into the Domestic Abuse Bill. ➤

I welcomed the Government's decision to set up a special panel to review the operation of the Family Courts



Speaking Up for Victims

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA)

I HAVE had two meetings with Linda Brown, CEO of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and I have found these to be very productive.

De-traumatising claiming for Compensation

My predecessor's review into the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS), published in January 2019, found victims were traumatised by having to set out a full



Victims were traumatised by having to set out a full account of what happened to them. This particularly applied to victims of sexual assault. Some victims were either put off from making a claim or felt compelled to instruct a solicitor to avoid the trauma



Dame Vera Baird with CEO of Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority - Sept 2019

account of what happened to them. This particularly applied to victims of sexual assault. Some victims were either put off from making a claim or felt compelled to instruct a solicitor to avoid the trauma. The CEO and I have discussed this issue in depth and I highlighted the fact that police provide copies of the victim's statement and CICA prefer to use this to using the account on the application form. The CEO subsequently decided CICA would pilot removing this requirement to see whether it was feasible and would not lengthen the overall time it took to process some claims. Two hundred cases were tested in the pilot and the new way of working, where victims of sexual crime were not required to explain the crime. The pilot was a success and CICA were planning to roll this out to all victims of sexual crime from 14 May. They will no longer have to set out in their own words what had happened to them. Instead, they would simply be required to provide a crime and location details and the date. CICA will use this to track down the police reports.

I very much welcome this and I know it will be welcomed by victims and those supporting them.

Reducing Complexity

Another concern raised in my predecessor's report is the complexity of the application process. I have been kept informed of work CICA is undertaking to simplify the application form and remove duplications and unnecessary questions. I also understand CICA is planning to introduce "track my claim" software functionality so that victims can keep up to date with the progress of their claims.

Single Point of Contact

My predecessor also called for victims to be given a single point of contact or caseworker within CICA so that they receive a more personalised service. I am pleased that CICA now provide such a service for certain

groups of victims, such as those who have suffered bereavement, are aged over 70, have limited life expectancy, complex cases, including multiple applications, and claims which have previously fallen under the "same roof rule". The CEO confirms this is working well and is popular with staff and victims. Staff can phone the applicants to seek additional information and secure a broader base of evidence for determining the claim. Looking ahead, I would like to see this being rolled out more widely.

Same Roof Rule

In September 2018 the Justice Secretary committed to abolish the pre-1979 same roof rule which has denied compensation to some victims. Legislation was introduced to amend the Compensation Scheme to make this group of victims eligible. I raised with Ministers why these victims would be given an award under the current scheme, which is less generous than schemes in place at the time the offences had taken place, but sadly, Ministers were reluctant to make this change.

I understand CICA has received around 1,500 applications from this group of victims and to date, around 40% have been processed. Most offers were being accepted at first decision. I will continue to seek updates on this area of work.

MoJ Review of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Looking ahead, I await the outcome of the MoJ review of CICS and how the MoJ plan to respond to other recommendations we have made for reforming the scheme. The schedule of awards payable has remained unchanged since 2011. I will also be writing to Ministers seeking a commitment that in future, they are increased in line with the rate of inflation in order to prevent any further erosion of their value.

National Probation Service (NPS)

I HAVE had two meetings with the Chief Probation Officer, Sonia Flynn and the Head of the Public Protection Group, Gordon Davison. I have also met with Amy Rees, Director General for HMPPS, responsible for probation services and HMPPS in Wales and one of her Directors, Jim Barton. I feel my engagement with HMPPS has been productive. I am particularly grateful to Sonia and Gordon for keeping me informed of high profile cases that raise sensitive issues about the treatment of victims.

Greater Transparency

My primary focus at these meetings is to ensure those victims within the VCS are being provided with sufficient information to enable them to understand the progression of prison sentences through to the point of release. For example, I was keen to see victims being informed when the offender has been re-categorised, explaining in general terms how and the decision was taken and the factors likely to have been taken into account. Despite some initial reservations about this suggestion, I am delighted to learn that the annual contact letter sent to victims will include an update on the offender's categorisation. I also understand this letter is to be reviewed to consider what scope there might be for providing more information on an offender's progress, whilst remaining compliant with data protection legislation. I look forward to seeing the detail of any possible changes as I am firmly of the view this information will provide victims with greater reassurance and will assist them in understanding the reasoning behind parole decisions.

Unrestricted Patients

I have welcomed the decision taken by MoJ to offer victims of unrestricted patients a Victim Liaison Officer in cases where they meet the statutory criteria. At present, these victims have to find their own way through the mental health system and this is often a very distressing experience. My predecessor called for such a change and it is a step



Dame Vera Baird with Sonia Crozier, Director of National Probation Service discussing information sharing with victims - Sept 2019

in the right direction. I also welcome the positive response to our request for some VLOs to become specialists on the mental health review system, so that they can offer victims of mentally disordered offenders the support they deserve. Of course, I am pleased that HMPPS has responded positively in supporting this group of victims, the issue of victim engagement with the mental health review process has yet to be resolved and this is something I am taking up directly with Ministers.

Victim Contact Scheme

The Government announced in October 2019, its intention to ask victims of serious sexual and violent crimes whether to "opt out" of the VCS as opposed to the current arrangement whereby they are required to "opt in". This is a welcome attempt to address the fact many victims do not respond to the request to "opt in" only to find they are not consulted on licence conditions at the point of release or given the opportunity to feed into the parole process.

I understand this approach has been piloted and the results have been impressive, with those wanting to join the VCS increasing significantly. I also welcome the proposal that bereaved victims following death by dangerous and careless driving will now be able to join the scheme.

These welcome proposals will increase take up will place more pressure on the VCS and moving forward, I will want to be sure there is sufficient additional funding to meet the cost. ➤

Parole Board

I HAVE met with the Parole Board and welcomed the opportunity to observe a parole hearing so that I might fully understand how the parole process works. I attended a hearing at HMP Wormwood Scrubs and it was fascinating and reassuring. I was delighted the members were able to discuss their role with me, giving generously of their time.

It confirmed my view that it is entirely proper that parole hearings focus on making an assessment of an offender's future risk to the public, but the starting point is that someone has lost their life or been subjected to horrendous violent or sexual crimes. The victims are likely to still be traumatised and may be for the remainder of their lives. Parole reviews maybe a forensic exercise, but they should not be an exercise entirely immune from the suffering of the victims.

3,000

OVER 3,000 SUMMARIES HAVE BEEN ISSUED TO DATE

Victim engagement with parole hearings is improving. I understand over 2,500 victims on the Victim Contact Scheme have registered to receive high level summaries of Parole Board decisions. Over 3,000 summaries have been issued to date. I welcome this demonstration that victims want to be better informed and to understand the decisions being taken by criminal justice agencies. I am keen that there should be an evaluation of these summaries so that we can be confident they are set out in terms clearly understood by the recipient.

The new parole reconsideration mechanism came into effect in July 2019. My predecessor welcomed the mechanism, but voiced some caution. As anticipated, relatively few victims are seeking a reconsideration and the question remains whether they have the information and the support to challenge whether a decision is reasonable.

There have been around 200 reconsideration applications since the new process came into being, with 90% being made by prisoners as we suspected would be the case. Again, it is important this initiative is fully evaluated once it has been given time to bed down.



Meeting with the Parole Board discussing the parole process - Oct 2019

Inspectorates

CRIMINAL JUSTICE inspectorates have a vital role to play in making sure criminal justice agencies operate to the highest standards and deliver their statutory functions effectively.

I am very aware victim issues fall across the boundaries of three inspectorates, HMICFRS, HIMIP and HMCPSI. Whilst I am sure all three are committed to reviewing services from a victim perspective, there is a possibility of victim issues falling between the gaps. For this reason I requested to attend a meeting between the criminal justice inspectorates to raise the possibility of a joint inspection looking at how effectively criminal justice services provide end to end support for victims.

My discussions with HMICFRS have focussed on how police support vulnerable victims and witnesses and how we might work together to ensure inspections are focused on the right issues.

I am delighted the Chief Inspector, Sir Tom Winsor, has agreed to sit on my Advisory Group. He also suggested I might have an input in drafting questions for Force Management Statements relating to vulnerability. I took up this opportunity as it is these questions that will focus forces and inspectors on how victims are treated.

Looking ahead, I will be taking a close interest in the work HMICFRS is doing in response to police super-complaints are progressing and any emerging findings. The issues arising from these complaints, namely the treatment of victims of modern slavery and domestic abuse, are of particular interest. I am also keen to feed into plans for joint inspection work on vulnerabilities.

I have met and entered into correspondence with Kevin McGinty, HMCPSI, specifically relating to the significant drop in rape prosecutions (covered earlier in this report) and the case study review undertaken by the HMCPSI as part of the government's end to end rape review. As already noted, I shared the serious concerns of the VAWG sector in how this review was undertaken and am pleased to see the government has now commissioned a



VC Dame Vera Baird with Sir Tom Winsor Chief Inspector of HMICFRS - Oct 2019

further and joint review to be undertaken by HMCPSI and HMICFRS.

I also met with Justin Russell, the newly appointed Chief Inspector of Probation to discuss how his team inspected the work of the Victim Contact Scheme and what data was being collected.

Senior Judiciary

It was a pleasure to meet the LCJ, Lord Burnett and President of the Queen's Bench Division, Dame Victoria Sharp to discuss a range of issues including the victim personal statement, the treatment of victims of sexual violence in the court room, the transparency of sentencing and how it might be better explained to victims and defendants.

I also met with Mr Justice Holroyde, Chairman of the Sentencing Council, to raise the issue of how we might work together to improve the understanding of sentences and what they mean in practice not only to victims, but the wider public. There is much more we need to do on this subject as all too often, our sentencing is opaque and the explanations provided after trial do little to assist victims in understanding the practical effect of what has been handed down.

Shortly after my meetings there was an announcement that in certain cases, judges' sentencing remarks would be televised and put online. This is a step in the right direction, but I remain committed to seeing all victims of serious crime being offered a free transcript of judges' sentencing remarks, so that they are able to absorb what has been said away from the stress and noise of the courtroom.

Crown Prosecution service

I HAVE met with officials from CPS to discuss Violence Against Women and Girls and I attended a stakeholder consultation meeting to discuss child sexual abuse. I have had helpful discussions with CPS representatives on a number of groups and committees. Similarly, I meet with CPS staff on the National Police Chiefs Council sub groups on domestic abuse and rape. The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has not yet met with me.

Shortly before I took up this post the CPS with the NPCC launched a form to get victims' consent, essentially in rape cases, to allow mobile phone data extraction. Violence Against Women and Girls charities, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and I had strongly advised against using the form as it would not provide free consent. The DPP continued to promote this form until the Information Commissioner gave similar advice to ours, that it did not create a valid consent. CPS and police were told to withdraw it.

I have made no secret of the fact that I have been alarmed by the collapse in rape prosecutions since 2017. This dramatic fall

I have made no secret of the fact that I have been alarmed by the collapse in rape prosecutions since 2017

58,000

IN 2019 THERE WERE OVER 58,000 COMPLAINTS OF RAPE

took place after a series of CPS roadshows in which a senior official in the CPS is reported to have urged rape prosecutors to a "touch on the tiller" against prosecuting "weak" rape cases in order to ensure a conviction rate of 60% and higher.

The results have been stark. In year ending March 2017, police referred 6,611 cases to CPS and in the year ending March 2019, 5,114 cases, a 22.6% decrease. However, in the year ending March 2017, the CPS prosecuted 3,671 cases, whereas in the year ending March 2019, this had fallen to just 1,758 cases, a collapse of 52%. This means whatever the size of the bundle of cases referred by the police, the CPS now prosecute less than half as many of them as they were prosecuting two years ago.

Anecdotally police officers have told me the reason they made fewer referrals was precisely because they knew that CPS were prosecuting fewer cases after 2017.

The CPS denies a change of prosecution policy. I am concerned that the change in policy or practice that has led to this substantial drop in prosecutions has had the unintended consequence of de-criminalising rape other than in a very small percentage of cases.

The failure to prosecute rape is that of CPS leadership who need to be held accountable to the public they should serve.

VC's View

Tackling the Torture of Domestic Abuse

IMAGINE LIVING your life in fear of your partner's temper, afraid of what will happen to you in bed at night, treading on eggshells, not allowed money, isolated from your family, told every day that you are stupid and can't get anything right. All this from someone you loved, who loved you and who is your only frame of reference since you've stopped seeing any friends and been pressed to give up work and independence

This is the isolated, tortured life of a domestic abuse victim. It can take time for the victim to see that this is abuse and not what they believe is their just desserts. By then they can be so degraded that they don't expect anyone to believe it if they complain. Despite much publicity, domestic abuse is little understood, and most people would not know how to recognise it, how to react to it or how help those experiencing it.

New legislation needs to end this epidemic, root and branch, as surely as we must end the shorter-lived Covid19 one. But the current Domestic Abuse Bill will not do that, unless government supports a package of amendments which have been shaped by the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner, specialist domestic abuse charities and me .

Perpetrators will be banned from personally cross-examining their victims in family courts, but although a welcome inclusion, it is a small element and the family courts need thorough reform

Establishing the post of Domestic Abuse Commissioner is the best step in the Bill. She will stand up for survivors, raise awareness, monitor responses and hold public authorities to account - but she needs more powers to do any of this. Further, during the Bill's Committee stage, Ministers seemed intent on parading the Domestic Abuse Commissioner as the answer to everything they are failing to tackle, even issues for which government intervention is needed.

The Bill includes a new definition of domestic abuse, to replace diverse ones in use across government. A duty is put onto councils to support victims and children in refuges and safe accommodation, but there is no money provided to fund it. And the duty is too narrow, leaving out for instance health providers which can be key to long term recovery but deliver support inconsistently.

Perpetrators will be banned from personally cross-examining their victims in family courts, but although a welcome inclusion, it is a small element and the family courts need thorough reform. The Family Courts Review Panel has recommended radical changes, which need to be added to the Bill.

A good move is to extend Domestic Abuse

2.4m

NUMBER OF ADULTS AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE EACH YEAR, TWO THIRDS OF WHOM ARE WOMEN

Children who are currently treated as witnesses to abuse in their own family will now be to recognised as victims

Protection Orders, which courts use to keep a perpetrator away. This Bill allows positive requirements to be tacked onto those orders, such as going on a behavioural change programme, but provision of such programmes is inconsistent across policing areas. There needs to be consistency in quality and funding if these orders are to work.

Victims will be automatically eligible for 'special measures' in the criminal courts, as sexual abuse complainants are now (for example they will be able to give evidence via a video link) and this could encourage more to testify. But these special measures are rarely used in the Domestic Abuse Magistrates' Courts so urgent culture change will be required. The Family Courts Review Panel recommended that special measures are also needed in the Family and Civil courts, and I am pleased to say the Government has agreed with that.

Bizarrely, the Bill provides for domestic abuse offenders to be subject to lie-detector testing when on licence from prison. While this element may make for good headlines, they are, all in all, random proposals which will not end domestic abuse which affects 2.4 million adults each year, two thirds of whom are women.

The Bill must entitle migrant victims of abuse to the same help and support given to non-migrant victims. Many are barred from having access to public funds in England and Wales which means they have no way of getting any support to deal with a violent partner.

And there have been many instances where the police have tended to focus on their immigration status more than on helping them. Everyone suffering abuse in our country must be entitled to potentially life-saving support when they need it but the government is not tackling that issue.

It has now been agreed that children who are currently who witnesses to abuse in their own family will be victims. This change will help to end any notion that a perpetrator can abuse a partner and still be a good parent, and it will encourage and allow access to specialist support for young people.

Clearly, if local authorities are to be given new duties to provide refuge-related services, they have to be funded for it and the duty needs to cover all public authorities in particular those from the healthcare sector ►

so that we end the current inconsistent response.

I also want to see the Bill make it a criminal offence to threaten to publish intimate photographs. These are often taken during a relationship and threatening their disclosure is a cruel new weapon, which bludgeons women out of leaving abusive relationships through fear of the shame if images were made public. Equally vital is to criminalise non-fatal strangulation, which is frequently used as a means of control. It is a dangerous practice in itself, but research has also shown that it is an indicator of a high level of risk.

There is a strong case for a defence for victims who are forced to commit crimes by their abuser. Sixty percent of women in prison for minor offences have suffered domestic abuse which many say have overborne their free will at the time. Victims of modern slavery, in a similarly coerced position, do have a defence and there is little difference in the two positions.

A significant public education campaign must accompany the Bill, until there is nobody left in England and Wales who reacts to a complaint of abuse by asking the victim why they don't just leave.

Domestic abuse has declined from a prevalence of 8.9% in 2005 to 6.3% in 2019. This Bill should cut it further but if we are ever to celebrate the eradication of domestic abuse, we need to lobby for these additional amendments now.



Unduly Lenient Scheme

On 25 July I called for the Government to undertake a comprehensive review of the Unduly Lenient Scheme.

The reason why the UL scheme was introduced 30 years ago was so anyone - but in particular a victim - could ask the Attorney General to consider challenging a sentence on the basis that it was not just lenient but unduly so. Although it has been updated a few times, there has never been a systematic review and there were obvious offences which should be included.

For example, there has only been a dedicated domestic abuse offence introduced since 2015. This is called coercive and controlling behaviour and it has transformed our understanding of how traumatic and long-term the impact of domestic violence can be. Sentencing hasn't caught up with this greater understanding and frequently victims and children are left feeling that neither the harm done, nor the culpability of the offender have been recognised.

Another obvious example is stalking, which is not always taken seriously enough, particularly where the behaviour itself is not obviously threatening.

I am also very aware of the distress caused to bereaved families by the sentences sometimes handed down for causing death by careless driving. Death by dangerous

Another obvious example is stalking, which is not always taken seriously enough, particularly where the behaviour itself is not obviously threatening

driving is included within the scheme and consideration should be given to including death by careless driving as well.

The Government agreed to my request and an announcement was made in September, adding a further 14 offences to the scheme, including stalking, harassment, offences involving controlling and coercive behaviour, and additional child sexual abuse offences.

The continuing problem is that the Government does not promote this, so most members of the public do not know that they have the right to ask for a challenge. This is likely to particularly adversely affect victims of crime and the Government needs an urgent promotional campaign when it launches the new Victims' Code.

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating

Communication was non-existent unless I was persistent. I was exasperated by the whole experience & not taken seriously. I have no faith in the cjs. I have suffered with extreme depression from my experience & have lost respect for the system & process

(Female respondent, 45-54, South West)

A FORMER head of the United Nations, the late Kofi Annan once said: "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating." These are wise words from a wise man.

Transparency in the justice system has been one of my key themes in my first year as Victims' Commissioner. I want victims and witnesses to be better informed about the criminal justice system and able to challenge those who hold power when appropriate. This will help victims to cope and recover from crime, which is in everyone's interest, but especially that of the criminal justice agencies who may need their help in the future. It will also help to deliver a fairer justice system in which victims and witnesses feel confident.

All crime has an impact on the victim. That is likely to range from a minor setback, perhaps causing the victim to feel that they are less safe than they had thought, right up to a need for lifelong post traumatic support for victims of serious physical or sexual assaults. It is imperative, if the criminal justice system is to be fair to those victims, that they are treated with dignity and acknowledged as having an important role to play in the process.

Victims and witnesses need to be given clear, easily understood information about the criminal justice system and how it will work and, it is essential that they are kept up to date on the progress of the specific case in which they are involved.

In recent years, there have been some positive moves towards openness, and these have been well received by victims and witnesses. Following a High Court judgment

52.2%

MY ANALYSIS OF VICTIMISATION DATA COLLECTED AS PART OF THE CRIME SURVEY FOR ENGLAND AND WALES SHOWED OVER HALF (52.2%) OF VICTIMS DIDN'T THINK THE POLICE KEPT THEM WELL INFORMED ABOUT PROGRESS IN THE CASE. THE FIGURE WAS 43.5% JUST FOUR YEARS EARLIER

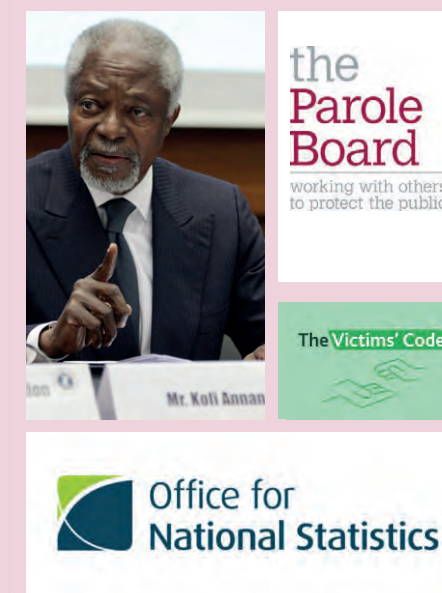
in 2018, the government scrapped the privacy requirement in the Parole Board Rules and victims can now be given high level reasons for Parole Board decisions. Victims responded positively to this offer of more information and so far, more than 2,500 victims in the Victim Contact Scheme have registered to receive high level summaries of Parole Board decisions, with over 3,000 summaries issued to date.

This appetite for more information on the part of victims sends a clear message to the rest of the criminal justice system.

And yet, in other areas, we appear to be going backwards. My analysis of victimisation data collected as part of the Crime Survey for England and Wales showed over half (52.2%) of victims didn't think the police kept them well informed about progress in the case. The figure was 43.5% just four years earlier. Anecdotal evidence is that victims can go weeks and months without receiving any update. It is little wonder record numbers of victims are withdrawing their support for prosecutions.

I want all victims to know what is happening as cases progress through the system. This is all the more important as the time taken to complete investigations and get cases to trial is getting longer, with some victims waiting for two years or longer before they see their case get to a courtroom.

This means police officers or those working for the police contacting victims regularly to give them updates on the progress being made, even if there is little to report. By receiving these updates, victims will feel part



Office for National Statistics



Victims and witnesses need to be given clear, easily understood information about the criminal justice system and how it will work and, it is essential that they are kept up to date on the progress of the specific case in which they are involved

of the process and will derive a sense that the process is working for them.

Victims should be consulted on bail terms which can provide important protection for them. They have the right to review Police or CPS decisions depending on who decides against a charge in their case, and they must be consulted by the CPS if it's proposed to drop a serious charge to a lesser one.

However, these Entitlements are rarely assured.

When a defendant is sentenced, I want to be sure victims (and defendants) understand what the sentence actually means in practical terms. Our sentencing laws are somewhat opaque and it is little surprise so many victims are confused.

I am calling for victims and defendants, in serious cases to be given transcripts of judges sentencing remarks free of charge so that they can absorb the information away from the pressures of the court, at a time of their choosing and seek advice where appropriate.

I also welcome the announcement by the Lord Chancellor that cameras will be allowed into courts to film judges handing down sentences. This should lead to more



VC Dame Vera Baird meeting with Victims' Minister Alex Chalk MP

victims, witnesses and the public being able to understand the reality of sentences and the reasoning behind them by viewing them online.

Another important element to transparency is victims being provided with sufficient information to help them understand an offender's progression through a prison sentence, to the point of release.

For example, I want victims in the Victim Contact Scheme to be notified when the offender has been re-categorised, perhaps explaining in general terms how such a decision is taken and by whom and the factors likely to have been taken into account. I have been successful in persuading HMPPS to notify these victims, as part of their annual contact letter, when an offender has been transferred to a lower category prison.

I am also pleased to be told that the annual contact letter is to be reviewed, with the aim of providing victims with more meaningful information on the offender's progress. I hear victims' frustration with these letters, which give very little information. Evidence from our victim engagement exercise in 2018 suggests victims interpret dearth of information as no change in the risk, attitudes or behaviour presented by the offender. So, when the victim receives a parole decision stating the offender is safe to be released, it can come as a terrible shock. In reality, a great deal of progress may have been made and this must be shared with the victims.

And finally, I want victims to be given more information on how an offender will be managed within the community. Many victims live in constant fear of release, particularly when the offender is an ex-partner or family member. The steps being taken by criminal justice agencies to manage the offender in the community and monitor their risk of doing harm are often extensive, and if fully explained to a victim, might provide reassurance.

So, Kofi Annan's dictum "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating" neatly and succinctly sums up why we need to do more to open up our criminal justice system and share information with victims.

By doing so, we help all victims to cope and – where possible - recover from the trauma of crime and we make our justice system fairer to all.

The Power of My Voice

Championing the Needs of Victims



The role of Victims' Commissioner has very little statutory power. But what I do have is the power of my voice, speaking up for victims, highlighting inequality of treatment and the needs of vulnerable victims, and talking about victims' experiences of the criminal justice system

SINCE MY appointment, I have been keen to use all forms of media to talk about my work and highlight the issues that matter most to me. I want to be considered a trusted and authoritative independent voice for victims and witnesses by the public and the media.

In order to achieve this, my team and I have used a range of traditional and new media to promote my role and our key messages. I have taken up many opportunities to work with organisations which support victims and have spoken at a number of meetings and conferences, responding to questions and stimulating debate and discussion.

National and regional Media

If the sheer volume of press requests received by my office is a reflection of society's interest, it all points to a significant awareness of the issues facing victims.

Our intention is to provide the victims' voice.

We are currently in the process of drawing up a new communications strategy which will cover the term of my office. This will include specific media, digital and stakeholder engagement plans.

My team and I are undertaking further work to expand our reach – specifically targeting and working with outlets which attract a younger audience and minority groups. ➤



VC Dame Vera Baird at LimeCulture's ISVA Conference

GEOFF REARDON PHOTOGRAPHY

Website

My website can be found at: VictimsCommissioner.org.uk. We worked with an in-house team to re-develop the website over a two-year period.

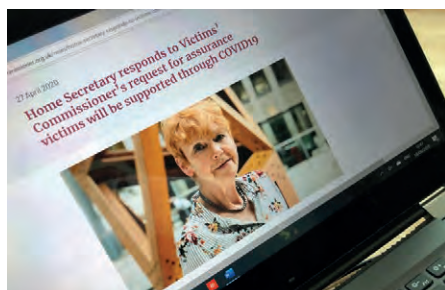
The current website was launched in March 2019.

The new website offers better engagement with victims through the "Victims' Journey". It also offers other facilities, such as an online blog, Twitter feed and examples of good practice in the support of victims.

I use it to publish my news releases and blogs, and these provide a 'library' of my comments and statements – clearly documenting all my ongoing work and policy positions.

We post copies of my letters and meeting notes on the website so that everything I do is as transparent as possible. This is to demonstrate my work and the issues on which I am challenging agencies and government.

The current website provides a good basis for moving forward and under-going further development.



Newsletter

Now that we have a full time Communications Manager in post, we plan to review whether to continue with the quarterly VC Newsletter.



Twitter

The Twitter account is: @VictimsComm. We currently have more than 10,000 followers and this is growing.

It is an important communication channel which allows us to reach the public, our stakeholders and the media. It allows us to communicate our messages quickly and clearly, utilising images, graphics and video.

It also allows us to direct traffic back to our website where further information is available.

Communications Strategy

Recognising the importance of communication, I was delighted we were able, for the first time, to appoint a full-time communications manager. We are currently in the process of drawing up a new communications strategy which will cover my first term in office. This will include specific media, digital and stakeholder engagement plans.

Other Social Media

We are not currently active in other areas of social media because our limited resources do not allow us to manage engagement on a wider range of sites. We review this position regularly and may extend our virtual presence in the future.

VC Videos

I am keen to present my work and messages in as many different mediums as possible, in order to reach out to the widest range of people. Throughout the year we have used short, relatable Twitter videos, to explain my messages and reports concisely and clearly. These have been well received on social media.

As we are keen to do more videos we are looking into launching a YouTube channel where all video output will be hosted and available to be viewed.

Victim Charities

I AM continuing to develop an extensive network of connections with the fantastic third sector organisations, who do such valuable work supporting victims of all types of crime.

This includes the domestic abuse sector, the majority of whom work with female victims, but many who also support men. It also includes charities tackling perpetrators of abuse.

Children's charities play a key role both in domestic abuse and in the sexual violence sector, where there are also great organisations supporting men and women, those who support victims of antisocial behaviour, specialist BAME charities of all kinds, smaller charities working with the bereaved including those who support the victims of mentally disordered offenders and of homicide abroad.

I have also worked with organisations supporting elderly victims, disabled victims, and a wide range of those have been personally victimised and have either become charity workers themselves or who are powerful spokespeople for better justice.

I'm constantly inspired and impressed by the amazing work undertaken by these charities. Their commitment and dedication to the victims they support is truly inspirational.

My office is about to appoint a stakeholder manager who will help us to extend our reach even further and on a more systematic basis.

My legitimacy comes from the breadth and depth of my contact with victims and I am proud that so many of them choose to engage with us.

I am constantly inspired and impressed by the amazing work undertaken by these charities. Their commitment and dedication to the victims they are supporting is truly inspirational



Other Jurisdictions

I HAVE welcomed the opportunity to meet with representatives from foreign governments, who are keen to discuss the treatment of victims. I believe we can learn much from the work undertaken in other countries and I hope they can learn from us too.

Over the past year I have had the pleasure of meeting and speaking to: a visiting group of senior Pakistani Criminal Justice Leaders; officials from the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security; the Victoria (Australia) Attorney General & Minister for Workplace Safety, The Hon Jill Hennessy and its Minister for Crime Prevention, The Hon Ben Carroll; a visiting delegation of Chinese judges; and Dr Kim McGregor, Chief Victims' Advisor for New Zealand.

Events

IT IS always an honour to be invited to visit groups across the country and speak at their special events. It hasn't been possible for me to accept every invitation but I have endeavoured to maintain a geographical spread.

Often these events are a great opportunity to celebrate success and achievement, as well as to meet victims and survivors and those who support them, so that I can better understand their lived experiences. These engagements help to shape my priorities, and I am able to feedback them back to Ministers and service providers.

This year, I have been delighted by the number of kind invitations I have received. However, I have been hindered in accepting as many of them as I would wish both by the "purdah" period around the general election and by Covid lockdown.

Nevertheless, I was able to undertake a wide range of visits and events encompassing a wide range of issues affecting victims of crime.

Looking forward, COVID19 presents a challenge for me and my team. I have no wish to be socially distanced from victims and those practitioners who support them. We are thinking carefully about how I will be able to



VC Dame Vera Baird meeting with Pakistani criminal justice leaders about supporting victims - Dec 2019

reach out to as many different organisations as possible in a virtual sense, so that I can continue to seek their views and ideas.

Individual Cases

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

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

I have a part-time Correspondence

Manager. Much of the correspondence is from victims of crime who wish to share their justice journey or who are seeking specific advice or those requesting that I press for a different outcome to their case.

We aim to comply with the Government standard of responding to general victim enquiries within 20 working days and letters from MPs, on behalf of their constituents, within eight working days.

Responses reflect the fact that I am precluded by statute from championing or intervening directly in operational decisions in any individual case. It is important to note this, as some victims who contact us want me to "direct" or campaign for a change in outcome, for example, getting a charging decision or release overturned, or by getting a different outcome to an application for compensation.

Data Protection

Victim enquiries to the OVC are supported by current data protection guidelines and sharing personal data is subject to victims' explicit consent. The website provides details of the privacy notice.

Correspondence volumes and themes

The OVC general correspondence between April 2019 and March 2020 peaked, as to be expected, at the same time as our reviews were published, as well as high profile media appearances relating to the Domestic Abuse Bill.

The overall total of victim correspondence to the OVC from: April 2019 to March 2020 was 596, which is an average of 50 a month, up from 42 a month in the previous year.

Key	Anti-social behaviour general	CICA general	Domestic Abuse	Child Sexual Abuse	Fraud	Sexual Assault	Stalking	Murder	Other	Murdered Abroad Published Review	ASB Published Review
No.	108	75	52	39	39	38	25	15	84	17	65

Victims' Law needs to be Bold and Ambitious

"We'll bring this (Domestic Abuse) Bill back as soon as possible... We must go further than legislation though which is why I want to double our funding for refuges and victim support services, pilot new domestic abuse courts to speed up cases and pass a Victims' Law so that every victim in this country can get the support they are entitled to. We know that the court process can deepen the emotional trauma of those who have suffered abuse so we'll improve the system and make it easier for victims to come forward"

The Prime Minister, Grazia, December 2019

THE GOVERNMENT, elected in December 2019, set out its vision for changing the victim landscape. As well as its commitment to continue with the Domestic Abuse Bill, its manifesto also included a commitment to: "... pass and implement a Victims' Law that guarantees victims' rights and the level of support they can expect."

I believe such a law is long overdue. If we use this opportunity wisely, it can transform victims' experience of the criminal justice system, by making them active participants in the process.

Being a victim of crime is a disempowering experience. All too often, it undermines a person's sense of wellbeing and their trust in others. We need a criminal justice system that delivers justice, but in doing so, restores the victim's faith in humanity by acknowledging they have been wronged, treating them with respect and where possible, giving them options for how they might engage with the process.

To achieve this, we need a landmark piece of legislation that is both bold and ambitious.

I welcome the plans to introduce 12 core rights from which entitlements will flow.

Being a victim of crime is a disempowering experience. All too often, it undermines a person's sense of wellbeing and their trust in others

Statutory rights are the essential precursor to changing the status of victims within our criminal justice system. They place a legal duty on criminal agencies to comply with them, whereas at present, compliance with the Victims' Code of Practice entitlements seems to be at their discretion.

Victims "rights" must be unconditional and not subject to the convenience of the agency concerned. And a Victims' Law must place a statutory duty on those agencies to make victims aware of their entitlements at each step of their journey.

This is a good first step, but the Bill will need to go a lot further if it is to deliver the transformative change required.

In December I wrote to the Lord Chancellor setting out my proposals for inclusion into a Victims' Law.

My proposals aim to give all victims a voice and make sure that those who are vulnerable, and possibly traumatised by the crimes committed against them, receive the support they deserve.

For example, I want all vulnerable victims of serious violent and sexual offences to have access to their own independent advisor, who



Children under a set age who become victims of crime should always be offered access to a registered intermediary to help them to give the best evidence they can

can offer the guidance and emotional support needed to move through the justice process and, who can help them start to re-build their lives.

These victim advisors need statutory recognition so that all parts of the justice system, including the courts, recognise their role.

I also want victims of rape and serious sexual offences to have access to free legal advice and representation when confronted with demands for extensive disclosure of personal material or an application to question them on their previous sexual history.

Children under a set age who become victims of crime should always be offered access to a registered intermediary to help them to give the best evidence they can.

The victims' voice needs to be heard in all parts of the justice system. This Law is also an opportunity to give victims of mentally disordered offenders the right to make victim personal statements and attend mental health review tribunals. It should also give victims of persistent anti-social behaviour the right to attend Community Trigger resolution meetings to explain the impact of the behaviour.

And victims should be able to refer their complaints directly to the Parliamentary

Ombudsman (PSHO) if they are dissatisfied with the outcomes of the complaints process. At present, they can only take a complaint to the PSHO through their local MP. In practice, the PSHO only receives a handful of complaints each year, with the clear implication that this route is little known about and thus inaccessible.

We also need to make sure the Victims' Commissioner can provide a powerful voice for victims and challenge those criminal justice agencies who maybe letting them down.

It is no coincidence the statutory provisions creating the role of the Victims' Commissioner are in the same Act of Parliament as those creating the Victims' Code. Whilst the Code gives victims entitlements, the Commissioner is there to give them a voice and to police the operation of the Code on their behalf. In short, the Code and the Commissioner are the two sides of the same coin, intended to make sure all victims are treated with decency and respect. If the government wishes to deliver transformational change to the victims' experience of the justice system, it needs to make sure they are active participants and not powerless bystanders. The Victims' Law is the opportunity to achieve this, but it can only do so if it is both bold and ambitious.

I am calling on the government to use the Victims' Law to extend the statutory powers of the Victims' Commissioner.

These should include:

- Agencies having a statutory duty to cooperate with the Commissioner, including the provision of data when requested;
- A statutory requirement for agencies to consider and respond to recommendations made in Victims' Commissioner reports, within a reasonable timeframe;
- A requirement the Commissioner submits an annual report on compliance with the Victims' Code, which would go beyond simply reporting local compliance data, and would monitor the quality of interaction with victims and victim satisfaction.

Pre-charge Bail

In February I responded to the Home Secretary's review of pre-charge bail. I saw it as a timely opportunity to strike the right balance between fair treatment of suspects whilst safeguarding victims and giving them the confidence to report crime

IN THE past five years the proportion of police investigations closed as a result of victims withdrawing their support has nearly trebled and the percentage of cases resulting in a charge has halved. The reasons behind falling public confidence are many and complex, but there can be little doubt changes to police bail in 2017 have played a part.

Since the current police bail arrangements came into force, the number of suspects placed on police bail has fallen sharply; suspects of sexual and violent offences, including domestic abuse are often being released without restrictions on where they can go or who they can contact. This has made victims all the more reluctant to report crime as they fear they will be left unprotected.

Indeed, it seemed as if, at least for a time, police were behaving as though "bail has been abolished" save in the most exceptional circumstances. Of course, I am aware this is not the case, but it raises real issues about how the 2017 provisions were explained to police officers and the wider public.

I called for the presumption against pre-charge bail to be abolished. This, more than anything, has resulted in police officers applying a much more rigorous threshold than the one intended.

Instead, I want to send a clear message to victims of the worst sexual and violent crimes that it is safe for them to come forward and report. Therefore, I called for a presumption in favour of bail in all cases where the suspect is being accused of serious sexual or violent offences, and in all allegations of domestic abuse.

This would provide greater clarity to police officers which, after the confusion of the past three years, is important. It also offers enhanced protection to victims who fear physical or emotional detriment should the suspect contact them.

It appears police officers used bail return

dates as a case management tool, not necessarily advancing an investigation until pressed to do so by the imminence of a return date. Today, in cases where police bail is not used, there is no return date to operate as a time check on the progress of a case, resulting in suspects being kept longer under suspicion. I suspect there is little practical or emotional difference for the individual concerned between being kept on bail for a long time and being kept under investigation for an equally long time or longer.

The steady increase in the length of police investigations is particularly noticeable in sexual assault cases. I believe the delays in conducting investigations has contributed to the increase in victims withdrawing their support for prosecutions.

Leaving victims of sexual assault in limbo for long periods of time can potentially re-traumatise them, making them feel abandoned by a system that apparently does not care about them.

I also called for a review of the effectiveness of bail conditions. At present, they do not afford the protection victims deserve and this

fundamental weakness needs to be addressed.

Many victims feel they are potentially exposing themselves to further physical or psychological harm by reporting a crime.

When victims are contacted by the suspect or see them within an exclusion zone, despite bail conditions forbidding this, they are dismayed when there is no police response. It undermines their sense of safety. It also has a wider detrimental impact in public confidence in the justice system's capacity to protect people.

The time has come to make breaching a no-contact bail condition or exclusion zone a criminal offence, that can result in a remand in custody, a custodial sentence and a criminal record. This would send a clear message to victims that the criminal justice system is there to protect them. It will make clear to suspects that they cannot intimidate and undermine the justice process with impunity.

Pre-charge bail should not be regarded as an administrative process, but as a means of protecting victims and giving the public confidence in our justice system. The government must act.

The time has come to make breaching a no-contact bail condition or exclusion zone a criminal offence, that can result in a remand in custody, a custodial sentence and a criminal record



Giving Victims a Voice at Inquests

Last year, I had the pleasure of meeting the Right Reverend James Jones KBE (Bishop James) and his colleague Ken Sutton, who worked together on the report "Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power"

LAST YEAR, I had the pleasure of meeting the Right Reverend James Jones KBE (Bishop James) and his colleague Ken Sutton, who worked together on the report "Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power"

The report highlights the experiences of the families and how they were treated by the authorities. Their testimonies are deeply moving and we must make sure we learn the lessons from that terrible and tragic incident.

For me, there are two key points. The first is that all public bodies should have a duty of candour. Helping the victims and the bereaved to understand exactly what happened must take precedence over any 'reputational damage' suffered by the organisation concerned. I recognise this will require a cultural change within many public bodies. If necessary, it might also take legislation to make it a legally enforceable requirement.

The second is that when

someone dies in the custody or care of public authorities, or where a public authority is involved in the circumstances of the death, the bereaved families must have access to legal support and representation at the ensuing inquest.

Although inquests are inquisitorial and not adversarial proceedings, nonetheless public bodies instruct expensive legal teams at public expense to defend themselves and their reputations.

Families, on the other hand, who have lost loved ones and whose lives have been hugely changed by bereavement do not

have access to legal aid in many cases, and have no other means of representation unless they can afford to pay privately.

As taxpayers, of course, these families are helping to fund the public bodies who may be responsible for their loved ones' death, yet they are being denied public funding for representation for themselves.

I am in discussions with Bishop James and the charity, INQUEST. We intend to work hard to put an end to this anomaly.

Bereaved families involved in an inquest in which one or more public bodies are legally

represented should be given equal representation from public funds.

Bishop James wisely advises that public authorities should also be told to moderate their spending on legal advice and representation which, particularly in cases where a number of authorities are involved, can create a massive cost to the public purse.

It is iniquitous that of all interested parties to an inquest, the family of those who have died can be reduced to mere bystanders, beholden to the coroner to ask the questions they wish asked on their behalf, should

"...the public body has a powerful voice in the arena whereas the bereaved, those who have lost loved ones and whose lives have been changed forever, can feel like mere bystanders, sitting in the public gallery, just watching what is happening."



VC Dame Vera Baird with Rt Rev James Jones and Ken Sutton

they agree to do so. That is not justice.

In its Final Report of the Review of Legal Aid for Inquests, in February 2019, the Ministry of Justice said:

"...we have decided that we will not be introducing non-means tested legal aid for inquests where the state has represented. However, going forward we will be looking into further options for the funding of legal support at inquests where the state has state funded representation. To do this we will work closely with other Government Departments."

We anticipate the Government will formally respond to Bishop James' report later this year. Therefore, now is the right time to make the case for change and to help inform the Ministry of Justice's exploration of options for funding legal support for bereaved families. I will report back through social media and my website.

We intend to explore all options for funding this legal representation, including possibly a mechanism for requiring a levy on public authorities in this position to fund legal representation for bereaved families at the same level and quality as their own.

Sadly, whatever changes are made, it will be too late for the bereaved families of Hillsborough. But if we can persuade the Government of the need to create a level playing field for victims, at least we will be certain in the knowledge we are helping future victims to achieve justice for their loved ones.

Double Jeopardy

Sexual abuse of children can have a devastating affect for the rest of their lives. For many, getting justice for these terrible crimes, however delayed it might be, is so important

LAST JUNE, I wrote to the Lord Chancellor, requesting the Government undertook a review the statutory provisions for a re-trial following acquittal.

My enquiry was prompted by the case of six complainants who claim to have been sexually abused by their football coach when they were children, although he was subsequently acquitted.

The legal representative for five of the six complainants was of the view that there is new and compelling evidence in their cases. However, the statutory provisions for a re-trial following acquittal, set out in the Criminal Justice Act 2003, restrict scope for a re-trial to "serious cases" and these are listed in a schedule of the Act.

The sexual offences listed in the schedule all carry a maximum sentence of life. Sexual assaults as alleged by the six complainants are not included.

I was a member of the Bill Committee during the passage of the 2003 Act and supported the ground-breaking provisions allowing certain cases to be re-tried. I recognise the need for care when looking to add offences to the qualifying list. It is right the list is limited to the most serious of offences, coupled with

other safeguards, such as the need for new and compelling evidence and a public interest test.

However, 16 years later, we now have a much better understanding of the terrible and long-term consequences of sexual offences committed against children. Our approach towards complaints and complainants is very different, as is the way in which we conduct investigations and gather evidence.

I was careful not to suggest a significant increase in the number of offences, but simply those focussed on the

typical activity of a child abuser.

Both the Lord Chancellor and his predecessor, understandably, expressed the need for caution. After careful consideration, I was advised that my proposals were rejected as the maximum sentences for the offences I was suggesting were significantly below those currently listed in the schedule.

I respect the decision and understand the concern that such a move might set a precedent to widen the scheme further. Nevertheless, I was disappointed. I am only too aware the six complainants in the case that prompted me to call for the review have been unable to obtain justice and closure and I suspect there are others in a similar situation.



We now have a much better understanding of the terrible and long-term consequences of sexual offences committed against children

Office of the Victims' Commissioner

Budget Report

	Budget	Out turn
19/20 total		
Pay	512	439
Non-Pay	30	32
Non-Pay Breakdown		
IT and Telecommunications	0	1
Travel and Other	12	3
Printing, Postage and Office Expenditure	6	3
Other Expenditure	12	25
Gross	542	471

	Budget	Out turn
17/18 total	496	475
Pay	467	466
Non-Pay	29	9
Non-Pay Breakdown		
IT and Telecommunications	7	3
Travel and Other	14	6
Printing, Postage and Other	2	0
Other Expenditure	6	0



Looking Ahead

Victims' Commissioner's plans for 2020/21

2020/21 promises to be an exciting and challenging year and my team and I have a packed agenda



Our first priority is to make the adjustment to living in a world of social distancing. We need to make sure we continue to hear directly from victims and the organisations supporting them. Inevitably, this will mean virtual contact for the time being and we are developing creative ways of making this happen.

Our work plans include:

- Commission and publish a literature review on special measures available to vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses to help them to give best evidence.

- Report on the provision and use of remote evidence centres to help victims and witnesses to give their evidence.

- Undertake a deep-dive review on the availability, use and impact of special measures for vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses.

- Work with the Mental Health Review Tribunal, MoJ and other key stakeholders to deliver equal treatment of victims within the mental health review process.

- Working with other key stakeholders to press for legal representation at inquests for victims in large-scale incidents

- Liaise with HMPPS to monitor the outcomes of pilots in co-working of Victim Contact Scheme (VCS) staff and victim support services and to improve the information made available to victims in the VCS.

- Work with all key stakeholders to develop proportionate and reasonable processes for seeking digital download of victim personal data in response to reporting sexual offences

- Carry out a survey/request for information with rape survivors on their experiences within the CJS to help inform work on increasing rape prosecutions and convictions.



- Work with the government and CICA to bring about improvements in the delivery of criminal injuries compensation and to seek changes to the regulations which will deliver a fairer service.

- Work with the police and other stakeholders to deliver improvements to the delivery of offers for victims to make a Victim Personal Statement.

- Work with the Parole Board to monitor the recent changes to the parole process and to consider the extent to which they have delivered improvements for victims.

- Carry out a short review of the training, co-ordination and operation of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors across England and Wales, to inform the future development of this important service

- Feed into cross-government work on supporting victims throughout lockdown and the recovery period and to ensure the victims' voice is being heard.

- Feed into the recovery of the courts after lockdown and work to clear the backlog of cases, to ensure the victims' voice is being heard.

- Identify the needs of those victims affected by "hidden harms" during lockdown and as a result of social distancing and work with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and others to highlight them

- Carry out a deep dive review of the experience of fraud as a crime and the pathways of support for victims

- Analyse and present data from CSEW (which has been unpublished until now) on victims' experience of support services

- Respond to the government consultations on the new Victims' Code of Practice and Victims Law, ensuring the victims' voice is being heard and work with key stakeholders to submit feasible proposals for the Bill.

- Seek opportunities to feed into the government's comprehensive spending review to make the case for additional funding for victim support services.

- Meet with Home Office and MHCLG Ministers to discuss proposals to enhance support for victims of Anti-Social Behaviour.

- Meet with policymakers, LGA and third sector groups to make the case for change. Press for changes to the community trigger which will give victims a voice at the table and the means to effect change.

- Engage with victims of specific crimes and record their experiences and assessment of support provided to them, ensuring all victims consulted are diverse and broadly representative.

Members of the Victims' Commissioner's Advisory Group 2019/20



Jon Collins Jon is the Chief Executive of the Magistrates' Association, an independent charity and the membership body for magistrates.

With 14,000 members

across England and Wales, the Magistrates' Association is a unique source of insight and information about the role, the courts and the broader justice system. Jon joined the Magistrates' Association in August 2017, having previously been chief executive of the Restorative Justice Council. Prior to that, Jon was deputy director of the Police Foundation, an independent policing think tank, and he has previously worked at the Criminal Justice Alliance, at the Fawcett Society and at Nacro, the crime reduction charity. Jon is also a member of the London Victims' Board and a governor of a London primary school.



Duncan Craig OBE

Duncan is the founder and Chief Executive of Survivors Manchester, a ground-breaking VCSE organisation providing therapeutic

and advocacy support to more than 900 male survivors of sexual violation across Greater Manchester each year. As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and later, sexual exploitation, Duncan has both personal and professional experience and knowledge of male sexual violation, leading him to work with Government, NHS England, the Crown Prosecution Service, various police forces and is proud to have been involved in the

development of the UK Victim Strategy and Cross-Government position statement on male victims of VAWG crimes. Duncan is co-founder of The Male Survivors Partnership, Men and Boys Coalition and a trustee of Sick Festival an arts organisation and bi-annual arts festival.



Kim Doyle Kim is the Joint Chief Executive of LimeCulture Community Interest Company, a national sexual violence organisation based in the UK. For the last 30

years she has worked extensively in the field of sexual violence and child protection. Kim qualified as a barrister and joined the Crown Prosecution Service in the UK in 1986. Since 1995 Kim has worked closely with the police, health, lawyers and other third sector agencies working to improve the standard of rape and child abuse investigations and prosecutions across the UK and internationally.



Mark Fenhalls QC Mark regularly appears in the most serious and complex of criminal cases, ranging from large-scale fraud and corruption cases to murder. He is ranked

as a leader of the Bar in both Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners. Mark took silk in 2014. He was Chair of the Criminal Bar Association (2015-16) and Chair of the Fraud Lawyers Association (2017-19). He is the current Leader of the South Eastern Circuit, one of the six Circuits of England and Wales.

Since 2014, Mark has been deeply involved in negotiations with the United Kingdom Government (and the senior Judiciary) over the national court reform programme and the provision of legal aid.



Professor Aisha K. Gill, Ph.D. CBE Aisha is Professor of Criminology at the University of Roehampton. Her main areas of interest and research focus on health

and criminal justice responses to violence against black, minority ethnic and refugee women in the UK, Iraqi Kurdistan, India, and Pakistan. She has been involved in addressing the problem of violence against women and girls, 'honour' crimes and forced marriage at the grassroots and activist level for the past 20 years. Her current research and activism is focused on crimes related to the murder of women/femicide, 'honour' killings, coercion and forced marriage, child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in South Asian/Kurdish and Somali communities, female genital mutilation, sex selective abortions, intersectionality and women who kill. She is editorial member of the Feminist Review Collective and the British Journal of Criminology. In 2019, she was appointed Co-Chair of the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW).



Sarah Green Sarah is Director of the End Violence Against Women Coalition, a UK-wide coalition of around 80 women's organisations

working to end all forms of violence against women and girls. The EVAW Coalition lobbies national and local government to improve its policy and practice in these areas and to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. It successfully lobbied for the Home Office to draw up and implement its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and significantly drove the campaign for compulsory Relationships and Sex Education (to help prevent abuse in the long term). The Coalition is currently campaigning to raise awareness of the multiple risks to women and girls throughout the Covid19 crisis, and for systemic improvements in the criminal justice system's response to rape.



Diana Fawcett Diana is Chief Executive of Victim Support. Before joining Victim Support, Diana was Director of Operations at Shelter for seven years where

she was responsible for all the charity's advice and support services. She has also worked for four London boroughs and three housing associations. She has been Chair of Trustees of a charity in south London providing advice and support to refugees and migrants since 2013. She is a non-judicial member of the Sentencing Council with specific responsibility for promoting the welfare of victims of crime.



Lucy Hadley

Lucy is Campaigns and Policy Manager at Women's Aid, the national charity working to end domestic abuse

against women and children. She leads the charity's policy development and national campaigns - including the SOS: Save Refugees Save Lives campaign that has secured Government commitment to a long-term funding solution for refuge services, the Child First: Safe Child Contact Saves Lives campaign for safety in the family courts, and work to influence the landmark new Domestic Abuse Bill. Lucy

leads the charity's engagement within government and parliament and regularly represents Women's Aid in broadcast media.



Julian Hendy Julian is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and investigative journalist. He is the founder of the Hundred Families charity, which

supports and advocates for families across the UK bereaved by homicides by people with mental illness. Hundred Families works with the NHS, Ministry of Justice, and others to prevent further tragedies, and provides evidence and training to promote lasting improvements in services.



Lucy Jaffé Lucy has been Director of Why me? since 2017, the charity established by a victim of crime to increase access to restorative justice for all victims

of crime. Since her involvement Why me? has expanded its focus from campaigning and communications to include service delivery. She has supported the Victims' Commissioner as a member of the advisory group since August 2017. She is Vice-Chair of the Criminal Justice Alliance, contributing experience and insights into victim policy. Lucy previously ran her own marketing and communications consultancy. She was a founder and National Coordinator of Reunite, the National Council for Abducted Children, and was a trustee of the Women's Resource Centre for six years.



Alison Levitt QC

Alison is a barrister. In 2009, following a long period in self-employed practice in chambers, she became Principal Legal Advisor to the Director

of Public Prosecutions, where she dealt with some of the most high-profile and important cases of the time, including drafting her well-received report into the lessons to be learned from the Jimmy Savile case. In

2014 she became a partner at the law firm Mishcon de Reya, where she established and led their white-collar crime group. In 2018 she returned to self-employed practice at 2 Hare Court where she specialises in criminal law and associated regulatory work, both prosecuting and defending serious crime. She is a Recorder (part-time judge) sitting in both civil and criminal law, and holds Old Bailey and Serious Sexual Offences tickets. She is a Master of the Bench of the Inner Temple where she has chaired their Education and Training Committee for the past four years. She is a Trustee of the Kalisher Trust and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).



Sophie Linden Sophie is London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. She was a special advisor to David Blunkett in the Department for Education and Employment from

1997-2001 before moving to the Home Office to work with the police in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour as a special advisor until 2004. While at the Home Office she worked with the Home Secretary and ministers on policy development and strategy including: police reform, crime and antisocial behavior reduction; neighbourhood policing; and reducing the harm caused by illegal drugs. From 2006 Sophie was a councillor at Hackney Council until her appointment by the Mayor of London, as well as Deputy Mayor of Hackney Council from 2011. Sophie also led the council to achieving excellent on the Equality Framework for Local Government. Sophie is a former member of the Local Government Association (LGA) Safer Communities Board, a peer reviewer for the LGA on community safety and a member of the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary advisory board on PEEL inspections.



David Lloyd David has been Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire since 2012. His focus has been on delivering effective and efficient

policing, supporting victims, promoting partnership working and delivering on the public's priorities. David is recognised for his pioneering work in developing and improving support services for victims of crime. The Beacon Victim Service, which he launched, has received national recognition for its innovation in areas such as the development of the Vulnerable Victim Case Manager role. David has been a strong campaigner for reform of the wider criminal justice system. He now chairs the Hertfordshire Criminal Justice Board and is using that position to encourage collaboration and develop a change programme. At national level, David is a leading member of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and has served as a board member and chairman. He is a member of the National Criminal Justice Board and a member, and past chair, of the Police Reform and Transformation Board.



Cris McCurley Cris is head of International Family Law and a Partner of Ben Hoare Bell LLP (Solicitors). She has specialist knowledge of domestic violence, honour-based violence, forced marriage, abduction, trafficking and 21st century slavery. She has regularly contributed to Government consultations and inquiries. She is a higher rights advocate. Cris has developed partnership working with the BAME women's domestic violence network and the North East Women's Network. She has worked with these networks on CEDAW, BME women's rights and access to justice, authoring the protocol, 26 weeks: a fair hearing for BME families, and the HMCTS/ MOJ publication, Forced marriage Courts, a users' guide. She is Law Society delegate/ Shadow report writer to the UN/CEDAW enquiry, giving evidence about access to justice and legal aid for victims of violence. She is an SRA accredited trainer in child abduction and all forms of VAWG and a member of a number of specialist advisory groups and professional panels including the Children Panel and International Child Abduction Panel. She is a member of the

ROW Advisory Board, the Law Society Access to Justice Committee and the National Resolution, and a member of the joint working party with TLS and the MOJ working group on legal aid and victims of DA.



Ruth Parker Ruth was appointed as Chief Executive of Victims First Northumbria (VFN) in June 2016. Prior to her appointment, she spent more than 20 years working for Her Majesty's Court Service where she had a passion for the care offered to victims of crime and those giving evidence in court. This was recognised when she opened the first dedicated victim and witness suite in the country. Ruth is proud to have led the VFN team in being awarded the Restorative Services Quality Mark and Runners Up in the category Outstanding Organisation of the Year.



Dr Jacki Tapley Jacki is a Principal Lecturer in Victimology and Criminology at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies (ICJS), University of Portsmouth. Prior to joining ICJS in 2000, Jacki worked as a Probation Officer in Dorset. Her teaching and research focuses on victims of crime, victimology, and professional culture and practices in criminal justice. Jacki is the course leader for the MSc Victimology and a postgraduate short course 'Working with Victims of Crime: Theory, Policy and Professional Practice'. Her specialist areas include victims of sexual violence, domestic abuse and fraud, the role of victims in the criminal justice system, victims' experiences, and the implementation of policies and legislation. She works closely with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, and is the Independent Facilitator for the Wessex CPS VAWG Scrutiny Panel and a member of the Hampshire Victim and Witness Working Group. She is a trustee for Aurora New Dawn, a domestic abuse, sexual violence and stalking charity. She has recently undertaken

an evaluation of the Domestic Abuse Matters training with Hampshire Constabulary and is currently collaborating on a three-year project with the Research Centre in Victimology at Algonquin College, Canada, focusing on Victim Service Providers and Vicarious Resilience.



Pragna Patel Pragna is a founding member of Southall Black Sisters' (SBS) advocacy and campaigning centre for black and minority women. She worked as a co-ordinator and senior case worker for SBS from 1982 to 1993 when she left to train and practice as a solicitor. In 2009 she returned to SBS as its Director. She has 38 years of experience working in the field of gender-related violence and associated issues and has been centrally involved in some of SBS' most important cases and campaigns. SBS has brought about significant changes in law and policy in areas such as domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence, immigration and religious fundamentalism enabling countless BME women to access protection and justice. She has also written extensively on race, gender and religion.



HH Peter Rook QC Peter is the current Vice Chair of the Parole Board, having been appointed in February 2020. Called to the Bar in 1973, he specialised in criminal law and became a QC in 1991 and a Bencher of Gray's Inn in 2000. He was Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association 2002-3 and head of chambers 18 Red Lion Court 2002-5 when he was appointed a Senior Circuit Judge. He sat as a judge at the Old Bailey for 12 years and retired in 2017. He has also sat in the Court of Appeal for a few weeks each year from 2008 until 2016. He's co-author of a legal textbook 'Rook and Ward' on 'Sexual Offences: Law and Practice'. 2006-10 he ran a course for the Judicial Studies Board to train judges authorised to try sexual offences. He lectures on sexual offences to judges, barristers,

solicitors, police and medical practitioners and has lectured on "vulnerable witnesses" in Trier, Edinburgh, Belfast, Jersey and at the International Criminal Court. In 2018-19 he chaired a working party on behalf of the legal charity Justice looking at alleviating the problems caused by the huge rise in the number of sexual offences prosecutions.



Gabrielle Shaw Gabrielle has led the National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) as Chief Executive since April 2015. NAPAC is the UK's leading national charity offering support to adult survivors of all types of childhood abuse, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Gabrielle is a senior INGO executive with over 13 years' leadership, policy and strategic decision-making achievements across charity, government and statutory sectors, including heading up the external affairs work of the global charity World Animal Protection to strengthen its campaigning on issues such as disease control and negotiations on SDGs; and leading on international relations and external affairs for CEOP.



Dr Olivia Smith Olivia is a Lecturer in Criminology and Social Policy at Loughborough University and sits on the co-ordination group for the British Society of Criminology Victims' Network. She has more than 10 years' experience in researching gender-based violence, with her recent book Rape Trials in England and Wales representing the first exploratory observation study of court responses to sexual violence since Sue Lees' foundational work in the 1990s. Olivia's other research includes a number of evaluations of support interventions, interviews with support workers about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, focus groups with disabled people about reporting hate crime, and public attitude surveys on justice policies.



Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM Dame Sara is the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner responsible for encouraging good practice in the prevention and detection of modern slavery and the identification of victims. She was the first Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council (from 2015 to 2019). Dame Sara joined the Metropolitan Police Service in 1986 and in 2000 became Assistant Chief Constable for Thames Valley Police. Following four years as Deputy Chief Constable she was appointed Chief Constable in 2007. During this time she was the national lead on intelligence, Vice-Chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers' (ACPO) Terrorism and Allied Matters, Director of the Police National Assessment Centre and ACPO Vice-President. Dame Sara is Chair of the National Leadership Centre's Advisory Board, a member of the Royal College of Defence Studies, the Advisory Board for the Oxford University Centre for Criminology and a trustee and board member of the Police Foundation. Dame Sara was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in 2006 and made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2011. She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2019. She has also been recognised with a Career Achievement Award from the Police Training Authority Trustees, and the Sir Robert Peel Medal for Outstanding Leadership in Evidence-Based Policing.



Claire Waxman In June 2017 Claire Waxman was appointed by Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, to be London's first Independent Victims' Commissioner. Claire brings a wealth of personal insight and expertise to the role having been the victim of a sustained stalking campaign, during which time she founded a campaign group which successfully fought for improved legislation and support for victims and survivors. As a prominent champion for victims' rights Claire led a successful

campaign for change in stalking laws and spearheaded the Victims' Law campaign. In her current role, Claire aims to transform the Criminal Justice Service to ensure victims and survivors easier access to a timely, effective, transparent and trauma-informed justice journey. From whether they choose to report the offence all the way through to post sentence, Claire's mantra is that all victims and survivors of crime, no matter their status or experience, should be able to engage with services to help them cope and recover. Claire works alongside victims and survivors, amplifying their voices and promoting their interests with criminal justice partners, to ensure that they are heard and that lessons are learnt to inform and shape practices, policies and service provision.



Sir Thomas Winsor In October 2012, Sir Thomas was appointed as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary. He is the first holder of that office to come from a non-policing background. In July 2017, he was appointed as the first ever Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services. Sir Thomas graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 1979 and is a lawyer, admitted to practice in both Scotland and England and Wales. In private practice, he specialised in complex commercial projects, finance, public law and the design and operation of economic and safety regulatory systems for essential public services such as energy, water and transport. Between 1999 and 2004, Sir Thomas was the Rail Regulator and International Rail Regulator, the economic regulatory authority for the railways in Great Britain. Between October 2010 and March 2012, Sir Thomas carried out a review of the pay and conditions of service of police officers and police staff in England and Wales. The review was carried out at the request of the Home Secretary and was the most comprehensive for more than 30 years. Legislation to implement a significant proportion of Sir Thomas's recommendations was passed in March 2014.

2019/20 Annual Report

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner
for England and Wales

