

Plans to put victims back at the centre of justice system published

- new draft legislation to cement voice of victims and improve support
- prosecutors obliged to meet victims before certain trials
- offenders forced to pay more for cost of crimes raising extra £20 million for support services

Draft legislation published today by the Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab will pave the way for the first ever Victims' Law – putting their needs and voices firmly at the heart of the justice system.

It will see victims' views sought at regular points during their case, with greater accountability placed on agencies such as the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and police for the service they provide to them. Victims will also be given clearer routes of redress if they do not receive the support they are entitled to.

For the first time, a duty will be placed on prosecutors to meet victims in certain cases before trial in order to hear their views. Victims will also be given the right to attend Parole Board hearings in full and to submit questions during the process – such as querying an offender's suitability for release. The Parole Board will be required to consider victims' views and concerns before making a decision in a case.

Criminals will also be forced to pay more towards crucial victim services such as rape support centres with a 20 percent increase to the Victim Surcharge that will raise an extra £20 million by 2025. This penalty fee is imposed on offenders when they are sentenced for crimes, to ensure they take responsibility for their actions and pay back to society by contributing to services which support victims.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice Dominic Raab said:

No victim should feel lost in a faceless system. We're amplifying victims' voices, boosting their rights at every stage and making criminals pay more to help victims recover.

We're doing this because it is morally the right thing to do to strengthen the care for victims, but also because it is operationally critical to drive up convictions – and keep our streets safe.

The reforms come as the government continues to drive improvements for victims, in particular those of rape and sexual offences, for which convictions rose 27 percent last year compared to before the pandemic.

There are now 26 courts where rape victims can following a successful application to the court pre-record their cross examination, sparing them the stress of giving evidence under the full glare of a courtroom, with a national rollout due to complete by September.

The draft Bill will outline how the Victims' Code will be set out in law and introduce additional scrutiny on the support victims receive from the police, Crown Prosecution Service, prisons and the Probation Service. Ministers will be able to order the criminal justice inspectorates to undertake regular joint inspections on victims' issues and produce action plans to drive improvements.

Diana Fawcett, Chief Executive of the independent charity Victim Support said:

It is vital that victims have stronger rights, better support and real influence in the justice system.

The Victims' Bill announced today presents a true opportunity to improve victims' experiences and we look forward to continuing our work with the government to ensure that the final bill leads to meaningful change for victims.

It will also introduce a new duty on Police and Crime Commissioners, local authorities and health organisations to work together when commissioning services for victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence and other serious violence so that services are more effective.

Victims will also find it easier to make complaints about the service they have received, by removing the requirement for them to go through their local MP before speaking to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

The legislation will also establish a statutory definition for Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA) and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) to ensure that these vital roles are more consistent. This will ensure victims know that they will receive a high standard of support from them.

In March the government announced that victim support services would receive £440 million in grant funding over the next 3 years, helping to fund more than 1,000 Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advisors and a 24/7 rape crisis helpline.

Notes to editors

- If you have any queries, please contact myself on 07469 579 041 or call our 24-hour newsdesk on 0203 334 3536.
- The [Draft Victims Bill](#) will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by the Commons Justice Select Committee, with the Committee's feedback being considered before the Bill's formal introduction
- In March 2020, the government [announced an increase in the Victim](#)

[Surcharge](#) of five percent. This was part of a commitment made during the 2019 election to increase the surcharge by 25 percent.

- A new cross-government Victims Funding Strategy which will tackle barriers to sustainable funding and drive consistent commissioning, so that victims get the right support at the right time.