

Press release: Justice Secretary unveils Victims Strategy

- Government acts to boost support for victims across the justice system
- Victim entitlements enshrined in law and Victims' Code to be strengthened
- More powers for the Victims' Commissioner to hold government to account
- Review of Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme; unfair "same roof" rule abolished
- Greater support for victims of disasters through Independent Public Advocate

Support for victims of crime will be overhauled following the launch of the first ever cross-government Victims Strategy.

The strategy will be published here when it has been laid in Parliament. Please join the conversation on social channels using [#SpeakOut](#).

The Justice Secretary today set out how the government will ensure that support for victims – including those of violent offences such as terrorism and child sexual abuse – is aligned to the changing nature of crime, and boost services at every stage of the justice system.

The strategy makes clear the specific support victims can expect – beginning immediately after a crime, and ending long after any court proceedings. The government currently spends roughly £200 million per year on support services for victims of crime.

Today's launch also serves as the next step in the delivery of Manifesto commitments to establish an Independent Public Advocate for victims of public disasters and enshrine victims' entitlements in law.

Commenting on the importance of this work to the government, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

Nothing can take away the distress and trauma of being a victim of crime, but ensuring people get the support they need as they rebuild their lives is vital.

How we support victims is fundamental to a caring society, and in recognition of that we are taking steps to enshrine their rights in law for the very first time.

The duty of a government is to keep people safe, but it is not enough to simply bring offenders to court. Victims need to know they are protected and listened to, and we will continue to work with charities and support groups to improve their experience.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

Many of us will be lucky enough to not have to encounter the justice system as a victim of crime – but those who do must not also become a victim of the process.

We will enshrine victims' entitlements in law by beginning a consultation early next year, and otherwise seek to boost the Victims' Code.

This strategy addresses the changing nature of crime, and sets out the support victims should receive at every stage of their journey through the justice system – from providing statements to police, appearing in court or in front of the Parole Board, and every step in between.

Key aspects of the strategy

The strategy sets out how the government will:

- Consult on a revised [Victims' Code](#) to ensure entitlements better reflect the needs of victims and the changing nature of crime. For example, we will reduce the points of contact for victims through reviewing the roles and responsibilities of agencies that support victims, and review support for victims of mentally disordered offenders.
- Consult on a Victims' Law to underpin the code, which will include strengthening the Victims' Commissioner's powers. We will launch a consultation in early 2019, with the aim of an amended code being in place in 2019.
- Consult on the establishment of an Independent Public Advocate (IPA) to help bereaved families following a disaster. They will help guide families throughout an investigative process, ensuring their voices are heard at inquests, and that they are directed to appropriate support services.
- [Review the entire Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme \(CICS\)](#) so it reflects the changing nature of crime – particularly around applications relating to child sexual abuse and terrorism. We will consider reform of the eligibility criteria, and will abolish the unfair and arbitrary pre-1979 'same roof rule.' We will launch a consultation by early 2019 on a review of the scheme.
- Improve communication and support for victims during the parole process. We will simplify the [Victim Contact Scheme](#) and improve the quality of communication; allow [Victim Personal Statements](#) at parole hearings; and roll out revised training for Victim Liaison Officers.

Significant progress has been made to address the causes of crime, including the work announced in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), and the introduction of the [Modern Slavery Act](#).

But ministers are clear that more must be done for victims. For example,

fewer than 20% of victims were aware of the Victims' Code, which sets out the minimum entitlements and services they should receive by law. Only 15% said they were given the opportunity by the police to make a Victim Personal Statement.

Baroness Newlove, Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales said:

This is a timely focus on the needs and rights of victims, and is a major step forward towards ensuring they receive the care, support and justice they deserve.

Victims consistently tell me that they feel their status in the criminal justice system is not comparable with that of the offender. As Victims' Commissioner I have long been calling for a Victims Law to ensure that the rights of victims are central to the delivery of our justice system.

I welcome this Victims' Strategy which brings us a step closer to seeing a Victims Law on the statute books. Such a law will mean that no victim in the future will have to fight for the support they're entitled to.

I will continue to push government to ensure that victims whose lives may be devastatingly transformed by the crime committed against them, are afforded the rights they so justly deserve.

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

As the national charity for victims we welcome the steps set out today to bring forward a Victims' Law and to strengthen the Victims' Code. We are also pleased that the government has announced a much-needed review of criminal injuries compensation for victims.

We have worked closely with the government as they've developed their strategy and we look forward to continuing this, to ensure that the reforms truly work for victims.

The strategy sets out new policy, and brings together existing funding commitments made by various government departments.

The strategy also outlines plans to improve support for victims of major tragedies to ensure that the painful experience of the Hillsborough families is not replicated.

Further measures in the strategy include:

- Commitments to increase spending from £31 million in 2018 to £39 million in 2020/21 to improve services for victims of sexual violence and abuse

who seek support from Sexual Assault Referral Centres.

- Greater support for families bereaved by homicide, including new funding for advocacy support for families bereaved by domestic homicide.
- Boosting the number of Registered Intermediaries – communication experts helping vulnerable victims and witnesses give their best evidence at police interview and trial – by 25%.
- Improving court environments, with new victim-friendly waiting areas and an emphasis on accessibility for the most vulnerable.
- Keeping the Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme under review, and considering an extension so victims and the public can have sentences reconsidered by the Court of Appeal.
- Focus on better enforcement of the Victims' Code, with increased responsibility for Police and Crime Commissioners in monitoring the delivery of services.
- The creation of a short, user-friendly overview of the Victims' Code in hardcopy and electronic formats.
- Developing a new delivery model for victim support services, and coordinating funding across government.

Notes to editors

- This strategy marks the latest milestone in improving the support for victims and builds on important progress over the last few years:
 - In 2006, The Code of Practice for Victims (the Victims' Code) established for the first time in law services that must be provided to victims of crime in England and Wales by criminal justice agencies.
 - In 2010, the first Victims' Commissioner was appointed. The statutory position was set up to champion the interests of victims and witnesses and encourage good practice in their treatment.
 - 'Getting it Right for Victims and Witnesses' was published in 2012 and set out the government's approach for making sure victims and witnesses get the support they need.
 - The creation of the Victims' Panel to represent the voice of victims in government policy making.
 - Wider provision of special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses many of whom are victims.
 - Seeking new laws and stronger powers to protect and support survivors of domestic abuse.
 - Creating new offences to protect more victims and bring offenders to justice including: revenge porn, coercive or controlling behaviour, and sexual communication with a child.
- The latest Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) estimates suggest one in five adults experienced crime in the year ending March 2018.
- Despite crime having fallen since the mid-1990s, the types of offences being committed are changing. Fraud and cyber offences now make nearly half of all crime in England and Wales. Additionally, more victims are coming forward to report crimes that have traditionally been under-reported. For instance, reported sex crimes have risen by nearly a quarter in a year, with demand for male rape support services rising 176% in the last three years.

- There has been a sharp rise in serious violence, with police recorded knife crime up by 16% in England and Wales in 2017/18 and the number of homicides rose by 12% in the same period. In London, acid attacks have more than doubled since 2014. The government's Serious Violence Strategy, published in April, puts a stronger focus on steering young people away from violence, whilst continuing to ensure the strongest possible response from law enforcement agencies.
- In April the Justice Secretary published findings of a review of parole processes, and measures to increase its transparency and improve the treatment of victims. One immediate step has been to change the rules to allow the Parole Board to explain its decisions to victims, media and the public. Since this change, the Parole Board has received over 850 requests for summary decisions.
- The government's intention to establish an Independent Public Advocate (IPA) "for victims of public disasters" was outlined in the 2017 Conservative Party Manifesto and confirmed in the Queen's Speech. The consultation, launched today, seeks views on the remit and powers of the IPA and closes on 3 December.
- Stakeholder engagement on the review of Victims' Code, strengthening the Victims' Commissioner's powers and the Victims' Law will commence in the coming weeks, with a view to a formal public consultation in early 2019, and an amended Code being in place in 2019.
- The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme awards taxpayer-funded payments to victims injured as a result violent crime, paying out more than £150 million to victims in 2017/18. Full details of the review of the scheme will be announced in due course, with a public consultation to be launched in early 2019.