



Ministry
of Justice

Our Commitment to Victims

September 2014



We need to do more to help victims of crime navigate the criminal justice system, access the information and support they need, protect vulnerable victims and witnesses in court, and to guarantee their rights in law.



As part of our Commitment to Victims, we will:

- 1. Establish a new nationwide Victims' Information Service by March 2015, and develop this into a comprehensive service that allows victims to access the information and support they need.**
- 2. Strengthen the protection for vulnerable victims by making the experience of going to court a better one.**
- 3. Increase transparency and accountability, to ensure criminal justice agencies are held to account for the services they provide to victims.**
- 4. Introduce a Victims' Law to guarantee key entitlements for victims.**
- 5. Develop plans for paying compensation to victims up front, rather than victims having to wait for their money.**

1. Establish a new nationwide Victims' Information Service by March 2015, and develop this into a comprehensive service that allows victims to access the information and support they need



By March 2015 we will:

- **launch a new nationwide Victims' Information Service.**
This will give victims all the information they need about what to expect from the criminal justice system and support services - made available in one place for the first time. It will include:
 - an **online portal**, where victims can find information about services in their area, restorative justice, how to apply for compensation, how the criminal justice system works and have a clear understanding of their rights under the Victims' Code and Witness Charter;
 - a **new helpline**, to ensure that victims in need of support are signposted to local and national support services. Those wanting to know about their case, or wanting to complain, will be referred to the relevant part of the CJS.
- **make TrackMyCrime available to all police forces** by the end of this year. TrackMyCrime is an online system which enables the police to provide timely information to victims about the progress of the investigation of their case.

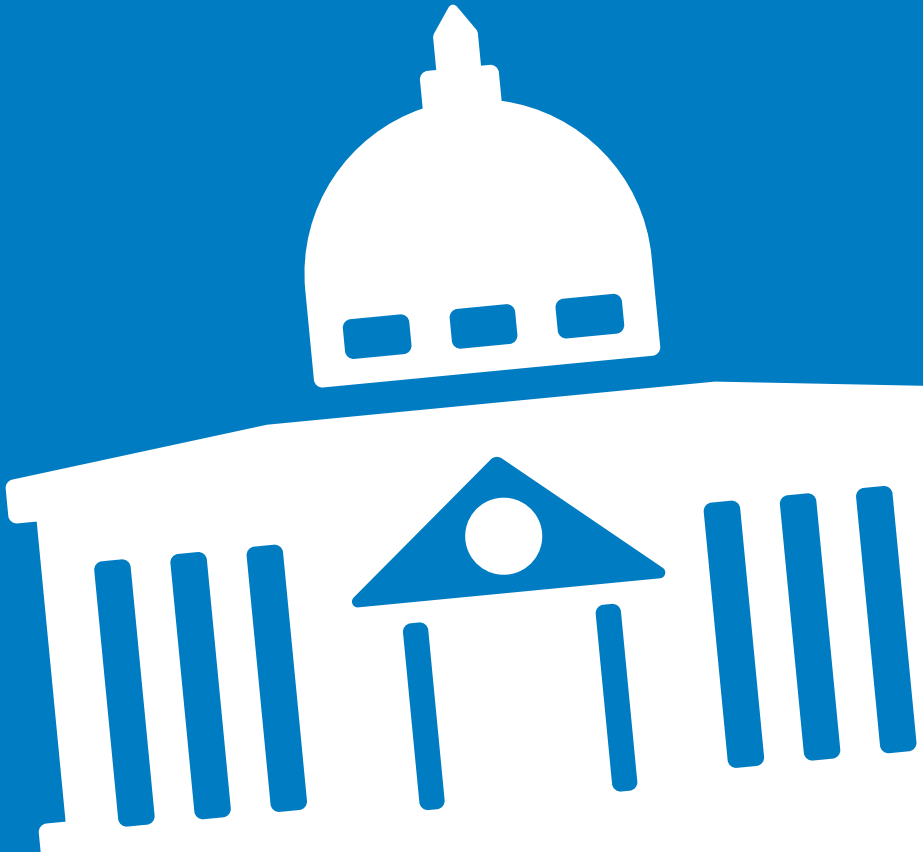
By April 2016 we will:

- **develop the Victims' Information Service to offer a full 'one-stop-shop'**, where victims can submit complaints to the relevant agency and provide feedback about their experience, so that the performance of CJS agencies can be judged on their customer ratings.
- **ensure that those victims who most need it should receive more tailored personal assistance to guide them through the system, from people who know them and their case** – working closely with Police and Crime Commissioners, who will be taking on a greatly increased role in commissioning tailored local services to support victims from 1st October 2014, and other agencies to achieve this vision.

By 2018 we will:

- **further develop the Victims' Information Service to include an extended TrackMyCrime tool**, that will allow the victim to track the progress of their case online, all the way through the criminal justice system.

2. Strengthen the protection for vulnerable victims by making the experience of going to court a better one



We will ensure that where victims give evidence, they have more options about how and where they do so: whether before the day of the trial, or from a location away from the courtroom. This will enable vulnerable witnesses to give evidence away from what can be an aggressive courtroom atmosphere and reduce their anxiety.

By March 2015 we will:

- **devise a requirement that to be instructed in cases involving serious sexual offences, publicly-funded advocates must have undertaken approved specialist training on working with vulnerable victims and witnesses.**
- **give vulnerable witnesses greater opportunity to give evidence from a location away from court that better supports them to give their evidence, with at least one such location available in each court region.**

- **set out a programme for national roll-out of pre-trial cross-examination for child victims**, subject to the evaluation of the pilots.
- **support the Director of Public Prosecutions' consultation on providing better information and support to victims** both before and at court so that they are better prepared for trials.

By March 2016 we will:

- **ensure that victims' needs are at the forefront of our plans to modernise the courts.** A more efficient and effective courts and tribunals service will be better suited to the needs of our most vulnerable users and will have upgraded facilities, such as separate waiting areas and easier access to court information and services.

By March 2017 we will:

- **complete the national roll-out of pre-trial cross examination for child victims**, subject to the evaluation of the pilots.

3. Increase transparency and accountability, to ensure criminal justice agencies are held to account for the services they provide to victims.



By April 2015 we will:

- **develop ways to measure and publish victims' satisfaction with the service they receive**, building on the CPS's national survey of victims and witnesses and the Community Feedback Pilots which are being pioneered in a number of police forces to enable victims to provide feedback.
- **ensure that criminal justice agencies publish information** to demonstrate how they have improved services for victims – with the national Criminal Justice Board and Victims' Commissioner holding agencies to account for what they have done at a national level, and enabling Local Criminal Justice Partnerships and Police and Crime Commissioners to lead local initiatives to improve services for victims.
- **set specific job objectives on victims** for all court managers and relevant staff and CPS staff (building on the Director of Public Prosecutions' existing priority for victims) which focus on the service they provide to victims of crime.

- **review whether Ombudsman services or other independent organisations need new powers to make sure victims get redress where they deserve it**, building on the ongoing reviews of complaints about the police and complaints in public services.

The CJS inspectorates already examine aspects of victims' services within their individual and joint inspections. In addition, in 2015, they will consolidate these findings to produce their first joint annual appraisal of the quality of victim and witness experiences - highlighting good practice and areas for improvement. In response, agencies will be asked to produce an action plan setting out how they will ensure victims actually receive the services to which they are entitled.

4. Introduce a Victims' Law to guarantee key entitlements for victims



We will legislate in the next Parliament to ensure that the rights of victims are enshrined in law, putting the key entitlements of the Victims' Code into primary legislation, and ensuring their voice is heard in court.

- early identification of priority victims and witnesses and assessment of their needs;
- automatic referral to the relevant support organisations;
- information for victims about their case, at every stage.

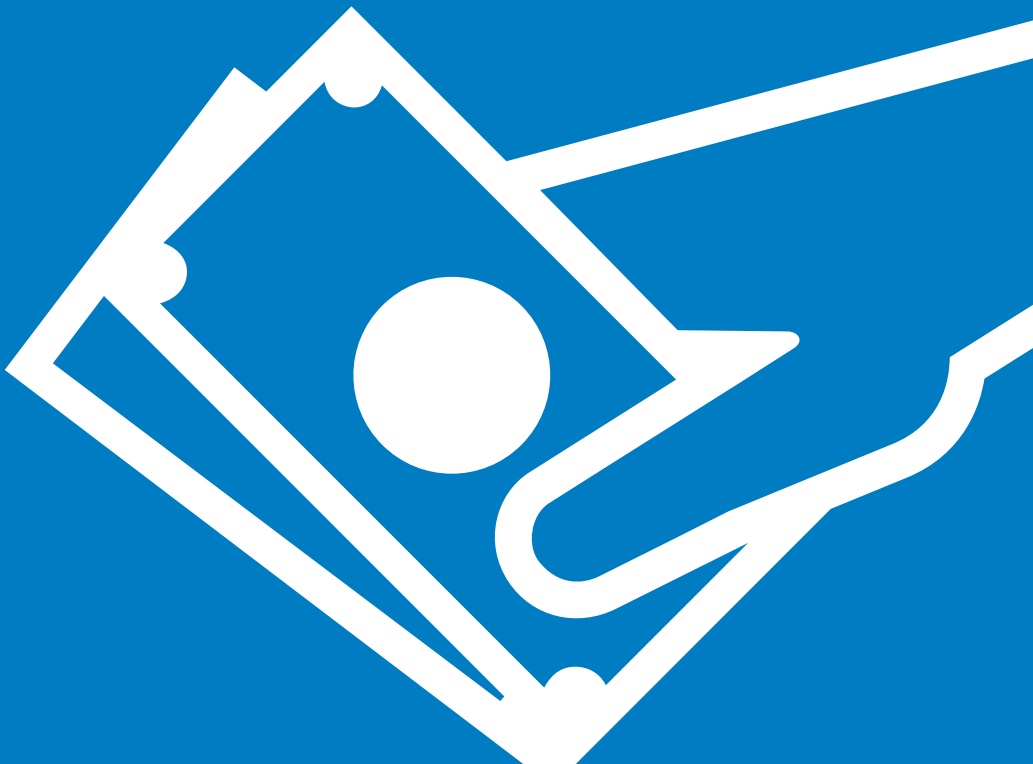
We will introduce new statutory weight for key entitlements in the Victims' Code, including:

- the right to make a Victim Personal Statement – so that victims have a voice in the criminal justice process and the court is left in no doubt about the impact the crime has had on them – and to request to read it out in court;

And, subject to consultation:

- a new regime for paying compensation; and
- new powers and sanctions for the Ombudsman to ensure that victims get the redress they deserve when things go wrong.

5. Develop plans for paying compensation to victims up front, rather than victims having to wait for their money



By December 2014, we will:

- **consult on options for paying compensation to victims up front**, to prevent compensation arriving months or years after imposition as and when the offender is able to pay.

Compensation orders are available to the courts to require an offender to compensate a victim for personal injury, loss or damage. Compensation is an important power. This Government has strengthened this regime by obliging courts to consider making a compensation order in appropriate cases, and lifting the £5,000 cap on compensation awards in the magistrates' court.

While we have strengthened compensation, the current scheme of receiving compensation can be distressing for victims because it prolongs their relationship with the offender and can prevent them from moving on from the experience. We think there is potentially a clear benefit for victims in giving them a chance to obtain a proportion of their compensation up front. Victims will be able to choose between the current scheme and the proposal. We are particularly keen to have views from victims and victims' groups in our consultation process, to inform how we might change the law.

Background:

This Government is committed to putting victims at the heart of the criminal justice system.



We have:

- Increased and extended the money we take from offenders so that up to £100 million is available for victims' services each year (double the Ministry of Justice's previous spending of around £50 million);
- Provided more tailored support for individuals, with Police and Crime Commissioners putting in place services that reflect local needs and priorities;
- Set clear expectations of the service that victims can expect to receive, through the Victims' Code and Witness Charter.

In March 2014, the Secretary of State, Lord Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals announced a programme of reform to deliver – through the use of modern technology, an improved estate and modernisation of current working practices – a more effective, efficient and high performing courts and tribunals administration that will improve the services provided to the public at a significantly lower cost. The needs of victims and witnesses will be at the heart of this work.

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