

New rights for victims of crime

- Greater clarity through simplified and improved Victims' Code
- Entitlements updated to better reflect changing nature of crime
- Part of government's Victims' Strategy to make sure support is consistent across the country

A consultation launched today (17 July), aims to strengthen the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code) – a statutory document which sets out the minimum level of service victims can expect from criminal justice agencies, including the police and courts.

Under the code, all victims of crime – whether they choose to report it or not – are entitled to a range of support and information to help them cope and as far as possible recover from its effects.

However, victims and groups representing them felt that the code's complexity and inconsistencies in the way it is applied across the country mean that some victims are missing out on the support they are entitled to.

For example, in recent years only 15% of victims said they were given the opportunity by police to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS), despite it being one of the Code's key entitlements. In addition, 69% of victims choose not to report their allegations, and so may not be aware of their rights under the Victims' Code.

Ministers are therefore seeking views from victims, charities, criminal justice agencies and anyone with an interest in the issue on how best to raise awareness, as well as making the Code clear and accessible so that it better meets victims' needs.

Justice Minister Edward Argar said:

The Government's commitment to better support victims of crime is clear today in our strengthening of the Victims Code. The nature of crime is changing and the Code must keep up.

Being a victim of crime can be life-changing, and how people are subsequently treated within the justice system, can make a huge difference in helping them recover.

By strengthening the Code, we will give victims a louder voice in the process, ensure that they are better heard through their journey in the criminal justice system, and make sure they can access the support they need.

But this is only one part of the picture, and our Victims' Strategy sets out how we will drive further improvements, including consulting on a Victims' Law.

Victims Commissioner, Dame Vera Baird, said:

For many victims their journey through the criminal justice system can be a frustrating experience with many unaware that they have entitlements, let alone what they are.

This consultation offers an opportunity to change much of this. But this can only happen if the views of victims are heard and taken into account. I very much hope this consultation will provoke a lively exchange of ideas and that these will be the building blocks for a world class victim support.

I welcome the consultation and congratulate the Ministry of justice on the considerable preparatory work it has done.

Proposals set out today include:

- Greater clarity around victims' rights, such as a right to be given information about the investigation and criminal proceedings and the right to make a VPS;
- Improved awareness that victims who do not report the crime or withdraw from the criminal justice process are entitled to the same support as those who do report it;
- Creation of a short, user-friendly guidance to help victims to understand their rights under the Victims' Code;
- Creation of a guide for practitioners working in the criminal justice sector to help them understand and deliver their obligations within the Victims' Code;
- Revising the current categories for victims entitled to an enhanced service to make it simpler, with a greater focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the victim.

Notes to editors

- The consultation will run from 17 July to 11 September.
- The consultation addresses these themes at each stage of the process:
 - Information and communication – Victims have told us that timely and accurate information and communication are key to meeting their needs.
 - Victims' voice – Victims want to be listened to and their views and needs taken seriously.
 - Support – The support for victims should always be of a

consistently high quality and accessible to them all.

- Specialist support – Recognition that many victims need access to specialised support.
- Accountability – Victims should be confident that they will receive the services to which they are entitled and have redress if this does not happen.
- The [Victims Strategy](#) was published on 10 September 2018, setting out the government's vision of a justice system that supports even more victims to speak up with certainty that they will be understood, protected and supported, whether or not they report a crime.
- The Strategy included 89 commitments, of which 32 have already been delivered.
- The Victims' Code came into effect in 2006 as part of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. It built on the support for victims within the Victims' Charter which was introduced in 1990 and which set out for the first time the levels of service victims of crime should expect. The Code was updated in 2013 and again in 2015.
- This consultation is the first step in delivering on the commitment on the Code. We intend to consult later this year on the detail of a Victims' Law to explore how government and other public bodies can be better held to account (compliance) for the service offered to victims under the Code.
- Enhanced entitlements are services which are offered to victims who are more likely to require extra support and services through the criminal justice process due to the nature of the crime they are victim of or because of their particular vulnerability as a victim.
- Join the conversation online using #SpeakOut