

# Have you got what it takes?

Supporting victims and witnesses  
to cope and recover

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### Important facts

#### The PCC role

Following a Government consultation earlier this year ('Getting it right for victims and witnesses') police and crime commissioners (PCCs) will in future be responsible for commissioning locally most of the emotional and practical support services for victims of crime that are provided by the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. These services help victims to cope with and recover from the impacts of crime.

PCCs will need to develop strategies for supporting victims, prioritising the needs of victims of serious crime, those targeted often and the most vulnerable. The bulk of the existing central government funding for victims and witnesses, currently £66 million each year plus a share of up to a further £50m to be raised from offenders, will be transferred to PCCs. You can find the original consultation and the Government's response here. <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digitalcommunications/victims-witnesses>

To help PCCs understand the types of victims' services currently available in their area, the Victims' Services Advocates project has issued reports for each police force area on local service provision. These reports combine evidence from victims of crime themselves and the people and organisations who support them, statistical information and research.

#### The EU Victims Directive

Along with the 26 other member states, the UK will be bound by the obligations in the EU Victims Directive, which will establish minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime when it comes into force in 2015. The directive aims to ensure that a victim of crime anywhere within the EU receives a minimum standard of support and protection. This covers a range of things, including information about criminal proceedings; the circumstances in which victims can access legal aid, interpretation and expenses; and measures to assist victims who give evidence in court. The directive sets out support services that must be available to victims and, in some instances, to their families, in accordance with their needs and the harm caused by the crime.

### Background

#### Current funding for support services

Under current arrangements, the Ministry of Justice provides the following support for victims and witnesses each year:

- **£38 million to Victim Support, of which £2 million is set aside for a dedicated homicide service and £8 million pays for the Witness Service;**
- **£0.75 million to other voluntary sector organisations providing specialist support to those affected by homicide;**
- **£5.05 million from the Victim and Witness General Fund to 110 voluntary sector organisations providing frontline services (until March 2014); and**
- **£3.5 million to provide set funding (until March 2014) to 65 support centres for people who have been raped and to develop new centres where there are gaps in what is provided.**

Other government departments provide the rest of the funding for a number of services for victims, including £7 million from the Home Office for a range of specialist support services to victims of domestic and sexual violence (until March 2015).

#### Victim Support

In 2008, 77 local victim support charities merged to become a single national charity. Victim Support is the largest organisation in the sector, providing:

- **a community service of support for victims of crime across England and Wales;**
- **a national telephone support line for victims of crime;**
- **a service providing specialist support for those bereaved by homicide; and**
- **a witness service offering witnesses information about court and legal processes, emotional support in dealing with the effects and experience of appearing in court, and practical support.**

## Rape support centres

The Ministry of Justice is providing £3.5 million in funding to 65 existing rape support centres across England and Wales until March 2014. The Ministry of Justice is working with the voluntary sector to develop new rape support centres in areas lacking this kind of provision.

Over the last 12 months £600,000 in funding has been provided to develop four new centres in Hereford, Devon, Trafford and Dorset, all of which are now open and providing services. Over the next 12 months, a further £600,000 in funding will be provided to develop five new centres in Northumbria, Leeds, Southend, Suffolk and mid Wales.

## Victim and Witness General Fund

The £5.05 million in the General Fund has been allocated to local organisations that have a proven track record in supporting victims and witnesses of the most serious crimes, those who are the most vulnerable and those who are the most persistently targeted. Children's groups and charities supporting victims of rape, domestic violence, hate crime, burglary, antisocial behaviour, and other violent crime have been successful in applying for funding. Those bereaved by murder, manslaughter and fatal road-traffic crimes also receive specialist support.

## Services for those suffering domestic violence and sexual violence:

The money we provide for victims of domestic and sexual violence pays for three separate local roles – independent domestic violence advisers (IDVAs), independent sexual violence advisers (ISVAs) and MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) co-ordinators. (See the briefing on [Tackling Violence against Women and Girls](#) for more details on these roles.)

## The code of practice for victims of crime (the Victims' Code) and the Witness Charter

The code sets out a minimum level of service that criminal justice agencies should provide to victims of crime, including families bereaved by crime. All victims are entitled, under this code, to receive information about local support services in their area. The code represents a minimum level of service from the criminal justice agencies. If agencies want to provide a better service, they are free to do so.

The police must make sure victims are given information about local support services and contact details for those services. They must also make sure the victim's contact details are passed to the appropriate local victims' service organisation.

The Witness Charter is a commitment made by the criminal justice system to meet the needs of witnesses. It is based on 34 standards which set out the level of service that witnesses can expect to receive at every stage of the criminal justice process. The charter applies to all who provide services to witnesses in criminal proceedings. This includes the police, witness care units, the Crown Prosecution Service, Her Majesty's Courts Service and the Witness Service.

## How will PCCs commission victims' services?

PCCs and their teams will need to understand the needs of victims in their area and the support services currently available. This might include getting involved with service providers and the community to assess local services and consider what might be needed in the future. Service providers will need to show the PCC that they will be able to deliver the outcomes that matter to their local PCC. This could include helping victims to cope with the immediate effects of crime and recover from the harm they have experienced. The Ministry of Justice will provide PCCs with support and information to help them establish their own commissioning approaches locally, including a commissioning framework.

## PCCs will be commissioning most victims' services – which services won't this include?

There are some low-volume but high-impact crimes where local demand for support may be low. To avoid the risk of victims of such serious crimes, including trafficking and homicide, not being able to access adequate support, these services will be commissioned nationally. The Government response to the victims and witnesses consultation provides information on which services will be commissioned by central government.