

# Gravesham Community Safety Unit Briefing Paper



## HM Government Victims' Strategy September 2018

### 1. Introduction

HM Government published a new cross-government Victims' Strategy on 10 September 2018. The key aim of the Strategy is to provide a criminal justice system wide response to improving support services offered to victims of crime by a range of agencies including the police, Crown Prosecution Service and courts. The Strategy is the latest in a series of steps taken over recent years that have included the:

- introduction of the Code of Practice for Victims for legal services in 2006;
- appointment of a Victims' Commissioner in 2010;
- publishing of 'Getting it Right for Victims and Witnesses' policy in 2012;
- creation of the Victims' Panel to give victims a voice;
- introduction of new offences to protect more victims and bring more offenders to justice e.g. coercive/controlling behaviour, revenge porn and sexual communication with a child;
- strengthening legal powers for tackling money laundering and recovering criminal assets;
- focusing on prevention through e.g. the Serious Violence Strategy 2018, CONTEST (Counter Terrorism) Strategy 2018 and the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2018.

### 2. The new Strategy is intended to respond to what victims have identified as their needs. Chiefly:

- having timely and accurate information and communication – without it, some victims become dissatisfied with the criminal justice system and disengage;
- fair treatment during the justice process;
- multi-agency working to ensure that information is shared promptly and effective prevention strategies can be more easily delivered;
- professional, targeted victims services – victims find it helpful if the primary point of contact is a trained professional with knowledge of the criminal justice system and the empathy to offer support.

### 3. What are the key challenges to overcome?

#### • **The nature of crime is changing**

Over recent decades, there has been a fall in overall levels of crime that also appears to be stabilising. However, the types of crime being committed have changed and continue to do so, resulting in the need for agencies to also adapt their response and how they address the needs of victims. There has been an increase in high harm violent crime nationally.

#### • **More people are coming forward**

There has been an increase in the crimes that have traditionally been under-reported e.g. sexual offences and child abuse. There has also been an increase in victims of domestic abuse reporting to the police but the majority of victims still do not report anything to the police (ONS, CESW).

## The changing nature of crime



Over recent decades, we've seen a fall in overall levels of crime, a trend that now looks to be stabilising. The latest Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) estimates **SUGGEST 1 IN 5 ADULTS EXPERIENCED CRIME** in the year ending March 2018.

### HIGH HARM VIOLENT CRIME HAS INCREASED



Police recorded knife crime **INCREASED BY 16%** in England and Wales in 2017/18 compared to the previous year.



In London, acid attacks **HAVE MORE THAN DOUBLED** since 2014, with other attacks in Essex and the West Midlands.

### MORE PEOPLE ARE COMING FORWARD TO REPORT CRIMES THAT HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN UNDER-REPORTED, CREATING MORE DEMAND IN THE SYSTEM



In the year ending March 2018, reported sexual offences **WERE UP 24%** compared to the previous year.



Recorded hate crime **HAS RISEN EVERY YEAR** since data tracking began in 2012/13.



In the year ending March 2017, police in England and Wales recorded **2,255** modern slavery offences, a **159% INCREASE** on the previous year.

### DOMESTIC ABUSE REMAINS A PERVERSIVE BUT UNDER-REPORTED CRIME



CSEW data suggests that an estimated **1.9 MILLION ADULTS** experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2017.



The reporting of domestic abuse crimes is increasing, but still the **MAJORITY OF VICTIMS** (as measured by the CSEW) do not report the crime to the police.

### MAJOR INCIDENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT A CROSS-GOVERNMENT RESPONSE IS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT VICTIMS

**36 PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES** in terrorist attacks in London and Manchester in 2017, and **71 PEOPLE DIED** as a result of the Grenfell Tower fire.



### THE ROLE THAT TECHNOLOGY PLAYS IN CRIME IS RAPIDLY EVOLVING



Technology now plays a **BIGGER ROLE** in stalking and emerging crimes such as 'upskirting'.



Fraud and cybercrime accounted for **NEARLY HALF** of all crime in England and Wales in 2017.

## **4. Key elements of the Strategy**

### **4.1 Overarching improvements to victims experience (Chapter 1)**

Many people are not aware that the Victims' Code exists and find it difficult to understand what it means. Victims may not always receive the entitlements in the Victims' Code and there is a lack of data to evidence the reasons for this. Actions to address this include:

- Strengthening the Victims' Code and consulting on the detail of victim focused legislation, including strengthening the powers of the Victims' Commissioner and delivering a Victim's Law;
- Holding agencies to account for compliance with the Victims' Code through improved reporting, monitoring and transparency;
- Developing the detail on the role of the Independent Public Advocate for bereaved families who have lost loved ones in extraordinary and tragic events (understanding that victims of major incidents can struggle to take part in inquests, investigations and inquiries);
- Abolishing of the rule which denied compensation for some victims who lived with their attacker prior to 1979 and consulting on further changes to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (so that access to compensation reflects our understanding of the nature of the crime);
- Improving the quality and accessibility of information;
- Strengthening the regulatory system for the press to tackle media intrusion.

### **4.2 Support available whether or not victims report a crime (Chapter 2)**

This sets out how services will be improved for all victims of crime, whether or not they report the offence. Key commitments are:

- Increasing spending from £31m in 2018 to £39m in 2020-21 to improve services and pathways for survivors and victims of sexual violence and abuse who seek support from Sexual Assault Referral Centres;
- Developing a new delivery model for victim support services, coordinating funding across government;
- Expanding support available to families bereaved by homicide, including bringing in new funding for advocacy support for such families;
- Spending £8m on interventions to ensure support is available to children who witness domestic abuse;
- Piloting the 'Child House' model in London, whereby multiple services are brought together in a child-friendly environment to minimise additional trauma.

The intention is to increase the availability of services across the board with more sustainable funding, that services are better integrated and that there is better consistency in the services and quality of the support available.

### **4.3 Improving support after a crime has been reported (Chapter 3)**

Chapter 3 considers improvements to victim support after a crime has been reported and includes commitments to:

- Introduce improved police training (particularly in respect of offences requiring specialist skills such as domestic and sexual abuse), including guidance on conducting interviews and collating evidence and the trial of body-worn cameras to take Victim Personal Statements;

- Increasing the number of Registered Intermediaries (communication experts) by 25%, helping vulnerable victims and witnesses give their evidence at police interview and at court, ensuring they are clear on their rights;
- Increase opportunities for victims to engage in alternative solutions to court (developing more restorative justice options);
- Improve communication with victims overall through the process, explaining decisions not to prosecute and on the right to review CPS decisions.

#### **4.4 Supporting victims through the court process (Chapter 4)**

Many victims are vulnerable or intimidated and the court process can be daunting. This Chapter aims to introduce measures to provide extra assistance to support victims to make sure they can give their best evidence, including addressing the practical difficulties of attending court for some victims. Commitments include:

- Improving the court environment, with victim-friendly waiting area and a new court design focussing on accessibility for the most vulnerable;
- Streamlining victim interaction, improving information provision to victims throughout the court process and make it easier for victims to feedback on their experience;
- Free up court time to minimise delays by dealing with crimes with no identifiable victims e.g. fare evasion, outside of court hearings;
- Continue to use video links to allow vulnerable victims to give evidence away from the courts;
- Improving support for victims with specialist needs e.g. disabled victims.

#### **4.5 Following court proceedings (Chapter 5)**

This sets out steps to make sure victims understand a court's decision, the implications for them and for the offender including:

- Reviewing and considering extending the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme so that victims and the public can have sentences reconsidered by the Court of Appeal;
- Reforming the Victim Contact Scheme, making it easier to opt-in, introducing more frequent communication and greater use of digital contact methods;
- Improving Victim Liaison Officer training, especially in supporting victims during parole hearings and in making a Victim Personal Statement;
- Reviewing and considering whether any improvements are needed to entitlements for victims of mentally disordered offenders.

### **5. Further considerations**

5.1 The Government has stated that stakeholder engagement will take place on the review of the Victims' Code, strengthening and Victims' Commissioners powers and the Victims' Law, with a view to a formal public consultation exercise in early 2019 and an amended Code coming into effect in 2019. It is possible that Local Authorities/local Community Safety Partnerships will be invited to comment upon the Strategy as part of the consultation process. With this in mind, the following points may be valid ones to consider for inclusion if we are invited to submit a response to the consultation exercise. Whilst welcoming the Strategy, additional factors that could be highlighted include:

- Particularly with the nature of violent crimes that are seeing an increase and the vulnerability of their victims, the mental health trauma experienced by victims and the long-lasting impact that this has on them should be addressed. Many of these victims

develop long-term treatment needs that require sustainable funding in order that services can provide support to them;

- Steps to ensure that victims of serious violent crime can access support in a timely fashion and that sufficient resources are available to avoid them being kept on long waiting lists;
- Is there scope for the introduction of Independent Violence Advocates to provide direct support to victims through the court process.

The full Victims Strategy document can be found by following the link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/739193/victim-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739193/victim-strategy.pdf)

**Kath Donald**  
**Strategic Manager**  
**Gravesham Community Safety Unit**  
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