

# Victims' Commissioner News

February/March 2017



## Thought for the day:

"You don't have to change that much for it to make a great deal of difference"

## A message from Baroness Newlove

*Can you believe it is the end of March already – where is this year disappearing to? My team have been keeping me very busy visiting Police and Crime Commissioner areas, attending speaking engagements and supporting International Women's Day on 8 March by officially opening a new facility for victims of sexual assault.*

*My recent focus has been on vulnerable victims. I published my Children's Review in February, contributed to a seminar as part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, and welcomed the Prime Minister's intention to address domestic abuse laws and support these victims.*

Best wishes,

**In February, I published my second review of the year** *Are we getting it right for young victims of crime*, which raised concerns about how children and young victims of crime were treated by criminal justice agencies. The findings in this review were worrying. My team spoke to 12 victims and their families and the main discussion points raised during these interviews was that some victims were not believed or taken seriously when they reported a crime: they were made to feel like criminals or were accused of wasting the police's time.

How are agencies meant to educate young people to put their trust in the criminal justice system when this is their experience?

You can read my report here:

<http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Are-we-getting-it-right-for-young-victims-of-crime.pdf>

I acknowledge that their views are only a small sample of all victims entering into the criminal justice system, which is why it was quite timely that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary released the police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) reports for 2016, in March. When assessed on their effectiveness to protect vulnerable people, 22 out of 43 police forces were assessed as 'good'; and overall, 83.3% of victims included in the survey were satisfied with the service provided by the police.



**I have been following the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse with interest** and I was called to give evidence as part of their investigations into compensation for victims. This evidence session was part of their 'Accountability and Reparations for Victims' inquiry; it considered whether the current systems in place to compensate victims were effective and whether there were ways to reform the current provision in order to make accessing compensation a more straightforward process for victims.



### Contact us:



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**To celebrate International Women's Day on 8<sup>th</sup> March**, I travelled to Cambridgeshire to officially open a specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centre. In operation since December 2016, the Elms SARC is a purpose built centre offering free confidential support and practical help to anyone in Cambridgeshire who has experienced sexual abuse. Seeing the centre, I know it will be of great comfort to victims and survivors of sexual abuse to know there is a place where they can seek help; a place where they can access support, advice and dedicated services in a safe, non-threatening environment.

I and Jason Ablewhite, Cambridgeshire PCC, were fortunate to meet a victim during the visit. She explained how a similar centre had helped her after she was raped. The survivor has now decided to work with victims to help them. She will be able to help other victims with her unique understanding and compassion – something I know future victims will value immensely.

While in Cambridgeshire, I also spoke at the Empowering Women event organised by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The event was attended by around 100 women, aimed at celebrating their contribution to the local community. I was fortunate enough to speak to this inspirational group of women about how – when working together – we can make a change for all victims of crime and their experiences.

**I was very honoured to be invited to speak at the 6<sup>th</sup> Ryder lecture** at Bolton University. This prestigious lecture was attended by law students, legal practitioners and judges. I spoke about the importance of the victim's voice in legal proceedings, how their voice is currently heard in proceedings and how victims perceive justice is delivered.



**I have been listening to many concerns** from the victims and stakeholders I meet in relation to provision of services, continued funding and satisfaction of services.

I really am keen to hear about any matters that I can discuss with stakeholders or ministers. I want to make sure victims are getting a fair deal in the criminal justice system and your personal experiences are so important.

Since January, my team have been updating the website when I have met heads of criminal justice agencies or sent letters to Ministers. Take a look at the website if you are interested in the issues I have been highlighting:  
<http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/what-we-do/meetings-with-stakeholders/>

**I am very pleased that the government is taking some direct action to support victims of crime**, although efforts to introduce a victims' law would also be welcomed.

In February, the Prime Minister announced plans to tackle domestic violence and domestic abuse by addressing the inconsistent legislation and providing support for victims.

The Ministry of Justice has also announced plans to introduce pre-recorded cross-examination for adult rape and sexual assault victims from September 2017. They will be testing the additional measures in a few courts initially; I hope they are successful and full roll-out can commence.

### Upcoming Dates

**28<sup>th</sup> March:** West Midlands PCC visit

**30<sup>th</sup> March:** Norfolk PCC visit

**6<sup>th</sup> April:** Hampshire PCC visit

**23-30<sup>th</sup> April:** National Stalking Awareness Week 2017

**26<sup>th</sup> April:** Kent PCC visit