

## VICTIM AND WITNESS ACTION PLAN 2017/2020

### THEME 1. THE STATUS AND TREATMENT OF VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
1.	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) monitor the issuing of the information leaflet to victims of crime, under the Victim Charter, through the introduction of digital measures to record the issue of that leaflet;</li> <li>(ii) put measures in place to make more efficient use of available resources, in improving the services provided to victims and witnesses of crime under those Charters; and</li> <li>(iii) review compliance with the Victim and Witness Charters, and how this is being achieved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) PSNI</li> <li>(ii) All</li> <li>(iii) All</li> </ul>	DOJ	June 2017  March 2020 June 2018 and March 2019 (for the Victim & Witness Charters)
2.	We will bring forward legislation to reform the committal process, and implement the changes resulting from this, so that victims of crime are not required to give evidence ahead of trial.	DOJ	PPS/PSNI/NICTS	Subject to Ministerial and Executive approvals in due course
3.	We will roll out the Indictable Cases programme across Northern Ireland, for certain offences (attempted murder, wounding with intent, causing grievous bodily harm with intent, unlawful wounding, inflicting grievous bodily harm and offences in relation to the supply of drugs), subject to the availability of funding.	DOJ/PPS/PSNI		From May 2017
4.	We will further extend the offender levy initiative to remaining specified disposals, evaluate and review its current operation and consider the mainstreaming of its funds.	DOJ		March 2020
5.	We will consider how a portion of any savings from the review of compensation services may be re-directed, to further improve support services for victims and witnesses of crime.	DOJ		March 2020
6.	We will ensure that the development of restorative approaches within the criminal justice system for adult offenders fully takes account of victims' needs, including the increased potential for the involvement of victims.	PBNI/PPS/PSNI/NIPS		December 2017

7.	We will continue to work with practitioners towards reducing victim and witness waiting times at court. Consideration will also be given to how best to enable prosecutors to consult effectively with victims at court.	PPS/NICTS	VSNI/ NSPCC	March 2020
8.	We will continue to review the work of the Serious Crime Unit, particularly in relation to building confidence, delivering proportionate and effective prosecutions and monitoring the performance of independent counsel.	PPS	PSNI	From April 2017
9.	We will continue to provide refresher training, including awareness of available support services, to frontline police officers who provide an initial point of contact to victims and witnesses of crime.	PSNI		From April 2017
10.	We will: (i) keep under review the information currently being shared by PSNI with PPS, in relation to the needs of vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses, as well as repeat victims, with a view to more effectively identifying the needs for special measures applications and support services; and (ii) continue to proactively consider whether an application should be made for special measures, including the use of a Registered Intermediary, where deemed appropriate given the circumstances of the case.	PSNI/PPS/ VWCU	VSNI/ NSPCC	From April 2017
11.	(i) PPS will continue to work with PSNI to enhance file quality and timeliness (including disclosure), with the aim of improving evidential and file quality, the effectiveness of case progression and reducing delay. The PSNI/PPS Working Together pilot will seek to address these matters in respect of cases deemed suitable for summary prosecution. (ii) We will review Phase I of the Working Together Pilot and use this to inform any further roll out.	PSNI/PPS		From April 2017  February 2018
<b>THEME 2. COMMUNICATION AND PROVIDING INFORMATION</b>				
12.	We will continue to develop the skills of criminal justice practitioners in communicating with children and vulnerable adults (for those who regularly work with these individuals). We will also liaise with the Bar Council, Law Society and other relevant bodies as appropriate, in relation to this.	All		From April 2017
13.	We will work to make greater use of technology in service provision, including: (i) reviewing web based information on the criminal justice journey, the roles and responsibilities of key organisations, practical advice and the current Victim Support NI Service Directory; and (ii) considering what use could be made of apps, or other social media avenues, to advise victims and witnesses about the journey through the criminal justice system and their role within this.	All		March 2018  December 2018

14.	We will keep under review correspondence with victims and witnesses of crime, to ensure that correspondence can be easily understood. This will include the information leaflet provided to victims of crime.	All		From April 2017
15.	We will comply with the statutory case management regime when it is in place, taking account of the needs of victims and witnesses (particularly vulnerable victims and witnesses). We will continue to liaise with the Office of the Lord Chief Justice in respect of this.	DOJ/PPS/ NICTS		From September 2017
16.	We will roll out and expand the work of the Victim Information Portal, subject to the outcome of the evaluation of this service. This will include the potential for further updates on the progress of the cases and signposting to support services.	PPS		March 2018
17.	The PPS will work towards further implementing the use of electronic tablet devices in the Magistrates' court, where appropriate. This will enhance the presentation of cases in court.	PPS		Ongoing
18.	We will undertake a promotion campaign to increase the number of users registered with the victim information schemes	PBNI	NSPCC, VSNI and VWCU	March 2018
<b>THEME 3. PROVIDING SUPPORT AND SPECIAL MEASURES</b>				
19.	We will continue to fund community, witness and compensation support services for victims and witnesses of crime.	DOJ		From April 2017
20.	We will develop positive communication messages aimed at increasing confidence in the criminal justice system, and raising awareness around the services available during the criminal justice journey.	All		From April 2017
21.	We will consider how best to provide support services for young victims of crime from when a crime is reported, through to aligning with current court support services. This will include training on appropriate referral pathways/service providers.	DOJ	VSNI/ NSPCC	December 2018
22.	We will consider introducing a support package for bereaved families and the form that this should take.	DOJ	VSNI	March 2020
23.	We will: (i) review the procedures in place that enable victims to make complaints about the standard of service that they have received from criminal justice organisations and voluntary sector partners; (ii) prepare a complaints leaflet; and (iii) collate complaints information from across the criminal justice system, with active consideration of how best to address recurring issues.	DOJ	VWSG	March 2018
24.	We will:	DOJ/NICTS	DOJ/PSNI/	

	(i) evaluate the Belfast Crown Court pilot of pre-trial cross examination; and  (ii) subject to the outcome of the evaluation, extend the scheme to all Crown Courts for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. In addition, consideration will be given to the possibility of extending the scheme to other court tiers.		PPS	December 2018 September 2019
25.	PPS legal staff within the Serious Crime Unit and Panel Counsel will continue to undertake ongoing specialised training relevant to the work of the Unit.	PPS		From April 2017
26	Panel Counsel will continue to be required to abide by the terms of the contract of engagement, which includes mandatory training around the support of vulnerable witnesses. We will also continue to review the training provided to prosecutors and Counsel, and will take into account issues raised in research into the criminal justice experience of families bereaved through murder and manslaughter as well as victims of sexual violence and domestic violence.	PPS		From April 2017
27.	The Care Unit at PSNI Garnerville will be considered as part of the PSNI's Estate Services Review of the site.	PSNI		March 2018
28.	We will consider how special measures technology could be improved, including through (i) upgrading the Achieving Best Evidence technology;  (ii) upgrading courtroom live link technology; and  (iii) considering further development of video link facilities (including remote facilities) to provide for greater geographical spread, linking in with the Criminal Justice Digital Strategy.	(i) PSNI  (ii) NICTS  (iii) NICTS/ PPS		March 2018 September 2017 March 2020
29.	We will: (i) roll out the Registered Intermediaries Schemes to the Magistrates' Court (including both adults and young people), with a view to testing demand and affordability of the scheme ahead of considering longer term implementation; and (ii) undertake a review of roll out to the Magistrates' Court, ahead of considering longer term implementation at that tier.	(i) PSNI/PPS/ DOJ  (ii) DOJ	NICTS  NICTS/PPS/ PSNI	April 2017  By March 2019
30.	We will evaluate the provision of support to victims of sexual violence, through independent sexual violence advisors, on a pilot basis.	VSNI	DOJ/PPS/ PSNI	March 2019
31.	We will consider what further developments can be progressed around witness services at court – including outreach, meeting witnesses away from the court and post-trial support.	VSNI		March 2018
32.	We will take steps to increase, strengthen and improve the collaborative relationships between	VSNI/NSPCC		December

	voluntary sector service providers, strengthening a partnership approach.			2018
33.	We will liaise with Criminal Justice Inspection NI (CJINI) in relation to their next 'Treatment of Victims and Witnesses' inspection, around reviewing new aspects of the criminal justice since their last material inspection, including (but not limited to): (i) the use of Registered Intermediaries; (ii) the Victim & Witness Care Unit (including the capture of victims/witnesses needs); and (iii) the Victim Charter. and continue to implement improvements arising out of this or other relevant reviews.	All		Subject to the timing of the CJINI inspection
<b>THEME 4. INVOLVEMENT AND IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING</b>				
34.	We will review the piloting of an 'Apology Letter Bank', enabling offenders in appropriate cases to write to their victims and acknowledge the harm that their actions have caused. Subject to the outcome of the review we will consider the extension of this facility, taking account of the views of victims of crime.	PBNI		March 2018
35.	We will develop a mechanism to utilise Victim Personal Statements in the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's work with offenders, where a victim has agreed to this.	PBNI	PPS/VSNI/ NSPCC	June 2017
36.	As part of the Department's review of sentencing policy, we will consider evidence around victims' understanding of the sentencing process and what steps could be taken to enhance that understanding in order to improve the experience of victims in the criminal justice system.	DOJ	NSPCC/ PPS/VSNI	From April 2017
37.	We will roll out the use of body worn video cameras across Northern Ireland, engaging with other criminal justice service providers as necessary.	PSNI	PPS/NICTS	December 2017
38.	We will review the findings of NIVAWS and consider actions necessary to improve services to victims and witnesses of crime, including increasing awareness of the Victim and Witness Care Unit role and the single point of contact in that unit.	All		March 2018
<b>THEME 5. GATHERING INFORMATION AND RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF VICTIMS AND WITNESSES</b>				
39.	In terms of the experiences of victims and witnesses of crime we will: (i) gather information on this across each stage of the criminal justice process to identify areas for improvement and share this with our criminal justice partners; (ii) improve our understanding of gaps in support services for victims of serious crime and those who are vulnerable or intimidated. This will include steps to improve the quality of data shared between organisations and take actions to tackle the specific issues raised in the Justice Committee's inquiry report in relation to particular groups of victims and witnesses. (iii)	DOJ	PSNI/ NSPCC/ VSNI/ VWSG	March 2018
40.	We will carry out further research and analysis to provide a clearer understanding of underreporting	DOJ	VSNI/	March

	of crime as well as how avoidable attrition (that is where a victim or witness withdraws or retracts their evidence) can be reduced and victims and witnesses better supported, subject to the necessary funding being available.		NSPCC	2020
41.	Subject to the necessary funding being available, we will conduct a further Northern Ireland Victim and Witness Survey, analyse the results of this and take forward any necessary actions arising from this, in order to better support victims and witnesses of crime.	DOJ	All	March 2020
42.	We will publish the outcomes from research with young victims of crime, prepare a response paper and an associated action plan to address the issues raised through the research.	DOJ	All	June 2018
43.	We will capture, and reflect back to criminal justice agencies, the view of victims and witnesses (through the Victim Support NI Voice of the Victim post) in order that this can be used to evidence good practice and consideration of the need for operational change.	VSNI	All	Annually from March 2018
44.	We will review the content of the victim survey, undertaken as part of a youth conference, with a view to considering what improvements can be made.	YJA		March 2018