



Baroness Newlove of Warrington
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

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Alex Davies-Jones MP
Minister for Victims and Violence Against Women and Girls
Sent by email: PS.AlexDavies-Jones@justice.gov.uk

26 June 2025

Dear Alex,

VICTIMS AND COURTS BILL: VICTIM NOTIFICATION SCHEME

I am pleased the Victims and Courts Bill will be placing the Victim Notification Scheme (VNS) onto a statutory footing. As I made clear at the Victims and Courts Bill Committee on 17 June, I support this initiative and it is very evident there is a real demand for this service.

Telephone Helpline

The proposed telephone helpline will also provide support to victims keen to find out information about the release of the offender. At the Bill Committee, Katie Kempen, CEO of Victim Support raised concerns about the proposed level of funding for the support line. Katie made the point that the line will quickly become more than just a conduit of information. She said operators should expect to field what she described as “casework” calls, which will require time and follow up work. I agree with her assessment and hope this has been factored into equation, otherwise there is a risk the helpline will be overwhelmed, with victims simply being unable to access the information and support they need.

Victim Notification Scheme

I have always taken a close interest in the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS), not least because I have been in the VCS for 17 years and have firsthand experience of it. I was less familiar with the VNS and arranged to meet with Dr Jacki Tapley to discuss her report, commissioned by MoJ, which evaluated its operation.

I was pleased to learn the take up rate for the VNS is higher than the VCS and that victims welcomed the support provided by Victim Liaison Officers. Many of those interviewed had a poor experience of the justice system up to that point and it is reassuring to hear that the VNS is being so well received. Due to the repeated nature of the offences and the high risk of further harm, these victims are keen to receive information about the release date and licence conditions to help them make plans for their own safety and protection.

However, her report highlighted a number of concerns, which reflected both my own personal experience of the VCS and feedback given to me by other victims.

Dr Tapley's report and this Bill should provide a welcome opportunity to review the operation of both the VCS and the VNS with a view to implementing systemic change.

Delays

A key difference between the VCS and the VNS is that for many victims in the VCS, there is a significant custodial sentence to be served, meaning that release is not imminent. This is not the case for victims in the VNS. To implement the VNS effectively, cases must be responded to as a priority, information gathered quickly and initial contact with the victim made as soon as possible.

However, Dr Tapley highlights delays caused by both internal and external factors. Can you tell me how we are proposing to monitor timeliness and what steps are being taken to identify causes of delay so that they can be addressed.

In her report, Dr Tapley concludes that having the VLU directly request victim referrals from the WCU is the most effective way of ensuring eligible VNS victims are identified and contacted within the target times. Does the Department agree with her analysis and if so, are steps being taken to implement this suggestion?

Information sharing

A key issue of concern is the delay in sharing information. As Dr Tapley points out, timely and accurate sentencing information is an essential starting point for the VNS process if target dates are to be achieved. Not all practitioners have access to the same digital systems, resulting in patchy, inconsistent, and inaccurate information. Her report highlights that WCUs and VLOs do not have access to magistrates' and Crown Court digital systems, which limits the availability of essential information. I am keen to know what steps are being taken to address this barrier to sharing critical information between agencies.

Date of Release

Limitations around what information the VLO can provide is causing victims unnecessary anxiety and concern. Whilst VLOs can tell the victim the intended week of release, they cannot state the actual date until after the release has taken place, unless there is an overriding public protection reason to do so. VLOs are also not allowed to tell the victim which area or part of the country the offender will be living in. I have had cases with individual victims where we have been told the is living a significant distance from the victim but, frustratingly, my team and I were unable to share this information with the victim.

These issues can cause victims significant distress and anxiety. It would seem the GDPR rights of the offender are considered to be more important than the peace of mind of the victim. I hope we can look at these matters again to consider how we might redress the balance.

On a related matter, many victims are keen to understand what offending related programmes the offender has undertaken in custody and how he has responded. Again, in cases where the offender has responded well, this can give some peace of mind. At present, this information cannot be shared with victims, and I should be grateful if this could be reviewed.

Exclusion zones

Whilst victims can request an exclusion zone, preventing the offender from entering a specific area where the victim resides, as set out above, VLOs cannot state which area the offender is living in. This essentially traps victims in the exclusion zone, by not knowing where else is safe to travel or which areas to avoid.

I understand Ministers are looking at this to see whether it would be lawful to place a restriction zone on the offender, so that they are limited to one area or part of the country, instead of the victim. I welcome this initiative and would be grateful for an update on progress. I know it would be welcomed by victims as support services.

I look forward to receiving your reply. As these issues are of interest to so many victims, I am placing a copy of this letter on my website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that ends in a small dot.

Baroness Newlove LLD (hc) DCL
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales