

## SPEECH FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE PCC EVENT ON PARTNERSHIP: 9 MAY 2013

### Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I am very pleased to be here. A key priority for me as Victims' Commissioner is to work with all Police and Crime Commissioners. PCCs are in a unique position to drive through the changes needed to improve services for victims and witnesses. And I want to make sure this is reflected in all Police and Crime Plans.

I am very impressed with the work you have already done through the strategic need assessment to ensure that you get this right.

### Protect and prevent

Protecting vulnerable members of the community and preventing them from becoming victims of crime is central to my vision. I believe this should be a key factor in the delivery of local policing plans. In many cases there are several missed opportunities to safeguard individuals before they fall victim to crime. We often take action too late.

Tim Winsor, Chief Inspector of Constabulary, has spoken recently about the importance of crime prevention and the protection of victims and the considerable cost savings in such an approach.

Early interventions send out a powerful message. They tell victims – and offenders – that certain behaviours are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The victims involved in your strategic needs assessment spoke of how important that is. Coupled with rehabilitative measures to prevent further offending, it is key to sustainable long term change.

I have seen what can be achieved when criminal justice agencies and communities join forces and work together to address early offending behaviour and agree appropriate remedies. It can lead to the creation of long term and cost -effective solutions.

### Working with communities

Because achieving justice is not just important for victims and perpetrators. It is also important that communities see justice being done.

The criminal justice system should be a core part of our communities. People need to feel that the system is there for them – whenever they

need it - and works on behalf of them. They should be fully involved in the delivery of your Police and Crime Plan so they have a stake in how they're policed, how crimes are prioritised and dealt with, how perpetrators are punished and how victims and witnesses are supported and protected.

PCCs can play an increasing role in making sure that happens. You may be aware of plans to revamp community impact statements so they can be used by PCCs to make courts aware of crimes that pose particular problems in their areas and their impact on local communities. I think this is a great idea. Who better to speak for people in court than those elected to serve them?

### Victims and witness feeling part of the process

From next year PCCs will also be responsible for commissioning the bulk of victims' services and ensuring they respond to the needs of their communities. I am a great advocate of this approach. You are best placed to understand your community, the nature of crimes victims suffer and the support and help they might need. You only have to look at the services currently operating in your area to get a feel for what might be required. And I don't just mean the bigger statutory and voluntary agencies. There will be small grass roots organisations working to support particular groups of people who have sprung up in response to specific needs.

I have seen the outstanding services that such organisations struggle on a daily basis to provide with very limited resources. I'm sure you will find them doing similar work in your community and achieving amazing things with little or no recognition. This is your chance to shine a light on the great work they are doing.

You have a golden opportunity here to map out the support and expertise already available and to fully assess what works for your community and what further resources are needed. It's a good time to engage with local people who can work with you, and help you make a real difference to the lives of those blighted by crime.

For too long government and national voluntary and statutory agencies having been telling us what victims and witnesses need. And they clearly haven't always got it right. Victims and witnesses can speak for themselves and it's time we started listening to them.

In fact that is what victims are always telling me - what they need most from criminal justice agencies is to be listened to. They want their concerns - and what has happened to them - taken seriously. They want people to understand how the crime has affected them. In short

they want to be seen as a human being. I know how devastating it is to be at the very lowest point in your life and lost in a system which treats you as a case file rather than a person.

Victims need to feel part of the criminal justice process and have some control over their journey through the system - not left to watch on the sidelines while so-called professionals and experts make decisions about their cases. They need a conversation with those who can help and support them. An honest conversation which explains what they are up against and tells them frankly when they cannot have what they are asking for. And they need to be given choices – real choices – about how and when they are contacted and what kind of services they receive.

### Getting victim services right

I hope you are all aware of the consultation on the Victims' Code which closes tomorrow. The draft as it currently stands is designed to ensure that agencies have more flexibility to focus on those victims who are in most need. I fully support this. We must move away from a one size fits all approach – particularly when it comes to the provision of services.

But at the same time, I don't believe that the vulnerability of victims should be defined by crime types. Victims are not categories; they are people who should be assessed based on their own individual situation and needs.

We have to stop looking in text books for the answers. We have to stop assuming we know what victims need and start asking them what they want. That is why it is important that services are commissioned locally by PCCs who understand the community they live in and the nature of the crimes they suffer.

If the criminal justice system fails to support victims properly, if it fails to provide them with adequate care, then we risk harming them further. They can be re-victimised by the very system supposedly there to protect them.

I am not a psychologist but I know that many victims are likely to suffer post traumatic stress. I have been there myself. I understand what it's like to have your world turned on its head. You no longer feel safe. In order to recover you need to make sense of what's happened to you. You know that life has changed irrevocably but you need to believe that you can - and will - be safe again.

A good experience within the criminal justice system can help you to come to terms with what has happened to you and put it into perspective. It can be part of your recovery.

A bad experience on the other hand can hinder your recovery and interfere with the normal grieving process. It can feed your anger and frustration and make you feel even more powerless and afraid. The victims involved in your strategic needs assessment spoke of the need for proactive support so they didn't feel they were left "high and dry" or "kept in the dark".

I did not have the best experience as a victim and neither did my daughters. Those parts which were good were good because of the people providing the services. They managed to support and help us, in spite of the failings of the system.

I became the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales because I want to change that. I want to champion those who do a good job, challenge those who don't and make sure that all victims get the support they deserve.

Because with the right support victims can stop being victims; they can become survivors. They may eventually feel strong enough to report the offences against them and cope with the ordeal of going to trial. If you invest a little more in victims, you will get a lot more back.

I know the system isn't perfect – far from it. I know that victims face delays and anxiety and confusion before their case even gets to court. But where victims are faced with these difficulties, we must ensure that they are not facing them alone. And we must put in place the support and protection they need to help them cope and recover from the crime whilst they are waiting for the trial.

Unfortunately it is at trial that we often fail victims and witnesses. For many victims the trial is not simply part of the process, it is the focus of their lives for months – sometimes years. They cannot move on until it's over. So we really need to get this right. It is so important that the CPS, the courts and the judiciary are fully engaged in your local support plans for victims and witnesses.

You may have heard talk of national proposals to promote greater use of trial plans and I'm a great supporter of this. The police and other services need to work with the court and the judiciary to plan a victim's appearance at trial. They must ensure they are properly prepared, know what to expect when they get there and are able to ask for the support they need.

Victims have a right to know how long they are likely to be in court, and what types of questions they will be asked. I'm tired of hearing from judges and lawyers that such preparation could be considered as coaching the victim. This isn't coaching – it's about treating a victim with basic human decency.

Victims also need some reassurance that they will not bump into the offender of his/her family in court and will have a safe place to wait. But this is sometimes difficult to achieve in older court buildings. If this is the case in your area then I ask you all to please work together to find a way around it.

Don't let the good work and time invested in supporting victims and witnesses unravel when the case reaches court.

And please don't forget about the need for support post-trial. In my view there is a national gap in services at this stage. When that court case is over, the sentence has been passed and the FLO has gone home, we need to consider what should be in place to support victims who are left alone to pick up the pieces and somehow get on with their lives.

In particular, we need to ensure that any further contact with the criminal justice system is properly managed. I have been asked by the Secretary of State, Chris Grayling, to conduct a review of the Probation Service Victim Contact Scheme. It's not surprising that I have found the need for improvements. Probation Services are new to this area of work as their focus has of course always been on offenders. But I know there are many individuals out there keen to improve the service they provide to victims. I have made a number of recommendations which are currently with Ministers. I hope you will work with me to ensure that they are delivered at the local level.

## Holding agencies to account

Where things do go wrong for victims, they need clarity about who is responsible and who can put it right. Where it cannot be put right they need to be able to complain and have their complaint taken seriously and acted upon. It is often the case that victims want something done when things go wrong simply because they don't want other victims to suffer in the same way. And criminal justice agencies should want the same. How can we possibly improve our services if we are not open to feedback?

The Victims Code consultation aims to ensure that every victim knows what they are entitled to expect from the criminal justice system and some means of redress when they don't get this.

I believe that PCCs are in the best position to monitor the effectiveness of the Code in their areas. They should be able to hold local CJS agencies to account if they do not comply with the Code. They should be ensuring that all agencies have a transparent and effective complaints procedure which is available to the public and clearly sets out the standards of service people should expect. Where a complaint cannot be resolved at agency level, PCCs should be prepared to adjudicate and address any wider issues involved.

## Ensuring agencies work together effectively

I believe that the introduction of PCCs provides us with the opportunity to make real and lasting improvements to victim and witness care. I want to help make that happen and I know you all do too. That's why you're here. But these changes won't happen unless all agencies work effectively together.

I'm familiar with the difficulties – the cultural differences between the police, CPS, the courts, the judiciary and probation. But we owe it to victims to overcome these.

So let's talk about these problems and get them out in the open. I'm very keen to promote discussion. Not only discussion about what victims and witnesses need from agencies. But also discussion about what agencies need from each other.

It is so important that criminal justice agencies - and indeed all other statutory and voluntary agencies providing services to victims - talk to each other. It's not just sound business sense; it improves services in so many ways.

If organisations talk to each other, they begin to speak the same language and start working to the same objectives and performance measures. If agencies understand what other agencies do, they can understand better how they fit in the process of support for a victim or witness on their journey through the criminal justice system. They can work together to identify duplication in services and gaps in services. They can learn from one another, share ideas, discuss solutions and exchange good practice.

Before you know it you have a number of organisations working in cohort to provide a seamless transition for victims and witnesses from one service to another.

PCCs are in a unique position to bring agencies together and make this happen. Today is a very good start. Differences in your work cultures should not be an obstacle to change – they should inspire change. They should make you question and re-think the way you do things and encourage innovation and new ways of working.

### Conclusion

You are the key to a better future for victims and witnesses. You have the opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of the people you serve. But opportunities also bring challenges. Seeing you all here today and the many agencies you represent, I'm confident you will rise to those challenges. And of course you will always have my support and the support of my team. I wish you every success and look forward to working with you in the future.