

Annual report 2010 – 2011

Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses

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Introduction:

The post of the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses was created by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and amended by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. The post was filled by open competition and Louise Casey CB took office in May 2010. The statutory duties of the Commissioner are that they:

- promote the interests of victims and witnesses;
- take such steps as she considers appropriate with a view to encouraging good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses; and
- keep under review the operation of the code of practice for victims.

The Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses is required to make an annual report to the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor, copied to the Home Secretary and the Attorney General.

The Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses is an arms length public body, whose funding in the main is provided by the Ministry of Justice. The Commissioner has a small team of 9 people who are on secondment from other organisations.

Louise Casey CB has a background working in homelessness, poverty, social exclusion, crime and justice.



Foreword by Louise Casey CB, Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses

It has been a privilege to serve as the first Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses over the last year and a half. It is a post that I know many victims themselves lobbied government hard for, and have rightly high expectations of the role. I hope that I and my team have gone some way to meeting those expectations over my time in post.

The post of Commissioner is the first statutory seat at the criminal justice table for a representative of victims and an acknowledgement that although there has often been talk that victims should be ‘at the heart of the Criminal Justice System’ this has historically been far from the truth of how they are actually viewed by and dealt with by that system. What I have found over my 18 months in office is that although the situation overall has improved for victims and witnesses, for those who need help the most, who have suffered the worst crimes against them and their family, progress hasn’t nearly been good enough.

Early on I set out why I considered victims to be the ‘poor relation’ in the Criminal Justice System. They are afforded few ‘rights’ as the system takes over to ‘process’ the guilt or otherwise of a defendant, and the very real needs of a victim or their families are often little more than an afterthought – with no real rights given, only promises and charters, and nowhere to go to complain if something goes badly wrong.

For example, not giving victims even basic information about what is going on in their case illustrates perfectly how they are not treated as if they are integral to the system of justice, although they can often be the people who bear all the effects of a crime and are key in bringing an offender to justice. It cannot be right that, for example, a family may not be informed about an offender being released until they bump into him at their local shops. Or not be told about an appeal taking place until they read about it in the newspaper. While offenders have statutory rights, it seems that victims get codes, charters, guidance and warm words.

There is a hard-headed rationale for treating victims and witnesses properly. Not just out of a sense of decency and compassion, but also a recognition that our entire system of justice is based on victims and witnesses not taking the law into their own hands, but trusting the legal system and the state to seek justice on their behalf – and with their help. We ask them to come to court, to give evidence and, ultimately, stop

crime happening to someone else. But we owe them more in return than we seem presently prepared to give. I believe we owe victims and witnesses some basic protections and rights, and that is why I have called for a victims' law.

My Review into the Needs of Families Bereaved by Homicide made clear the major negative long-term effects on families of losing a loved one in this way, and also how the criminal justice system is currently not only getting it wrong in how it treats them, but can actually make their grief worse. Although most victims and their families have no formal status in proceedings, their legitimate interest in what happens and in the outcome of the justice process must be formally recognised.

The review sets out the clearest case possible on why there is a need for a victims' law, and I am pleased to say that politicians seem to be giving it proper consideration. There is still much that needs to be done in regard to some of the other recommendations made within the review, but I have been hugely heartened by the progress that has been made so far, the additional funding made available by Government and by the willingness of the Crown Prosecution Service to consider change.

I am not ignoring that in times of financial pressures on budgets I am asking for more and better services for victims, but I believe that we still pay too much attention to providing a universal service of support when not everyone needs one. And we do this at the expense of those who are in dire need of practical and emotional long-term support.

I am now leaving the post of Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses and hope that I have built a solid platform for what comes next. To be frank, it has been one of the most challenging jobs that I have undertaken in terms of the very great human suffering that I came across, the unmet need that runs alongside it, and the frustration of many victims that their voices are not heard.

I have met hundreds of victims since taking office. It has been striking to me that the views of those who have suffered are often dismissed as perhaps being unpalatable, with hard line attitudes to punishment. But this has not been the case at all – I have been struck by the enormous courage and dignity in the face of the most appalling acts of violence.

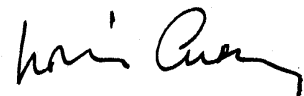
My team and I over the last eighteen months have, however briefly, been shown a glimpse of some of the worst acts of human nature, the plight of those who have had loved ones taken from them and a response from the 'system' that, however well meant, has often fallen short.

I have also witnessed the very best of human behaviour – in those people who after tragedy has hit them and their family, devote their lives to campaigning to make things better and supporting other people who are going through the same terrible experience. This has been truly inspiring.

I want to thank everyone who has worked with me and my team over the last year and a half, including the many staff I have met, both paid and unpaid, across the Criminal Justice System and third sector, who have gone the extra mile.

I am also very grateful to the Ministry of Justice for the ongoing support and funding provided to enable me to carry out my work.

Finally, I hope that the improvements that need to be made continue until we have a justice system fair to all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Casey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Louise Casey CB
Commissioner for Victims & Witnesses

31st October 2011

Understanding the landscape for victims and witnesses

The Poor Relation – June 2010

In her inaugural speech and accompanying report entitled 'The Poor Relation', the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses set out the landscape of the Criminal Justice System in regard to the position and role of victims and witnesses within it.

The Commissioner began by setting out why the treatment of victims matters to the administration of justice. The rule of law depends on a victim not seeking revenge or retribution themselves, but stepping aside for the state to prosecute the individual as an offence against the Crown. And by supporting someone to come forward, report and give evidence in court, the victim is also thereby helping to stop that offender targeting others.

The Commissioner outlined how victims policy has developed significantly in the last 15 to 20 years, with many developments to improve the position of victims and give them greater status in the criminal justice system.

However, despite this, the situation was not good enough. Despite all the changes in the system, and indeed the range of initiatives, the raft of pledges, codes, charters, guidance notes and performance targets, to say that 'victims are at the heart of the justice system', is simply inaccurate.

The Commissioner described victims and witnesses as the 'poor relation' in regard to where the money is spent, where services are focused and how fairness and justice is pursued; sentencing policy has become so complicated that few victims or members of the public can understand it; there is no set of basic victims' rights, no right of review or proper accountable complaints system; there is too much inconsistency in delivery of support services and the changes that have been made do not add up to the sum of their parts.

She also set out how we needed to target what little resources were available to victims on those who really needed help, and not waste that resource trying to offer help to the 80% of victims who research shows do not want or need support.

Using resources better

Ending the Justice Waiting Game – November 2010

With this report the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses called for some common-sense procedural changes to the justice system that would speed up the processing of court cases to the benefit of victims and witnesses.

She called for the end to the automatic right for a defendant to opt for a trial by jury for petty crime cases, which can result in Crown Courts being clogged up, and also a

halt to the practice of awarding reductions in sentence for defendants entering guilty pleas at the door of the court, causing distress for victims.

The suggestions reflected a study by HMIC into the criminal justice system which found that getting defendants to court quickly and better case management will reduce late guilty pleas, so improving victims' satisfaction and saving around £40million a year.

Ending the Justice Waiting Game also highlighted other findings which included:

- In 50,000 cases each year where a person charged has pleaded not guilty, they change their plea on the day of the trial, which costs approximately £5million in wasted preparation costs by the Crown Prosecution Service alone;
- Over 60 percent of Crown Court business is taken up with cases that could be taking place in a Magistrates Court, despite the fact that the average daily cost of running a trial in a Magistrates Court is £800 compared to £1700 in a Crown Court, and that Magistrates Courts are running under capacity; and
- Two thirds of defendants (63 percent) who choose to opt for a Crown Court trial by jury actually plead guilty when they get to court, leaving the tax payer to pick up the extra costs.

Promoting the views of victims to Government

Throughout the first 18 months of being in post, the Commissioner has sought to garner and promote the views of victims. This has been done in many ways. The Commissioner has met with over 900 hundred victims and justice professionals. She has convened working groups of victims to help guide policy development and travelled throughout the country to meet people and hear their views.

Breaking the Cycle Green Paper – February 2011

The Secretary of State and the Ministry of Justice commissioned the Victims' Commissioner to draw together the views of victims in response to its Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*. Our consultation process revealed that the punishment, rehabilitation and sentencing of offenders are central to victims' concerns and experiences of justice, and victims have a range of views on these matters which they kindly shared with us.

As part of this consultation, victims of different sorts of crime who had been through the criminal justice system were brought together at an event in London organised by the Commissioner. This event and others undertaken as part of the consultation revealed important insights into the way the criminal justice system works or doesn't work for victims, and highlighted that this group are also more informed than the general public about criminal justice issues because of their own experience.

In addition to the consultation event, the Commissioner also held focus groups and undertook in-depth interviews with victims of crime to better understand their

experience of court, sentencing issues, victim personal statements and restorative justice (see later).

The Commissioner in her formal written response to the Green Paper set out how she strongly supported the new Government's efforts to improve the rehabilitation of offenders and shared the frustration that despite a strong rehabilitation emphasis within the criminal justice system there is such limited success at turning offenders' lives around. This matters to victims because they do not want another victim to suffer. But equally, crime should be met with appropriate punishment and offenders should pay back for their crimes – both to victims and to society. In this context, victims want to see a justice system that focuses on punishment and reparation as well as rehabilitation. And in that order.

This Green Paper fed views into the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill and the Commissioner welcomed the fact that many of the views she relayed on behalf of victims were taken heed of. This included the decision not to progress the 50% reductions on sentences for those people who plead guilty, and to ensure that proposed changes to bail arrangements took account of the protection of victims of domestic violence, and that it reflected concerns about changes to the indeterminate sentences for public protection.

The Commissioner also welcomed making prisons a place of work for criminals, and to pay towards victims' services from those earnings, toughening up community sentences, and the seizing of property if court imposed fines aren't paid. The Bill also proposed a new statutory responsibility for a sentence given out in court to be explained. We know that this is something that a number of victims and their families have found difficult in the past so this is to be welcomed – even though the detail of how this is implemented in practice is not yet entirely clear.

In her response, the Commissioner highlighted the importance for victims of the Victim Personal Statement (VPS) as part of the criminal justice process. She therefore welcomed the proposal to seek views on how to iron out issues of inconsistency in how they are used as part of the forthcoming victims' consultation, and she also commissioned and published new research on the value of the VPS (see later).

Sentencing report

The Commissioner carried out research with victims of crime who had recently experienced going to court, to understand their views on sentencing and the outcome of their case, and their views on proposals contained in the *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper.

The research contains important considerations for future policy and practice. It explores a victim's 'satisfaction' with the justice system, showing that while a victim may value the service and support they receive from criminal justice agencies and therefore feel 'satisfied' with the service, they may not feel that justice has been done in terms of the outcome of the case – in other words that justice has not been served

and their 'voice' has not been heard. It also reveals a much more nuanced view of sentencing than some may presume. On the whole, victims were not simply calling for tougher sentences and greater use of imprisonment, but a strong message that the punishment should be appropriate and proportionate to the crime. This research was published in October 2011.

Victim Personal Statement research

The Victim Personal Statement scheme (VPS) was introduced in October 2001 allowing victims to make a statement about how they have been affected by the crime. Professor Julian Roberts at the University of Oxford was commissioned by the Victims' Commissioner to undertake a systematic review of the research evidence on the use and value of victim personal statements both here and in other jurisdictions. The report was published in October 2011.

The findings reveal that victims have a strong desire to communicate to the court the impact the crime has had on them, and that victims who complete a VPS are more satisfied with the sentencing process than those that do not. It also found that sentencers find the VPS useful from the point of view of calibrating the seriousness of the offence and that the statements contain information that cannot be gleaned elsewhere.

Promoting victims views to Parliament/policy makers

The Commissioner has appeared before Parliament's Justice Committee to give evidence on victims issues, before the Committee scrutinising the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill and the Bill committee for the Police and Social Responsibility Bill to discuss Police and Crime Commissioners. She has also met various Government ministers and their shadows, and MPs with particular interest in victims' issues as matters of policy or because of constituency interests.

She has also given evidence to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's inquiry into disability-related harassment.

She has supported changes to the Bail Act whereby an appeal by the prosecution can be made if it is felt that bail has been wrongly given, as a result of the campaign led by the parents of Jane Clough. This has now received the public backing by the Director of Public Prosecutions, who has also committed to consulting on a change to policy guidance about whether families are actually consulted, rather than only informed, of charges of rape being laid on file – something the 'Justice for Jane' campaign has vociferously called for. This is a huge step forward and a tribute to the tenacity of Jane's parents.

She has also backed calls for a specific offence of stalking and better protection for victims of stalking, including training for police and others on stalking behaviour, and has given evidence to an all-party parliamentary inquiry into stalking.

The Commissioner has also called for changes to the disclosure of evidence rules so that victims in road death and road injury cases are more easily able to receive interim compensation payments to help meet some of the very significant costs arising from deaths and injuries of these kinds (see below under Help for Those Who Need It Most).

She has also supported calls for 'Clare's Law' whereby future victims of domestic violence can be warned about a perpetrator's past violent behaviour. The Home Office has issued a consultation on making this a reality.

Putting the plight of victims in the public spotlight

As part of her remit, the Commissioner has sought to promote victim and witness issues publicly in order that they are given a higher political profile and ultimately achieve reform and change. She has done this in many ways. She has had contact with numerous parliamentarians, she has given many speeches, as well as issuing reports and statements that have received good coverage in the media. Radio 4 ran an in-depth documentary about her role and the plight of families whose loved ones have been killed through violence. She has also featured in 2 ITV documentaries about criminal justice and victims and numerous press articles and television interviews. There was a large volume of coverage for her review of bereaved families' needs in broadsheets, tabloids, magazine and on broadcasts from the One Show to the Today Programme and Thought for the Day.

Help for those who need it most

Review into the Needs of Families Bereaved Through Homicide – June 2011

A major piece of work carried out by the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses and her team was a fundamental review into the treatment of families who have suffered the ultimate loss at the hands of criminals, but who often don't get the support, care or consideration they deserve.

The review included the largest ever survey of bereaved families and outlined the huge emotional and practical costs. Findings from the survey of 400 bereaved families included:

- more than 80 per cent of families suffered trauma-related symptoms;
- around 60 per cent had difficulty managing their finances;
- nearly 80 per cent of families waited longer than a month to bury their loved one;
- a quarter gained sudden responsibility for children;
- a quarter stopped working permanently; and
- over half respondents said that dealing with the criminal justice system was the most difficult issue to deal with apart from the bereavement itself.

Other research carried out for the review found the average cost of the homicide to

each family was £37,000, ranging from the costs of probate, to funerals to travel to court, to cleaning up the crime scene. The majority got no help with these costs and many were forced into debt.

The review called for a package of measures to be put in place to include a dedicated homicide caseworker offering help and advice on issues like housing and child care proceedings, access to trauma and bereavement counselling from approved providers and a national network of peer support groups that should be available to provide befriending and support for families.

It recommended more information and communication from the CPS as part of a guaranteed service to families bereaved by murder, manslaughter and culpable road death, better treatment of bereaved families in the courtroom, and an end to the scandal of families waiting long periods for the body to be returned to a family for burial.

The Commissioner also called for a national protocol governing the police's review of cases which remain unresolved, including how regularly they are reviewed and mandatory communication with the families concerned.

The review called for a Victims' Law to enshrine these entitlements and expectations. The Commissioner received a warm response to her review with the Bar Association calling it 'a wake up call'. The Commission is working on how to progress the proposals to put them into practice.

She also highlighted the need for specific help for those bereaved prior to the introduction of the National Homicide Service, the needs of families who have suffered homicide abroad and the importance of ensuring that families bereaved by culpable road death receive the same services as those bereaved by homicide as soon as resources become available.

Call for a Victims' Law

As part of her review above the Commissioner called for the creation of a Victims' Law. This would for the first time set out some basic 'rights' for victims and witnesses, where at the moment they have only pledges and charters with nowhere accessible and accountable to complain if things go wrong. Included in the Commissioner's proposals for a Victims' Law are:

- the release of a body by the coroner back to a family for burial within 28 days unless exceptional circumstances apply;
- a Criminal Practice Direction to ensure families are treated with dignity and respect during court proceedings;
- the right to information from the Crown Prosecution Service and to meet with the CPS lawyer at key stages of the legal process, including on convictions, acquittal or appeal;

- the right to sentencing remarks from judges in writing and trial transcripts at a minimal cost to families; and
- that families will be provided with an integrated package of help and support following the death and up until any trial and beyond.

Overall in response to the *Review into the Needs of Families Bereaved Through Homicide*, the Commissioner has been heartened by the reception of her proposals which include:

- The allocation of an additional £500k funding a year for three years for homicide including additional funding to ensure specialist trauma services and a network of peer support service are available to bereaved families
- The Crown Prosecution Service have now committed to a new guarantee for bereaved families which includes including meeting with barrister before the day of the trial
- The Judiciary are sympathetic to a Practice Direction and written sentencing remarks in homicide cases.
- There has been significant coverage of problems faced by bereaved families which has led to support from politicians across all parties for a Victims' Law.

Innovation in policy and Practice

The Restorative Justice project

Restorative Justice (RJ) schemes are often promoted as beneficial to victims, through giving them the chance to say how they have been affected by a crime, to get answers to questions, to hold offenders directly to account, and to express how they would like to see them make amends. However, many schemes labelled as RJ have tended to be offender-, rather than victim-, centred and too often the victim is sidelined, or an afterthought, in the process. The Commissioner has sought to explore more victim-centred approaches to RJ and has commissioned the RJ and mediation charity REMEDI, to pilot a victim-centred approach for adult victims of crime in South Yorkshire. The aim of the pilot is to start with the wishes of the victim, giving them an informed choice about their options by having a voice in the process.

Victims Advocates – March 2011

The Home Secretary allocated the Victims' Commissioner new funding of £1m to be spent across the country to ensure victims and witnesses are given a powerful local voice ahead of the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 2012. This welcome step followed on from the inclusion of a provision in the legislation that creates PCCs which says they must obtain "*the views of victims of crime in that area about matters concerning the policing of the area*". In Committee stage, the Minister Nick Herbert MP attributed this to the Government being 'urged' to do so by the Commissioner.

The Commissioner sought a partnership with Victim Support, the national charity for victims, who have then worked with the Commission to set up a network of advocates to:

- hear directly from victims and witnesses about their experiences through public meetings, links with victims' groups, surveys and discussions with residents in high crime areas;
- look at what is in place to help victims locally, whether victims can access these services and if all the victims that need help are getting it, particularly those who need it most;
- set out what needs to be done locally to better protect and support victims;
- make sure local crime and policing strategies reflect victims' needs and priorities, so that victims have a proper voice locally; and
- advise PCCs on local issues and victims' needs from their introduction in 2012.

This programme of work is ongoing.

Services and support

Services for Bereaved Families – September 2011

The Commissioner published a paper, supplementing her earlier report on the needs of families bereaved through homicide, which considers the services that try to respond to these families' often overwhelming levels of need. While the number of families affected by homicide may be relatively small, these families often develop multiple, complex and long-term needs, which often require specialist support and advocacy to overcome. Currently, the level and depth of demand is simply outstripping supply and there are insufficient resources available to expand.

The paper acknowledges that the landscape of support services for bereaved families has improved dramatically. The Homicide Service has developed considerably and the Ministry of Justice's announcement of an additional £500,000 per year for the next three years following the Commissioner's review should make a real impact. However, this will simply not be enough, and the Commissioner has proposed a number of measures to ensure that we can guarantee these families a minimum level of support in their time of need. This support should include four key components: a dedicated casework service which advocates for the family, specialist trauma support, specialist legal advice and peer support free at the point of demand. These services should be integrated so that a family does not have to search around themselves for these services but can be referred by their caseworker. While these services are rightly provided by different organisations according to their specialism, it is vital that services work collaboratively so that families can receive a more integrated service than is currently provided. Children bereaved by homicide should also receive age-appropriate services tailored to their needs.

Advocacy training

In line with the findings of the review that families need someone 'on their side' as they navigate their way through the criminal justice system, the Commission is currently developing an advocacy programme for those working with bereaved families which will provide training on the criminal justice system, its operation and what victims and their families can and should expect.

The training will take place in early 2012 and will be provided to all Homicide Service caseworkers and those peer support groups who are regularly called upon to advocate for bereaved families.

Those who attend the two day training will come away equipped with the knowledge that they will need to properly support vulnerable families through the maze of legal and other issues that they are faced with in the weeks and months after the death of their loved one.

Funding clinic

As part of the Commissioner's in-depth look into services that are offered to bereaved families, she identified the very strong role that peer support organisations offer. However it became apparent that there was no easily-accessible funding stream to allow the proper long-term operation of these groups who often had to rely on donations or bits of money from one month to the next. It became clear that these people were also often ill-equipped for the often complicated and arduous task of applying for funding, and that the situation of lack of funds would only become worse when budgets become even tighter.

The Commissioner used a small part of her budget to set up and pilot a funding clinic programme. The programme included the provision of dedicated one-to-one time with a funding specialist for ten groups and organisations that offer peer services to those bereaved by murder and manslaughter.

These funding specialists had decades of experience of looking at and considering funding applications including for nationally renowned organisations such as Comic Relief. They met with the groups individually, assessed past failed applications and assisted the groups in navigating the funding landscape and helped to ensure that future applications were as strong as possible.

The reaction from those who have received the support has been hugely positive:

"Our advisor told us if he was reading our application as a potential funder he would not have got to the second page – but he knew from meeting us that we knew our business – we were just {rubbish} at putting in applications."

The advisor "opened our eyes to other funding sources and showed us doors we could open."

“She didn’t just take the bid away and do it for us – it was all about learning about what bids should be about”.

The package of support also included a training day where groups that had participated in the one to one sessions came together to learn more about improving the quality of their funding applications.

Although it is still very early days following the end of the pilot project, the funding clinic has more than paid for itself in terms of successful applications for funding.

Acknowledgements: to those who have helped the Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses.

We would like to thank the individuals and families that have taken the time to write to, meet with and talk to the Commissioner since she took up office in May 2010. These frank, open and honest discussions have shaped the work programme and priorities of the Commission and we are truly grateful to all those we have met.

We have worked with many victims groups and organisations that freely and generously offered advice and direction and acted as a sounding board for us in the development of our programme of work this year.

Thanks in particular goes to:

Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA)
ASSIST Trauma Care
Brake
Cardiff School of Medicine and Vale University Health Board/NICE Chair
Cassandra Learning Centre
Chickenshed
Commission for Victims and Survivors – Northern Ireland
Compassionate Friends
CRUSE
Damilola Taylor Trust
Escaping Victimhood
Families Fighting for Justice, including Our Lost Love Years (OLLY)
FLACSS (Family Liaison and Co-ordination of Police Support Services)
Jimmy Mizen Foundation
Justice After Acquittal
Kids Taskforce
Knife Crimes.Org/Victims Advocates
Lucy Blackman Trust / Missing Abroad
Marchioness Disaster group
Mothers Against Murder and Aggression (MAMAA)
Mothers Against Violence (North East)

National Victims Association
NPIA
NSPCC
Phoenix Chief Advocates
Plymouth SARC
Probation Victims Network
Protection Against Stalking
Remedi
Road Victims Trust
RoadPeace
Robert Levy Foundation
SAMM Merseyside
SAMM National
SAMM Northern Ireland
Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust
Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM) Abroad
Support and Care After Road Death & Injury (SCARD)
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust
The New Year Shooting Memorial Trust
The Terry Booker Foundation
The Tom Easton Flavasum Trust
Through Unity
Victim Support (England & Wales)
Victim Support (Northern Ireland)
Victim Support Homicide Service
Victims' Voice
Voice UK
Why Me?
Winston's Wish

The Commissioner and her team were invited to participate in many key events over the year and were pleased to have been part of the following occasions:

AAFDA AGM - January 2011
ACPO Family Liaison Officers Annual Conference – June 2011
Better Trials Unit – Supporting Vulnerable and intimidated Victims and Witness
Conference – March 2011
Annual Victims and Witnesses Conference – October 2010
Families Fighting for Justice Conference - May 2011
JAA Families meetings September 2010 and September 2011
Justice for Victims Annual Memorial Service - December 2010
Kids Taskforce Gala Dinner – December 2010
MAMAA National conference March 2011
National Victims Association Annual Conference July 2010 and July 2011
NVA Memorial Services Feb 2011
SAMM Abroad Network Meetings Feb 2011 and September 2011
Service for Peace to celebrate the life of Jimmy Mizen – May 2010

Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group conference - November 2010
 South East Victim Support Conference – October 2010
 Thames Valley Young Victims of Crime Conference – November 2010
 Victim Support Nottinghamshire Annual Review – July 2011
 Victim Support Volunteer Awards – November 2010

The Commissioner and her team have also undertaken numerous visits across the country to meet with victims and witnesses and organisations supporting them.

Date	Location	Visit
12/5/10	Liverpool	Making Waves Project Merseyside Victim Support Merseyside Witness Care Unit
13/5/10	Tower Hamlets	Community Safety/Hate Crime Team
13/5/10	East London	Victim Support local team
13/5/10	Barking	Victim Support local team
17/5/10	Nottingham	Victim Support local team
20/5/10	Blackpool	Lancashire Police Aquamarine and Awaken teams Blackpool MARAC Lancashire Victim Support local team
25/5/10	Rotherham	Rotherham Witness Service Rotherham Local Authority Rotherham Victim Support local team
25/5/10	Barnsley	Local Authority and voluntary sector partners
26/5/10	Leeds	Leeds Crown Court
26/5/10	West Yorkshire	Victim Support local team Bradford Crown Court Bradford Witness Service
27/5/10	Birmingham	Birmingham Community Safety Partnership Victim support local team Birmingham Women's Aid
3/6/10	Islington	Highbury Magistrates Court
7/6/10	South Shields	National Victims' Association
7-8/6/10	Newcastle	Criminal Justice System working project Specialist Domestic Violence courts Survivors Engagement Empowerment and Development (The SEED Project)
11/6/10	Liverpool	Merseyside Witness Care Unit
14/6/10	London	Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)
16/6/10	Nottingham	Young Witness project
17/6/10	Birmingham	Women's Aid and Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)
22/6/10	Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough Community Safety Partnership
23/6/10	Middlesbrough	My Sister's Place Barnardos

25/6/10	Bristol	Women's Support Network Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA)
28/6/10	Bristol	Next Link Missing Link
1/7/10	Liverpool	Justice After Acquittal (JAA) Families Fighting for Justice SAMM Merseyside
9/7/10	Newham	East Homes
14/7/10	Camden	London Probation
15/7/10	London	London Serious Youth Violence Board
12/08/10	London	Scotland Yard; Met police
16/8/10	Birmingham	Support After Murder & Manslaughter (SAMM) National
17/8/10	Thame	Escaping Victimhood
18/8/10	London	'Belong'
19/8/10	Cheltenham	Winston's Wish
20/8/10	Rugby	ASSIST Trauma Care
24/8/10	Blackpool	Lancashire Police
25/8/10	London	Mothers Against Murder and Aggression (MAMAA)
27/8/10	London	Through Unity
21/9/10	London	Tavistock Centre
27/9/10	Manchester	Victim Support Homicide Team
28/9/10	Manchester	Greater Manchester Criminal Justice Board (CJB)
29/9/10	Bristol	Probation visit
18/10/10	Oxford	Youth Offending Service Thames Valley Police
22/10/10	Thames Valley	Thames Valley Youth Partnership
30/10/10	Plymouth	Young Witness project
7/10/10	London	Cardiff and Vale Healthcare Trust National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) chair
11/10/10	London	Victim Support Homicide Service
20/10/10	London	Roadpeace
21/10/10	Warrington	St Georges Healthcare Trust
26/10/10	Cardiff	Victim Support Wales
3/11/10	Birmingham	SLCNG Annual conference
11/11/10	London	Met Police Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
12/10/10	Cardiff	Victim Support Cardiff & Vale Healthcare Trust
14/10/10	Hull	Hull Young Witness Service and Hull Young Victim Project
18/11/10	London	National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA)
22-23/11/10	Northern Ireland	Youth Justice Agency Coroners Service for Northern Ireland Commission for Victims and Survivors

		NSPCC Northern Ireland
		SAMM Northern Ireland
29/11/10	London	NPIA Witness Intermediary Scheme
30/11/10	London	Royal Free Hospital
1/11/10	Birmingham	West Midlands Police & ACPO
2/12/10	Birmingham	Birmingham South West Group
13/12/10	Sussex	Coroner for West Sussex
13/12/10	Hampshire	NPIA
7/1/11	Bristol	Co-op legal services
7/1/11	Swindon	Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA)
18/1/11	London	Child Victims of Crime Trust
25/1/11	London	Road Victims Trust
2-3/2/11	Lancashire	Liverpool Crown Court
		Lancashire CPS
		Prison service
3/2/11	Birmingham	SAMM National
4/2/11	London	MAMAA
8/2/11	Birmingham	SAMM National
10/2/11	Swindon	AAFDA
12/2/11	London	SAMM Abroad
14/2/11	London	Brake
15/2/11	London	Roadpeace
16/2/11	Thame	Escaping Victimhood
17/2/11	Birmingham	Probation Service Victims network
18/2/11	Liverpool	SAMM Merseyside
21/2/11	South Shields	NVA
22/2/11	London	Victim Support Homicide Service
23/2/11	London	Lucy Blackman Trust
24/2/11	London	SAMM abroad
24/2/11	London	Chickenshed
26/2/11	Newcastle	NVA
2/3/11	Cheltenham	Winston's Wish
3/3/11	Hertfordshire	Road Victims Trust
4/3/11	Newham	Local Authority Victim Conference
4/3/11	Leicester	JAA
9/3/11	Richmond	CRUSE Bereavement Care
10/3/11	Sheffield	Remedi
15/3/11	London	Kids Taskforce
22/3/11	London	Met Police
23/3/11	Swindon	AAFDA
24/3/11	York	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
25/3/11	Bristol	Victim Support Homicide Service
30/3/11	Liverpool	Families Fighting for Justice
		Our Lost Love Years (OLLY)
31/3/11	Liverpool	SAMM Merseyside
19/4/11	London	Victim Support national
20/4/11	London	Remedi

10/5/11	London	Victim Support Homicide Service
11/5/11	London	Met Police
18/5/11	Liverpool	Families Fighting for Justice
1/6/11	Colchester	Knife Crimes.org
16/6/11	London	Victim Support national
19/7/11	Sheffield	Remedi
21/7/11	London	Victim Support national
23/7/11	South Shields	NVA
27/7/11	Leytonstone	Cassandra Learning Centre
3/8/11	London	Scotland Yard; MET police
4/8/11	Swindon	AAFDA
23/8/11	Nottingham	Victim Support local team
25/8/11	Liverpool	Victim Support local team Merseyside Witness Care Unit FFJ SAMM Merseyside
2/9/11	London	JAA
7/9/11	Birmingham	SAMM National Victim Support local team
10/9/11	Portishead, nr Bristol	SAMM Abroad
14/9/11	London	Remedi
15/9/11	London	Victim Support local team
16/9/11	Swindon	AAFDA
24/10/11	London	Victim Support national

Correspondence to the Commissioner:

The Commissioner draws on the correspondence that people send, to help inform work priorities and the perspective of that work. We would like to thank the many people that have written to us to share their views and experiences of the system; their insight and perspective has been invaluable.

From April 2010 to October 2011, the Commission received correspondence from over 300 people sharing their views and experiences and, often, seeking help and advice. The vast majority of these emails and letters were from members of the public, of which families bereaved by homicide made up the single largest 'group'.

The Commissioner received many pieces of correspondence from victims and witnesses who have had very difficult or bad experiences of what happened to them in the Criminal Justice System post the crime being committed. This may largely be because the complaints system for victims is not satisfactory – there is no real and proper route of complaint when things go wrong. The Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses is however not allowed by law to intervene in individual cases, or take up complaints on an individual's behalf, and can only seek to listen and suggest policy change on the back of what she learns.

The single subject raised most often by victims in correspondence with the Commissioner was dissatisfaction with the Victim Contact Scheme, which provides support and information on issues regarding prisoners' parole hearings and release, a scheme operated by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) – for example not being informed about a prisoner's release or change in license conditions. Indeed the sense of a general lack of access to information from the Criminal Justice System was a common thread in the public correspondence. Other prominent issues raised were unhappiness with sentences seen as too lenient, the probation and parole process itself, the financial impact of the crime on victims, and concerns over the coronial/post-mortem process – for example delays with the release of a loved one's body for the funeral.

Financial:

2010/11

Original budget:	£1.4m
Final spend:	£882,222

Main areas of expenditure:

Payroll costs:	£820,541
Travel:	£22,160*
Hotels:	£2,498
Printing/postage/ office expenditure:	£12,870
Office set up costs:	£9,228
Projects/events/ conferences:	£8,809

Hospitality and gifts:

The Commissioner or her team have accepted no hospitality or declarable gifts since she took up her post in May 2010 until the writing of this report.

* Vast majority of this was on rail travel (standard class), and includes paying expenses for crime victims and victims' groups to travel to London for meetings and consultative events.