

AAFDA - Minutes/Notes from AGM

Held on 7th January 2011 at Swindon Council Offices

Miriam Minty, Assistant Director of the Commission for Victims and Witnesses headed by Louise Casey

Introduced Louise Casey as very outcome focused. Louise makes personal contact with members of the public and the community.

The Government wanted a commissioner that would listen to victims, challenge services, command confidence and ensure that victims and witnesses have a voice. The Commission wants to encourage good practice and there have already been several reports prepared.

The Commissioner is a statutory role, first set out in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and amended in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. It is independent of Government.

The Victims' Commissioner- key duties

- Promote the interests of Victims and Witnesses
- Encourage good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses
- Keep the Victims' code under review
- Provide an annual report to Ministers
- Give advice to Ministers when required

What the Commissioner can and can't do

- Not responsible for providing services or funding
- By law can't take up individual cases
- Can learn from experience of cases and victims to influence policy
- Has the profile and experience to influence policy decisions
- Independent from government

Hard-hitting reasons

Part of the contract in which the victim does not seek retribution is that the State delivers an effective response on their behalf. In cases of serious crimes, there is a public protection imperative

Why has the Commission been set up?

The Commission is a team of 8 people and has been running since May 2010 covering England and Wales. The team has been talking to victims and their families around the country, victims organisations, public services, for example, criminal justice system units, judiciary and the Crown Prosecution Service. These meetings elicited, a number of unprecedented “jaw dropping” moments and helped form the Commission’s first report in July 2010, - “the Poor Relation”.

Despite many improvements and advancements for victims over the last 15 years, including the introduction of the Family Liaison Office, the Victims’ Code and the National Victim Service, it’s wrong to say that victims are at the heart of the Criminal Justice System.

From the Commission’s research they concluded that victims are not guaranteed to receive any of many potential contacts but may receive up to 30 when navigating criminal justice system after being a victim of crime.

For example:

The victim *may* be referred to Victims Support. They may receive a call from Victim Support. When the perpetrator has been charged, the victim is *most likely* to be contacted by the Police Witness Care Unit, and they *may* be put in touch with the Witness Service.

If the victim/witness has to spend a day in court, they *may be* met by a member of the CPS.

In violent, serious or sexual crime crimes where the offender is sentenced to more than 12 months they *may* get the help of a Victim Liaison Officer

There is a lot of work for all those participating in getting things right for victims both from statutory and voluntary sector partners.

What next?

Ken Clarke MP has tasked the Commission to focus on 2 issues:

1. Bereaved – review looking at the help and support given to families bereaved by murder, manslaughter and culpable road death .
2. Child Witnesses in an adult Court.