

Victims Taskforce

Terms of Reference

Last updated January 2019 – updates highlighted in yellow

Purpose

1. The terms of reference are made in relation to the Victims Taskforce established by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Lord Advocate to improve victims' experiences of the justice system in Scotland. Its ambition is to work as an action and outcomes focussed group to achieve this goal.
2. This requires all members and their organisations to commit to providing high-level strategic leadership, focussing on what members can do individually, in collaboration and collectively to improve victims experience.

Remit

3. The primary role of the Taskforce is to co-ordinate and drive action to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system, whilst ensuring a fair justice system for those accused of crime.
4. Part of the actions taken by the Taskforce to achieve this will be to monitor, support and facilitate the delivery of the following Programme for Government commitments **themed around strengthening the victim's voice in the Scottish Justice system. The Programme for Government commitments as stated are:**
 - Reduce and, where possible, eliminate the need for victims to have to retell their story to different organisations as they look for help, working with Victim Support Scotland and others.
 - Widen the range of serious crimes where the victim can make a statement to the court about how the crime has affected them, consulting on specific details by early 2019.
 - Ensure victims and their families have better information and greater support ahead of prison release arrangements.
 - Increase the openness and transparency of the parole system
 - Establish, by Spring 2019, a new support service for families bereaved by murder and culpable homicide
 - Improve the experience of victims of rape and sexual assault
5. The Taskforce will ensure existing and planned work streams are considered and implemented with an understanding of the perspective of victims and witnesses, ensuring that victims' voices are heard, their journey through the criminal justice system is streamlined where possible and wide-ranging support and information is available and accessible.

6. The Taskforce will have a specific focus on victims of sexual offences and will align with appropriate ongoing work and reviews.
7. The Taskforce will consider the victims experience throughout the whole justice system and including interaction with the court service and the particular issues, both logistical and procedural which are known to be sources of frustration or distress for victims and their families. Work on this will be carried out in close consultation with justice partners.
8. The Taskforce will also consider issues which arise for victims who engage and experience the Youth Justice System and, while recognising that those victims have restricted rights to case-specific information, should strive to ensure that their journey through the system is streamlined where possible and wide-ranging support and information about the Youth Justice System is available and accessible.
9. In all the work of the Taskforce, including the approach to engaging with victims and victim support organisations, inclusivity and diversity should be considered. This should include taking into account geographic accessibility.

Membership and Responsibilities

10. Membership is detailed in **Annex A**, current as of February 2019. Membership of the Taskforce will be at the invitation of the Scottish Government.
 - Members will demonstrate commitment to make a positive, practical, meaningful and lasting contribution to the work of the Taskforce whilst working with members to drive action to improve the experiences of all victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system.
 - Members will communicate with and provide feedback from their organisations and ensure regular communication with the Taskforce and other relevant stakeholders.
 - Members are expected to attend or dial-in to meetings. However, the substitution of a deputy is acceptable on the understanding that the deputy will provide a report on the meeting to the substantive member and the group they represent. Members submitting apologies for meetings, and who are unable to send a deputy, should notify the secretariat in advance.
 - All members will make a full declaration of interests. If a member is uncertain as to whether or not an interest should be declared, they should seek guidance from the chair.

Leadership and Links with Other Relevant Activity

11. Meetings will be conducted by the Co-Chairs.

12. To ensure that the work of the taskforce is informed and effective at making links to other relevant areas of activity, the Secretariat will ensure appropriate communication and co-ordination with the wide range of other organisations, activities and Programme for Government commitments relevant to improving the experiences of victims and witnesses of crime.
13. This includes but is not limited to the Chief Medical Officer's Taskforce to improve services for victims of rape and sexual assault; First Minister's Advisory council for Girls, Equally Safe Delivery Plan; the development of Scotland's first Restorative Justice Action Plan; consideration of the Barnhaus concept of trauma-informed services for child witnesses; progress of the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) Bill.
14. The Taskforce should specifically feed into the ongoing work around improving the process around the Standards of Service for Victims.
15. The Secretariat and relevant members will ensure regular updates on the work of the Taskforce are provided to the collaborative Justice Board.

Frequency of meetings

16. It is proposed that the Taskforce will meet quarterly throughout 2019 with the frequency of meetings revisited after the first year. The taskforce will be operational for the remainder of the current Parliament, to May 2021.

Secretariat

17. Secretariat support for the group will be provided by the Scottish Government Justice Directorate and the Lord Advocates office.

Annex A– Membership

Co-Chairs

- Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Humza Yousaf
- Lord Advocate, James Wolffe QC

Scottish Government

- Director of Justice, Neil Rennick
- Director of Children and Families, Michael Chalmers

Criminal Justice Sector Representation

- Crown Office and Prosecutor Fiscal – Crown Agent, David Harvie
- Police Scotland – ACC Crime and Protection, Gillian MacDonald
- Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service – Chief Executive, Eric McQueen
- Scottish Prison Service - Chief Executive, Colin McConnell
- Parole Scotland- Chair, John Watt
- Community Justice Scotland- Chief Executive, Karyn McCluskey
- Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration – Operational Development Manager, Pauline Proudfoot
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority – Chief Executive, Linda Brown
- Social Work Scotland –Vice President , Kathryn Lindsay
- Victim Support Scotland – Chief Executive, Kate Wallace
- Scottish Women’s Aid - Chief Executive, Marsha Scott
- ASSIST – Head of ASSIST and domestic abuse services, Mhairi McGowan
- Rape Crisis Scotland – Chief Executive, Sandy Brindley
- Victims Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland - Rotating member from this forum
- Children 1st – Chief Executive, Mary Glasgow
- Law Society of Scotland – Chief Executive, Lorna Jack
- Faculty of Advocates - Vice Dean, Angela Grahame
- Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research – Dr Margaret Malloch
- Victim representative, Lynn Burns