



Victim Support NI

Making justice victim-centred

A Victim Manifesto for Northern Ireland

No one likes to think they may one day be a victim of crime. Yet every year, around 93,000 people become victims of crime in Northern Ireland. For every number in that statistic, there is a person whose safety has been shattered, who may be dealing with trauma, and whose family and friends are worried about the person they love.

Once a crime is reported, victims are thrust into the criminal justice system, which they are often surprised to find treats them as mere witnesses to the crime. Many victims report frustration, exhaustion and revictimization as a consequence of engagement with a system that is adversarial and does not place their needs and experience at its centre.

The Department of Justice in its Victim & Witness Strategy has committed to making victims more central to the justice system, and we commend the work that is ongoing to make that a reality.

Our asks in this Manifesto are additional to the work that is already ongoing. These four innovative proposals, if implemented, could move us significantly closer to making a victim-centred justice system a reality, and get to grips with the changing landscape of crime and our society.



Ask 1

Broaden the scope of the Victim Charter and strengthen it to include the right to redress/remedy for victims of crime

Crime is a harm against society as well as a violation of the individual human rights of victims. The Victim Charter for NI sets out a range of entitlements that victims of crime can expect to receive if they engage in the Criminal Justice system. The rights, support and services available to victims should not be dependent on the filing of a complaint by a victim nor should it only be confined to a victim's engagement with Criminal Justice agencies.

Despite implementation in 2015, the Victim Charter still remains largely unknown amongst victims and criminal justice professionals with no right to formal redress/remedy where rights are not met. In an environment where the fair trial rights of defendants are paramount the rights of victims often face opposition or resistance and the entitlements of victims under the Charter can be overlooked with little consequence.

We want to see:



The expansion of victim entitlements and support beyond the Criminal Justice arena.



A strengthening of the redress available to victims if their Victim Charter rights are not upheld.



Ask 2

Provide financial redress for victims financially disadvantaged by crime

No one asks to be a victim of crime. To then be financially disadvantaged because of that crime adds insult to injury and trauma. We've spoken to victims left struggling to replace burnt out children's prams, destroyed vehicles, or being impacted by employment lost due to time out of work.

We want to see:



A Victim Fund to provide emergency crisis support to those financially disadvantaged by crime.



Court-mandated financial redress owed by defendant to complainant to be paid out immediately by the courts, with the administration of the courts managing the collection of the debt from defendants after the fact.



Ask 3

Put pathways in place to meet the specific & unique mental health needs of victims of crime

Victim recovery is not only a justice issue. Research has shown that one of the main impacts of crime is on victim mental health and wellbeing. If our justice system is damaging victim mental health, it is the responsibility of the State to take action to mitigate that damage.

We want to see:



After-Court Support work being placed on a permanent footing and funded as part of core victim support services.



Specific pathways put in place to provide victims of crime with the mental health support they need at a time, place and pace they need it at.



Ask 4

Greater investment in the prevention of technology enabled crime and tech support services for victims of cyber-crime

Those who are targeted by cyber-criminals often find that their online security has been shattered in the wake of being victim of a scam or phishing attack. They may not know how to make their online presence secure once again and this can lead to stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and the withdrawal of victims from their online lives.

We want to see:



Increased investment in resources to investigate, research and prevent online fraud.



A dedicated, practical help-desk or support service for victims of cyber-crime to assist victims with any technical support to enable the provision of evidence to the police, help victims resolve any practical issues arising out of a scam, or other form of cyber-crime, make their online presence secure, and safeguard them against future crime.

