

Reflections and recommendations for the Victims Bill

1. Children in the Victims Bill

The Children's Commissioner welcomes the broad definition of a victim set out in Section 2 of the Draft Victims Bill, which captures any person (child or adult) who has suffered as a result of criminal conduct. However, the failure to recognise children throughout the subsequent clauses of the Bill – particularly under the Codes of Practice, compliance, and collaboration duties – risks overlooking the specific and distinct needs of young victims.

Many children struggle to access specialist services following domestic abuse¹ and sexual violence.² Without specific recognition in the Victims Bill, the Children's Commissioner is concerned that many children will remain reliant on adult services, which are often not appropriate for them.

Child victims must be recognised separately throughout the Bill and relevant authorities should be required to provide specialist support services for them.

- **Section 2, the Victims' Code**, should place a duty on the Secretary of State to provide enhanced entitlements to child victims in the Victims' Code. The Secretary of State should also be required to ensure that the Code is made accessible to children, including those with SEN.
- **Section 5, compliance**, should require local policing and criminal justice bodies to take account of the experiences of child victims in their local area when reviewing compliance with the Victims' Code.
- **Section 6, collaboration**, should place a duty on authorities to consider the specific needs of child victims in their local area when fulfilling their duties to the Victims' Code.
- **Section 6, collaboration**, should also require authorities to consult with child victims and their representatives.

Case study: The Lighthouse

The Children Commissioner's team recently visited the Lighthouse in North London, a centre for survivors of child sexual abuse based on the Barnahus model. The Lighthouse is an exemplary model of how to support victims holistically in a safe space, yet the Children Commissioner's office notes the need for greater sufficiency of services that provide wraparound support to child victims of sexual abuse across the country.

¹ Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2022) Mapping of Domestic Abuse Services across England & Wales. [Link](#)

² Barnardo's (2017) Journey to Justice. [Link](#)

2. Children born through rape

As Daisy's testimony shows, children that are born as a result of rape suffer profound and lasting impacts, both to their own lives and to their relationships with their birth mothers and wider family members.

However, children born through rape are currently not recognised by the law. They often struggle to access victim support, and to bring prosecutions against the men who raped their birth mothers.

Children who are born through rape must be recognised by the Victims Bill as victims in their own right.

3. Victims of child criminal exploitation (CCE)

Children who are coerced and manipulated into committing crime should be recognised by the Victims Bill. There is currently no statutory definition for CCE.³ As a consequence, children who are forced to commit crime are often not supported and safeguarded as victims.⁴

As Sammy's campaigning spotlights, threat of criminalisation can also be weaponised by abusers to prevent victims from disclosing to authorities.

The Victims Bill should define child criminal exploitation (CCE) and ensure that these children are protected and supported as victims.

4. Children abused in intimate relationships

Young people who experience abuse in their own intimate relationships can struggle to access specialist support, falling between the gaps of domestic abuse and child protection services.⁵

The Victims Bill should recognise the fact that under-16s can be victim to abuse in their own intimate relationships. The Bill should introduce a duty on relevant authorities to commission specialist support services for teenagers who have experienced abuse in their relationships.

³ Children's Society (2021) Defining child criminal exploitation. [Link](#)

⁴ Barnardo's (2021) Exploited and criminalised. [Link](#)

⁵ SafeLives (2017) Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse. [Link](#)