

NSPCC Northern Ireland response to the Department of Justice consultation on the Victims Charter 2014

September 2014

Victim Charter Consultation

Victims and Witnesses Branch

Department of Justice

Massey House

Stormont Estate

Belfast, BT4 3SX

12th September 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

The NSPCC broadly welcomes the Draft Victim's Charter approach in seeking to provide the statutory entitlements and minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims and witnesses of crime. The NSPCC is a leading child protection Non Governmental Organisation in Northern Ireland providing a range of evidence-based preventative, protection and therapeutic services for children and young people. We continue to work closely with the Department to deliver on the actions contained in the Victims and Witnesses Five-year Strategy; we are also a core member of the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) and are represented on the Criminal Justice Committee's sub group Victim and Witness Steering Group.

As noted in the draft document, the Young Witness Service is a specialist support service which has supported more than 4,000 children and young people across all courts in Northern Ireland before, during and after their trial. In recent years we have conducted extensive research examining the experiences of child victims within the criminal justice system and we continue to evidence and share the learning from our unique engagement to ensure that all victims receive the optimum access to justice.

NSPCC supports the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration; we also support the effective inclusion of the voice of the child in the development and evaluation of any government policy that affects them as a group. As such, we were delighted to engage with our participation group in the drafting process of the children's version of the Victim Charter, which we envisage will also be readily available for consultation.

Given our considerable interface with the criminal justice system, we wish to highlight a few key points on the named consultation document and where appropriate we make a number of

recommendations to the Department based on our practice and research which we feel should be reflected in the Charter.

- The draft Charter in its current format is perhaps too voluminous and inaccessible for a wider audience to understand the literature. We did however find the brief overview and flowchart to be particularly useful and look forward to viewing the anticipated easy read version of the final summary document.
- The importance of safeguarding the needs of all children and young people in the court setting cannot be underestimated. We therefore would request that the Draft Victim Charter is extended to provide the equitable provision of support for vulnerable young people giving evidence for the defence or the prosecution.
- It is essential that special measures and additional support for vulnerable victims is universally implemented for all children and young people under 18 years of age. In addition, we would also strongly recommend that the provision of off-site facilities for pre-recorded cross examination for child witnesses is made available in all courts; and for the expansion of training for barristers on the needs of child witnesses and integration of this into their Continuous Professional Development.
- The Charter rightly recognises the specialist support services available for victims of human trafficking at paragraph 50. It may also be helpful to include details of the NSPCC's Child Trafficking Advice Centre (CTAC) and the newly established Modern Slavery Helpline which are staffed by experienced practitioners who are trained to recognise and respond to victims of trafficking.
- We welcome the reference to our Young Witness Service as a support service provision at paragraph 66. We would ask that ChildLine is referenced either as a footnote or annex to this section. We have provided suggested text below:

ChildLine is a private and confidential service offering support to children and young people up to the age of nineteen. You can contact a ChildLine counsellor about anything – no problem is too big or too small. Call free on 0800 1111, have a 1-2-1 chat online or send an email via www.childline.org.uk

I hope these comments are useful and please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to discuss in further detail.

Yours faithfully,



Neil Anderson

National Head of Service - NI