

Prison Reform Trust response to the Ministry of Justice consultation Delivering Justice for Victims – January 2022

The Prison Reform Trust (PRT) is an independent UK charity working to create a just, humane and effective penal system. We do this by inquiring into the workings of the system; informing prisoners, staff and the wider public; and by influencing Parliament, government and officials towards reform. The Prison Reform Trust provides the secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Penal Affairs Group and has an advice and information service for people in prison.

The Prison Reform Trust's main objectives are:

- reducing unnecessary imprisonment and promoting community solutions to crime
- improving treatment and conditions for prisoners and their families
- promote equality and human rights in the criminal justice system.

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We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Our response is mainly focused on victims in prison, and we have only chosen to answer questions where we have competence to do so. Our response reiterates many of the points made in our previous submissions to the 2019¹ and 2020² consultations on the Victims Code. We regret that there is little evidence from this consultation that the government has taken account of concerns raised in our previous submissions. We hope it will take the opportunity of this consultation to make a substantive response to the points raised.

Question 1: Do you agree that the key principles set out in the consultation are the right ones? If not, do you have any other suggestions?

It is unclear how placing a limited set of broad principles on a statutory basis will translate into an enforceable set of rights and minimum standards which victims are entitled to receive from statutory and contracted services. Legislation without teeth is unlikely to lead to a significant improvement in the quality of the service received by victims, including victims in prison, which the consultation aims to deliver.

The consultation claims that the government wants to “make sure that the legislation allows us a degree of flexibility to strengthen the specific minimum expectations if

¹ Prison Reform Trust. (2019). *Prison Reform Trust response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on Proposals for revising the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime*.
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Consultation%20responses/MOJ%20victims%20code%20consultation%20PRT%20response.pdf>

² Prison Reform Trust. (2020). *Prison Reform Trust response to the Ministry of Justice consultation on Improving the Victims' Code*.
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Consultation%20responses/Improving%20the%20Victims'%20Code.pdf>

policies and practices change in the future. This may be best achieved by placing the detail of the Code in accompanying regulations and/or guidance.” Wanting to ensure a degree of flexibility to anticipate how policy and practice might change is understandable. However, it should not come at the expense of transparency and accountability for what the government intends to deliver. It is not possible to reach a view on the key principles put forward in the consultation without also seeing the accompanying regulations and/or guidance which will flow from them. Furthermore, guidance has a different legal status from regulations and statute. Guidance is likely to result in a less enforceable set of victims’ entitlements than entitlements placed on a statutory or regulatory basis.

Instead of enshrining a broad set of principles in statute, we would prefer for the government to legislate for the minimum standards a victim should expect along the lines specified in the existing Victims’ Code. At the very least, the government should be consulting on the regulations and/or guidance which will flow from the statute alongside the broad principles. It should also clarify which principles will be underpinned by regulation and which by guidance alone.

Question 2: What more can government and agencies listed in the Code do to ensure that frontline professionals are aware of what is required of them under the Code?

As we highlighted in our previous submission to the Ministry of Justice consultations on the Victims Code, in theory prisoners are as entitled to access victims services under the code as any other member of the public. However, in practice they are not always given the opportunity to report crimes committed against them whilst in prison or prior to their incarceration and are often unable to access victims’ services. Prisoners are also directly discriminated against by some of the provisions of the code. For instance, people with convictions are denied the opportunity to apply for compensation when they are victims of serious violence.

The Prison Reform Trust provides an advice and information service for prisoners which receives around 6,000 contacts a year. We regularly hear from prisoners about the difficulties they experience in reporting crime and accessing victims services. Prisoners report having difficulty accessing the Police Liaison Officer (PLOs) to speak to them about a crime of which they believe they have been a victim. Often these are allegations of theft or assault by other prisoners or staff. The PLOs exercise some judgement about how to proceed and whether to report it to the police—a potential barrier and level of filtering that people in the community do not experience. If the decision is made not to report it, it can be difficult for a prisoner to report it themselves—they might be able to write to a local police station or ask a family to do so for them.

Prison rules contain some guidance and information for prisoners who are victims which it would be helpful for the victims’ code to reinforce.

Annex H of the Complaints Policy Framework gives this advice to prisoners:

“You can write to the Chief Officer of the local police force if you have evidence that a criminal offence may have been committed. If this concerns something that has happened in the prison you should consider whether you should raise the matter with a member of staff first. If necessary you can do this by writing to the governor/director using confidential access.”

The framework also contains the following direction:

“The prison must allow a prisoner who is a victim of a crime to report that crime to the police if they wish to do so, even if the prison has decided not to report that crime directly.”

However, how prisons actually manage and make decisions about what crimes to report to the police is not transparent. We are often asked by prisoners for information in prison service instructions (PSIs) about the role and responsibilities of PLOs in reporting crimes. We are also aware that in some situations, where the circumstances of the crime meet certain criteria and the circumstances are sufficiently serious, the prison must report the crime to the police, even without the victims' consent. We are concerned that appropriate safeguarding does not always take place in these situations. It would be particularly useful for victims services to be made available in these cases, as the victim may not feel able to access support from prison staff. Provision of victim services in prisons would support this process, provide advice and advocacy both for prisoners and staff and enable prisoners to access their rights as victims.

The prison service, the police and CPS have duties to comply with their responsibilities as set out in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. The implementation and operation of these duties in prison need greater oversight. The process should be monitored and data around the numbers of victims receiving services in prison should be publicly available. Prisoners' rights under the code and their entitlements as set out in prison service instructions need to be more closely aligned, and backed by appropriate information and guidance to prisoners, prison staff, statutory bodies and service providers.

Question 3: What more can government and agencies listed in the Code do to ensure every victim is made aware of the Code and the service they should expect to receive under it?

Prison staff need greater awareness of the rights prisoners can access under the Victims' Code. This would ensure they assist prisoners to report incidents to the police when the victim has requested to do this. The paucity of provision of information and communication technology in prisons and restrictions of prisoners' access to the internet require that print copies of the code will need to be made available. At the very least, we would recommend that a print copy is sent to each prison library in all establishments in England and Wales.

Question 7: a) What changes, if any, could we make to allow victims to be more engaged in the parole process? b) What do you think would be the advantages and any risks of implementing those changes?

As the consultation points out, victims already have a number of entitlements in relation to the parole process, including the right to submit a VPS and to read it out at the parole hearing if they so wish. Furthermore, as part of its root and branch review of the parole system, the government has announced its intention to introduce public parole hearings in some cases and to allow victims to attend parole hearings in full at the parole board's discretion. In addition, following the revision of its rules in 2018, the Parole Board has moved quickly to become more transparent through the publication of summary decisions which can be made available to victims and other stakeholders on request. The government has also introduced a right to request a

reconsideration of a Parole Board decision in cases where the correct process was not followed or where the decision was irrational and unreasonable.

As far as we are aware, no comprehensive assessment has been made of the impact of any of these measures on victim satisfaction or public confidence in the parole system overall. The need to do more to increase victim engagement is therefore not established, and the paper does not present any further options to allow victims to be more engaged in the parole process, or indeed a rationale for doing so.

Increasing victim engagement with the parole process without also being clear about the necessary limits on that engagement carries significant risks. Many victims choose not to engage as the prospect can be retraumatising for them. The promise of engagement can also raise unrealistic expectations of the parole process which cannot hope to be fulfilled. Neither victims nor the public are qualified or invited in statute to offer a view about the risk of serious further offending. At the original trial, the impact on the victim is plainly relevant to seriousness, and a jury of the public is charged with the judgement on innocence or guilt. Neither is true at the parole hearing, and the importance of victims' experience is already part of the process and informs any future risk management plan. The giving of reasons, and the steps the board has taken to publicise its role and the way in which it is carried out meet the requirement to help the general public understand what a parole hearing is and is not about. If there is public misunderstanding, it is easily corrected on every occasion that it arises, if there is a political will to do so. If, by contrast, the public disquiet about parole springs in fact from a desire that a parole hearing should offer the possibility of keeping a person in prison because of the seriousness of the crime they committed, no amount of attendance at hearings will change that desire or the impossibility of satisfying it.

Notwithstanding some significant improvements to the Parole Board's operation and its openness to scrutiny, instigated by its previous Chair and continued under current leadership, immensely serious problems remain with the parole process as a whole. Despite sentences of increasing length, the government continues to fail to prepare prisoners adequately for release to happen as soon as the period set for punishment 4 has expired. Cases are repeatedly adjourned because of inadequate preparation by prison and probation services, and prisoners are repeatedly denied the opportunity to progress because of the chaotic state of an overcrowded prison system. Support for people released on parole repeatedly falls short, leading to avoidable recalls to custody. The government's decision to begin its latest review of parole with this consultation only highlights its fundamental failure to deliver its much larger responsibilities for efficient and fair handling of the parole process. Its energies would be better directed to the timely reduction of risk during custody and the effective management of it following release.

Question 10: What should the role of PCCs be in relation to the delivery of a quality service and commissioning victims' support services, and what levers could be given to PCCs to deliver this role and enhance victims' experiences of the criminal justice system at a local level?

Given that PCCs now have responsibility for the commissioning of victims' services, it makes sense that they are responsible for working with their local criminal justice partners to adapt the victim and practitioner guidance to set out how overarching victims' rights will be delivered locally. We understand that the intention is to allow local criminal justice partnerships to ensure they are clear not only to victims but also to agencies about who does what at a local level. Prisons should be explicitly included as one of the criminal justice partners who PCCs are required to work with.

Partnership agreements between PCCs and prisons in the PPC area should specify how prisoners will be informed of their rights under the code, how they will be enabled to access those rights and how services will be adapted to ensure that prisoners can benefit from them.

Question 11: a) Do you think the current inspectorate frameworks and programmes adequately focus on and prioritise victims' issues and experiences and collaborate effectively across the criminal justice system to do so? b) Could inspectorates be reinforced further in relation to victims?

Question 12: Do you think that the current inspectorate arrangements allow sufficient collation of, and reporting on, victims' data and issues across the criminal justice system? Could they be utilised further for this?

We are not aware of any systematic efforts by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation to understand:

1. Levels of victimisation among the population in prison and under probation supervision in the community other than through the routine collection of data relating to safety
2. The access of people in prison and under supervision to victims services and support and the quality of service they receive.

We recommend:

1. The development of more detailed metrics and the routine collection of data to understand levels of victimisation in the offender population
2. The access of prisoners and individuals under probation supervisions to victims' services, and the quality of service they receive, is made the subject of prison and probation inspectorate expectations.
3. The experience of people who are victims in prison and under probation supervision in the community is made the subject of a criminal justice joint inspectorate thematic.

Question 17: What do you consider to be the best ways for ensuring that victims' voices, including those of children and young people, are heard by criminal justice agencies?

Question 18: a) What data should criminal justice agencies collect about victims' experiences, and at what key points in the process? b) Can you provide any examples – in the UK or elsewhere – of this being done effectively?

We do not believe that the voices of people in prison or under supervision in the community who are victims of crime are given any systematic consideration by government. Despite evidence of the high level of victimisation among the offender population, data on rates of victimisation among this group are not routinely collected by the Ministry of Justice. As far as we are aware, the needs of this population are given limited if any consideration by commissioners in the provision of victims' services.

Below we present evidence that is available on rates of victimisation in the offender population, in the hope that it will be taken into consideration as part of this consultation process and the recommendations that arise from it:

The latest Ministry of Justice Safety in Custody statistics³ reveal that:

- In the 12 months to June 2021, there were 2,009 serious assault incidents, a decrease of 37% from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 44% to 1,332 in the 12 months to June 2021. Serious assaults on staff also decreased, by 16% to 717.
- There were 19,470 assault incidents in the 12 months to June 2021, down 30% from the 12 months to June 2020. In the most recent quarter, assaults increased by 11% to 5,128 incidents.

The Ministry of Justice 2012 study Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners⁴ reveals that:

- Twenty-nine per cent of SPCR prisoners stated that they had experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child. Women (53%) were more likely to report having experienced some sort of abuse than men (27%), as were prisoners from a non-BAME background (31%), compared with prisoners from a BAME background (20%).
- Those serving short-term sentences were more likely to state that they had experienced abuse as a child than those on longer-term sentences (29% compared with 24%).
- Female prisoners who had experienced abuse as a child were more likely to report suffering sexual abuse (67%) than male prisoners who had experienced abuse (24%).
- Forty-one per cent of SPCR prisoners said that they had observed violence at home as a child. Women were more likely (50%) to report having observed violence at home than men (40%).

A number of contacts from prisoners to PRT's advice and information service suggest that people who have reported physical or sexual assault have struggled to get support afterwards, either from prison-based healthcare service or from external specialist sources.

³ Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to September 2021, Assaults and Self-harm to June 2021*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-june-2021/safety-in-custody-statistics-england-and-wales-deaths-in-prison-custody-to-september-2021-assaults-and-self-harm-to-june-2021>

⁴ Williams, K., Papadopoulou, V., & Booth, N. (2012). *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278837/prisoners-childhood-family-backgrounds.pdf

Women – domestic violence and sexual abuse

There are just under 4,000 women in prison in England and Wales making up around 5% of the total prison population, a large proportion of whom have been victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse:

- 57% of women report having been victims of domestic violence as adults.⁵ Because many women fear disclosing abuse, this figure is likely to be an underestimate.⁶
- Women's offences are more likely than men's to be prompted by their relationships with 48% of women, compared to only 22% of men, saying that they had committed offences to support someone else's drug use.⁷
- Research by The Disabilities Trust found that of 173 women screened at HMP Drake Hall, 64% reported a history indicative of brain injury and for most this was caused by domestic violence.⁸
- In research by Muslim Hands with Muslim women in prison, 71% of interview participants reported experience of domestic abuse.⁹
- Women with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse.¹⁰
- Women with children can be reluctant to disclose their exposure to domestic violence, but the impact of prosecution and imprisonment may be particularly disruptive and traumatic for both mothers and children.¹¹

In recent research we found there is limited support for women in prison affected by domestic abuse, particularly those serving short sentences, and that the patchy availability of support on release from prison, including suitable housing, health and

⁵ Data Extracted from OASYS, published in Ministry of Justice (2014) Thinking differently about female offenders. Transforming Rehabilitation, Guidance Document, London: MoJ/NOMS

⁶ Gelsthorpe, L., Sharpe, G., & Roberts, J. (2007). *Provision for women offenders in the community*. Fawcett Society.
<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=5e997239-63bf-4017-a81b-c877aaff22b>

⁷ Light, M., Grant, E., & Hopkins, K. (2013). *Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*. Ministry of Justice.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220060/gender-substance-misuse-mental-health-prisoners.pdf

⁸ The Disabilities Trust. (2019). *Making the link: Female offending and brain injury*.
<https://www.thedtgrouop.org/media/163444/making-the-link-female-offending-and-brain-injury.pdf>

⁹ Muslim Hands. (2018). *(In)visibility: Female. Muslim. Imprisoned*.
[https://muslimhands.org.uk/_ui/uploads/lk2ki4/\(In\)Visibility_Web.pdf](https://muslimhands.org.uk/_ui/uploads/lk2ki4/(In)Visibility_Web.pdf)

¹⁰ Hammond, T., Talbot, J., Earle, J., & Murray, A. (2019). *Out of the Shadows: Women with learning disabilities in contact with or on the edges of the criminal justice system*. Prison Reform Trust.
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Out%20of%20the%20shadows.pdf>

¹¹ Beresford, S. (2018). *What What about me? The impact on children when mothers are involved in the criminal justice system*. Prison Reform Trust.
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/portals/0/documents/what%20about%20me.pdf>

social care services and welfare benefits, leaves women even more vulnerable to abuse and offending.¹²

Trafficking

We do not know how many people in prison have been trafficked. People who have been the victims of abuse may be reluctant to talk about their experiences to police, courts or prison staff. People who have acted under pressure, with threats made against their family are unlikely to provide information from a prison cell. At the moment, the legal system is not good at recognising when people have been coerced into committing crimes. Too often it is the victims of human trafficking, instead of the person responsible for the trafficking, who end up being prosecuted and imprisoned. We need to recognise that people commit offences because they have been intimidated or threatened with violence. Not only is protection a human right for victims but enforcement processes against traffickers are less effective without the evidence and participation of victims. This will only happen in a system that victims trust and that offers adequate support.

There is no comprehensive data on the number of people in prison who have been trafficked. However, available information suggests that children and young people are disproportionately at risk of being victims of criminal exploitation. For instance, the latest data on National Referral Mechanism referrals shows that child potential victims were most often referred for criminal exploitation (47%; 635).¹³ For those exploited as children, an increase in the identification of 'county lines' cases has partially driven the increase in referrals within the criminal exploitation category.

Foreign nationals in prison are another group who may be disproportionately likely to be victims of trafficking. Two reports, one published in 2018 by the Prison Reform Trust and Hibiscus Initiatives,¹⁴ and the other in 2012 by the University of Cambridge, supported by the Economic and Social Research Council,¹⁵ have underlined the lack of support available to foreign national women in custody in England and Wales who have been trafficked into offending. The latter by Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe and Dr Liz Hales examines the case management of migrant women in the criminal justice and immigration systems, including the identification of trafficked women. It found violence, intimidation and rape were common experiences of the women, but evidence of their suffering was often overlooked and they did not receive the protection guaranteed to them as victims of human trafficking under international law. In only one of the 43 cases of human trafficking identified by the researchers did

¹² Prison Reform Trust. (2017). *"There's a reason we're in trouble" Domestic abuse as a driver to women's offending.*

[http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic abuse report final lo.pdf](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Domestic%20abuse%20report%20final%20lo.pdf)

¹³ Home Office. (2022). *Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, Quarter 3 2021 – July to September second edition.* GOV.UK.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-3-2021-july-to-september/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-3-2021-july-to-september#national-referral-mechanism-referrals>

¹⁴ Prison Reform Trust & Hibiscus Initiatives. (2017). *Still No Way Out: Foreign national women and trafficked women in the criminal justice system.* Prison Reform Trust.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Still%20No%20Way%20Out%20full%20report.pdf>

¹⁵ Hales, L. (2017). *The Criminalisation and Imprisonment of Migrant Victims of Trafficking.*

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3082873

victim disclosures result in a full police investigation in relation to the actions of the perpetrators.

Evidence from Hibiscus Initiatives contained in the 2018 PRT report and confirmed in recent inspection reports suggests that despite police and prosecution guidance there is a disturbing failure to identify, protect and support victims of trafficking at an early stage and avoid prosecuting them for offences committed as a consequence of their exploitation by traffickers. Of the 585 foreign national women prisoners Hibiscus assisted between February 2013 to March 2017, 45 women were identified as victims or potential victims of trafficking, all of whom had disclosed information about their exploitation.

Question 29: a) Do you agree that we should explore increasing the surcharge?

No.

The consultation is an evidence-free zone on this subject, and simply uses a 'pre-election pledge' to increase the surcharge by 25% by 2024 as justification for the proposals it puts forward. There is a clear potential for any increase in the surcharge to have a number of serious unintended consequences. These should be obvious to anyone with a passing familiarity with the realities of the criminal justice system and the people in it. At a minimum, before any increase in the surcharge is considered, the government needs to establish:

1. What do we know about the impact of the surcharge at its current levels? Is it successfully collected?
2. How many people end up back in court (costing far more to the state) because they can't pay it?
3. Has anyone looked to see if there is a link between the level of surcharge and the level of default?

We also refer the ministry to the following commentaries, which raise substantive concerns about the victim surcharge scheme and the way it operates. We urge the government to give careful and urgent consideration to these concerns, particularly given the direction of travel it maps out in the consultation:

<https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/law/victim-surcharge-unintended-consequences-/71546.article>

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/news/society/25032/expert-comment-victim-surcharge-fee-should-be-dissolved-immediately-argues-university-of-kent-criminologist>

b) Should we consider an overall percentage increase (for example, increasing the surcharge rate by 20%)? If so, do you have any views on what the percentage increase should be?

See our answer to 29a

c) Should we increase the minimum rate (for example, to £100)? If so, do you have any views on what the minimum rate should be?

See our answer to 29a

Question 30: The surcharge for fines differs to the other surcharge impositions, as it is paid by both individuals and organisations and is calculated as a percentage amount of the fine with minimum and maximum caps. a) Do you agree that we should review the surcharge paid for fines?

See our answer to 29a

b) Should we review the cap rates for surcharge amounts for fines? If so, do you have any views on what the minimum / maximum caps should be?

See our answer to 29a

c) Should we review the percentage amount? If so, do you have any views on what the percentage amount should be?

See our answer to 29a

Question 49: Have we correctly identified the range and extent of the equalities impacts under this consultation in the equality statement? Please give reasons and supply evidence of further equalities impacts that are not covered as appropriate.

People with protected characteristics are significantly over-represented in the prison system:

- Over a quarter (27%) of the prison population, 21,537 people, are from a minority ethnic group.¹⁶
- Over a third of people (34%) were identified as having a learning disability or difficulty following assessment on entry to prison in 2017–18.¹⁷
- 67% of women and 43% of men surveyed by inspectors in prison reported having mental health problems.¹⁸
- 36% of people in prison are estimated to have a physical or mental disability. This compares with 19% of the general population.¹⁹

¹⁶ Table 1.4, Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Offender Management Statistics quarterly: April to June 2021* [Dataset]. Ministry of Justice. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-april-to-june-2021>

¹⁷ Skills Funding Agency. (2018). *OLASS English and maths assessments by ethnicity and learners with learning difficulties or disabilities: participation 2014/2015 to 2017/2018* [Dataset]. Skills Funding Agency. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765597/OLASS_English_and_maths_assessments_by_Ethnicity_and_disability_201415_to_201718.xlsx

¹⁸ Ministry of Justice. (2018). *A Review of Self-inflicted Deaths in Prison Custody in 2016*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747470/review-of-deaths-in-custody-2016.pdf

¹⁹ Cunliffe, C., van de Kerckhove, R., Williams, K., & Hopkins, K. (2012). *Estimating the prevalence of disability amongst prisoners: results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey*. Ministry of Justice. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/278827/estimating-prevalence-disability-amongst-prisoners.pdf

Furthermore, we have highlighted in our answer to question 18 the high level of victimisation among the prison population, including among those with protected characteristics. For instance, the evidence presented shows that a disproportionate number of women in prison have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Therefore, it would be consistent with the government's obligations under the public sector equality duties for it to give consideration to how the rights enshrined in the victims code could be made more accessible to people in prison.

The government's failure to respond to any of the substantive points we made in our submission to the 2020 or 2019 consultations on the Victims Code, and the lack of any reference in the revised code or the current consultation to the circumstances of people in prison, suggests that no such consideration has taken place. We strongly encourage the government to engage with the arguments and evidence we have presented and work to enable people in prison to gain access to the services to which they are entitled.