

**Manifesto**

30 July 2025

By Tracey Hanson

# Victims' Rights



# Summary of recommendations

Our manifesto calls on the UK government to:

1. **Josh's Law:** At sentencing victims and bereaved close relatives **MUST** be informed of their right to appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentencing (ULS) Scheme. Clear, accessible guidance on the ULS Scheme, including the 28-day right to appeal, must be within the VCOP and delivered consistently across all agencies.
2. **Renaming the Victim Personal Statement:** language must reflect the seriousness of crime and the emotional harm caused. It must be renamed to Victim Impact Statement to ensure that all agencies respond with urgency in and around the impact of the crime.
3. **Post-Mortem material:** The Retention and Disposal of material from post-mortem examination form, must be included in the VCOP. It must also include a signed copy which is to be given to the bereaved close relatives.
4. **Victims' Advocates alongside PCC's:** calling for victims advocate to sit alongside PCC's who have joint responsibility for the commission of victims' services in their area.

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## 1 What is the VCOP?

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code- VCOP) is a statutory code of practice that establishes minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. It sets out services and a minimum standard for these services that must be provided to victims of crime by an organisation in England and Wales.

## 2 Who is a Victim?

The code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP) defines a 'victim' as

- a person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss which was directly caused by a criminal offence.
- a close relative (or a nominated family spokesperson) of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence.

## 3 How can a victim expect to be treated?

Victims have the Right to:

- be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity, compassion and courtesy.
- make informed choices that are fully respected.
- have your privacy respected by service providers in accordance with their obligations.
- have services provided to assist you and your family to understand and engage with the criminal justice process and that are offered in a professional manner, without discrimination of any kind.



## Introduction

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The Josh Hanson Charitable Trust was established in 2016 by its founder and CEO, Tracey Hanson, following the tragic and unprovoked murder of her late son Josh Hanson. Josh was 21 years old when he was brutally murdered by a man who was known to the police and who had 17 previous convictions. Josh was a hardworking, caring and kind young man who was full of life, naturally inquisitive and deeply loved. His mantra “*I’m living my best life*” reflected the joy he shared with everyone around him.

**This year marks ten years since Josh’s life was taken.** This anniversary is a moment for remembrance, and his memory continues to inspire strength, advocacy and meaningful change.

The Trust supports victims while they navigate the criminal justice system while promoting the prevention of serious violent crime.

The trust exists to ensure that the:

- voice of the victim is heard.
- criminal justice system puts victims first.
- victim receives appropriate support to navigate the criminal justice process.
- victim is protected from re-victimisation.

Tracey’s personal experience of statutory agencies, government departments and support services while navigating the criminal justice system added to her trauma. Rather than being reassured and supported by the criminal justice system as a bereaved mother, she found that her basic human rights were overlooked.

*“I miss my dear son Josh every second of every single day while living with the injustices that still haunt me. However, I shall endeavour to do all that I can to raise awareness and support bereaved victims while they navigate the criminal justice system and hope you can support my call for Josh’s Law and consider my recommendations for change.” -Tracey.*

This manifesto is a call for justice, reform and recognition for Josh, Tracey and every victim whose voice has been silenced or ignored.

# 1. Josh's Law

## *The call for Josh's Law and the right to appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentencing (ULS) Scheme*

It would:

- ensure victims are **informed** about their right to appeal under the ULS Scheme by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at the time of sentencing.
- ensure victims have **equal rights** to those of offenders within the criminal justice system.
- extend the 28-day ULS time limit for victims in **exceptional circumstances**.

The ULS Scheme allows anyone to ask for certain Crown Court sentences to be reviewed by the Attorney General's Office (AGO) if they think the sentence is too lenient.

Of the victims who have reached out to our Trust, not one was informed of their right to appeal. It is vital that victims and bereaved victims are informed about and understand the Scheme during the trial and at sentencing as is the case of the accused/offender. While a case may not be deemed eligible it is the absolute right of a victim to appeal.

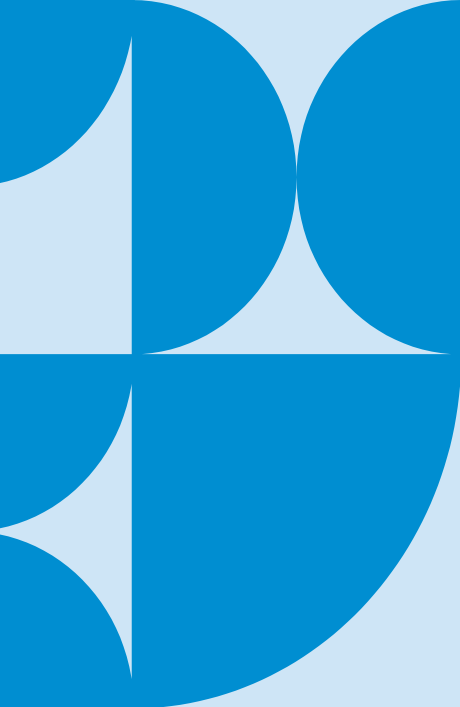
In doing so, victims have a greater chance of moving forward, confident that they have exercised every right afforded to them and taken every possible step to secure the justice they deserve.

While Tracey submitted her appeal on the 28<sup>th</sup> day, it was received outside of office hours. This information was not public at the time. Although Tracey's efforts have led to clearer guidance on relevant websites stating that appeals must be submitted between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, victims are unlikely to search for this information if they are not first made aware that the right to appeal exists.

The current 28-day time frame needs to be extended for victims as is extended for offenders in special circumstances. Here, we are not asking for an indefinite period just an extension in special circumstances so, case by case, the same right afforded to the offender. As in Tracey's case.

Throughout the trial the accused is well informed about their right to appeal. The defence team ensure that their clients rights are made clear to them. This is the law. However, this is not the case for victims and even less so bereaved victims.

Josh's Law would ensure that victims are told about their right to appeal and that this information is explained.



*“It is vital victims understand sentencing for recovery. I still feel like I have been failed and denied my basic human right” - Tracey.*

The call for Josh’s Law has been heard in Parliament and received cross party support, [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament](#) – and reported across mainstream media [Mother denied right to appeal sentence of son's killer because she applied 'outside office hours' \(telegraph.co.uk\)](#).

Further to this, statistical evidence highlights the extremely low number of appeals under the ULS Scheme, showing a consistent pattern of minimal uptake. It is deeply concerning that very little improvement has been made despite the recommendations laid out by Attorney General Jeremy Wright KC MP who at the time of [this publication said](#):

*“While in the vast majority of cases sentencing judges get it right, the ULS scheme is essential in ensuring victims, family members of victims and the general public are able to request that sentences they think are unduly lenient can be reviewed and, where necessary, increased.”*

More recently, the AGO published its annual ULS statistics for 2023. That year, the AGO received over 1,200 applications for sentences to be reviewed. Of these, 139 cases were referred by Law Officers to the Court of Appeal. The court agreed that 93 of these sentences were too low and increased the sentences as a result.

To put the numbers into perspective, 1.12 million offenders were convicted, of these 0.01% were referred to the Court of Appeal and 0.008% of all convictions resulted in a sentence being increased under the ULS Scheme.

Josh’s Law **would not** take anything away from the offender, it would mean that the rights of victims are upheld and that there is transparency, equality and justice for all.



## 2. Renaming the Personal Impact Statement

### *Victim Personal Statement (VPS) vs Victim Impact Statement (VIS)*

A VPS is a statement given by victims of crime to the police (or any agency assigned to take the VPS on their behalf) that aims to give victims a voice in the criminal justice process by helping others to understand how the crime has affected them.

This was the one opportunity for Tracey and other bereaved family members to explain how Josh's murder had impacted their lives- physically, emotionally and psychologically- within the criminal justice process.

We respectfully propose that the term *Victim Personal Statement* be formally changed to *Victim Impact Statement*. The current terminology places emphasis on the "personal", which can inadvertently suggest subjective or emotional account. This may diminish the perceived weight of the statement in formal proceedings. It can even imply a relationship or proximity to the offender that does not exist or is unwanted.

The term *Victim Impact Statement* more accurately reflects the true purpose of the statement, which is to convey the full and often long-term consequences of the crime on the victim's life. This includes social, physical, financial and psychological impacts. The term 'impact' is more objective, direct and legally relevant as it emphasises the real-world consequences of the offence and reinforces the importance of the victim's voice in the justice process.

Furthermore, guidance on the VPS process varies widely. There is no nationally standardised approach from the police or Crown Prosecution Services (CPS), and no clear communication about when a victim or bereaved family will be invited to provide a statement.

Renaming the statement in this way would align it with widely used international terminology and best practice, it would represent a meaningful step towards a more victim-centred justice process.

### 3. Post-Mortem Material

*The Retention and disposal of material from post-mortem examination form*

Following the loss of her son, the first time Tracey was allowed to see Josh's body was at the mortuary- three days after his death, and not until two postmortems had been carried out. One was for the prosecution and one for the defence.

Immediately after that devastating moment, Tracey was asked to sign the [Retention and disposal of material from post-Mortem examination form](#), a document with tick boxes regarding how she wished Josh's tissues to be disposed of.

*"To this day I have no recollection of doing this. In a state of trauma and shock, trying to comprehend the brutal reality of seeing my son's body, I would have signed my life away."*- Tracey Hanson.

When she later requested Josh's belongings and tissues after the trial, she was informed that they had already been disposed of in line with the signed instructions. However, the form is only produced in two copies, neither of which is given to the bereaved family, leaving them with no proof or record of such a critical decision.

Furthermore, no opportunity was provided to fully explain the form, reflect on the decision, or engage in a discussion with her Family Liaison Officer (FLO). This left Tracey feeling further disempowered and uninformed at a time of profound grief.

Bereaved families deserve more than a tick-box process. They deserve information, clarity and a formal copy of the document relating to the treatment of their loved one's body. The Coroners and the Mortuary must form part of the bill to ensure that the victim's journey is part of a joined-up approach.

## 4. Victims' Advocates Alongside PCC's

### *Strengthening the Role of Victims' Commissioners*

As a bereaved mother, Tracey's experience of the criminal justice system seeking justice for her son Josh, was disjointed, isolating, and devoid of the clear support she should have received. The system failed to provide her with her key rights and entitlements every step of the way. She was left to navigate a complex and unfamiliar system alone, unaware of her rights as set out in the VCOP.

It was only through Tracey's persistent enquires with various support services, such as Victims' Commissioners and support services, that she was able to understand her rights under the VCOP. It also helped Tracey use her experience to support others, raise awareness and drive forward impactful change.

Victims' Commissioners play a vital role in ensuring that the justice journey that is timely, transparent, inclusive and effective- whether or not a victim chooses to report the offence- and through every stage including post-sentence.

Therefore, we call for the formal appointment of dedicated Victims' Advocates across the regions of England and Wales, working alongside existing Police and Crime Commissioners. This will:

- foster collaboration between victim support services, third sector organisations and academics.
- embed accountability for the delivery of the VCOP.
- strengthen the monitoring and protection of victims' rights.

A national network of Victims' Commissioners will help ensure that no one is left to face the criminal justice system alone and thereafter.

The Josh Hanson Trust is a Charity that focuses on advocacy, education and community building. Our vision is to help create a safer, fairer and more compassionate society.

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