

The Josh Hanson Trust



Manifesto

11th October 2025

By Tracey Hanson

Victims' Rights



The Josh Hanson Charitable Trust
A registered Charity in England and
Wales Number
Charity no. 1170511

Summary of recommendations

Our manifesto calls on the UK government to:

1. **introduce Josh's Law:** The law would require the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to notify victims or bereaved families of their right to appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentencing (ULS) scheme before or at the time of sentencing as is afforded to offenders. If this information is not provided, *Josh's Law* would ensure that this is treated as an exceptional circumstance allowing a sentence to be reviewed after the 28-day time limit.
2. **rename the Victim Personal Statement:** The 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. **include information about the Retention and disposal of material from post-mortem examinations form in the Victims' Code:** This will ensure bereaved family members are given information and time before signing and be provided with a signed copy of the form for reference.
4. **appoint victims' advocates to sit alongside Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales:** This would ensure joint responsibility for the commission of victims' services in their area.

1 What is the VCOP?

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime or “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. These services must be offered in a professional manner, without discrimination of any kind.

Introduction

The Josh Hanson Charitable Trust was established in 2016 by CEO Tracey Hanson after the tragic 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.

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 help them cope and work towards recovery.
- victim is protected from re-victimisation.

Sadly, Tracey's experience of statutory agencies, government departments and support services while navigating the criminal justice system added to her trauma. Rather than feeling protected and supported by the criminal justice system as a bereaved victim - her basic human rights were overlooked.

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

"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 victims while they navigate the criminal justice system. I hope you can support my call for Josh's Law and consider my recommendations for change in the Victims and Courts Bill." – Tracey Hanson.

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 prior to, or at the time of, sentencing.
- allow for the Attorney General to consider the case outside the 28-day rule in exceptional circumstances.
- ensure victims have **equal rights** to those of offenders within the criminal justice system.

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 that have reached out to our Trust, not one of them was told about their right to appeal. It is vital that victims and bereaved victims are informed about and understand the ULS scheme during the trial and at sentencing, in the same way that the accused/offender is informed by their defence. While a case may not be deemed eligible, it is the absolute right of a victim to appeal.

In doing so, victims have more chance of moving forward knowing that they have had every opportunity to exercise the rights afforded to them. They know they have done everything they can to get the justice they feel they deserve.

Tracey found out about her right to appeal on the 28th day and while the appeal was submitted the same day, it was received out-of-office hours and was rejected. Information about the ULS scheme was not public at the time. Tracey's campaigning has ensured guidance has been improved on government websites. Highlighting the 28-day rule and within office hours of 9-5pm.

The current 28-day time frame needs to be extended for victims, as it is extended for offenders in special circumstances. We are not asking for an indefinite period - just an extension in special circumstances – so that, case by case, victims have the same rights as the offender.

Throughout the trial, the accused is well-informed about their right to appeal. The defence team ensures that their client's rights are made clear to them. This is the law. However, this is not the case for victims, and even less so for 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 Hanson

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](https://www.telegraph.co.uk)).

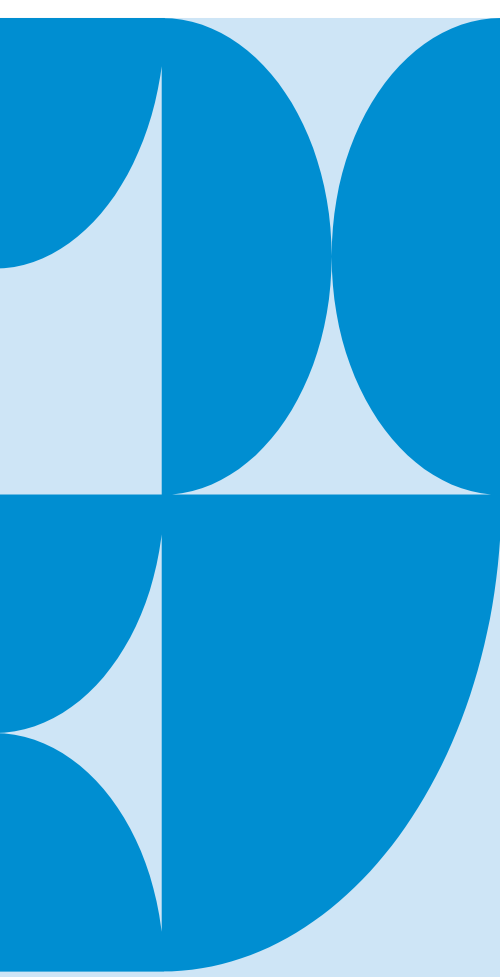
Further to this, statistical data and evidence show the very low cases of appeal and a trend which shows minuscule uptake. It is deeply concerning that very little improvement has been made despite the recommendations laid out by Attorney General Jeremy Wright KC MP who at the time of this publication (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/unduly-lenient-sentence-scheme-ensuring-justice-for-victims-of-crime-and-their-families--2>) 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 Attorney General's Office (AGO) published the annual ULS statistics for 2023. In 2023, 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 in 2023. 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, instead 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 a chance for Tracey to explain how Josh's murder impacted her life- physically, emotionally and psychologically within the criminal justice process. However, she felt pressure to censor content and was told to leave out her emotions. This guidance directly contradicts the very essence of a personal statement and undermines its intended purpose.

The change in terminology from Victim Impact Statement to Victim Personal Statement may seem semantic, but it reflects a broader issue. The word 'impact' recognises the measurable harm caused by an offender, by contrast to the word 'personal' belonging to or affecting a person.

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

3. Post-Mortem Material

The coroner's Retention and disposal of material from post-mortem examinations 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.

Later, when Tracey asked for Josh's belonging and clothing following the conclusion of the trial, she was informed that his tissues had already been disposed of in accordance with instructions she had given. However, only two copies of this form existed, neither of which was provided to her. This left Tracey without any record or evidence of the decision she had unknowingly made.

Furthermore, the lack of communication between the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and the coroner's officer meant that she was not fully informed to make such a critical, sensitive decision.

Bereaved families deserve more than a tick box. They deserve dignity, information and genuine choice.

Therefore, we call for the form to include a third copy which is to be provided to the bereaved family, and for this information to be included in the VCOP.

4. Victims' Advocates Alongside PCCs

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 as laid out in the VCOP. She was left to navigate a complex and unfamiliar system alone, unaware of her rights whilst grieving and campaigning for Justice for Josh.

It was only through the dedicated support of bereaved families that Tracey was able to access the critical information she needed. Claire's Waxman OBE also advocated for her providing clarity and a platform to be heard. Tracey has used her experience to support others, raise awareness and drive meaningful change.

Victims' Commissioners play a vital role ensuring the victims voice is heard whilst advocating for victims' rights.

Therefore, we call for the formal appointment of dedicated Victims' Commissioners 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 Victims' Code.
- 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 system alone.

The Josh Hanson Trust is a Charity that focuses on advocacy, education and community building.

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