

# Judicial Communications Office

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 18:00, 14 APRIL 2011**

## **LORD CHIEF JUSTICE SAYS THERE IS A NEED FOR VICTIMS' VOICES TO BE HEARD WITHIN THE CRIMINAL PROCESS**

**14 April 2011**

The Lord Chief Justice in a speech this evening at St Dominic's High School, Belfast welcomed the development of victim impact reports and community impact statements which set out the facts that enable judges to fully understand the impact of crimes on victims and the community.

The Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, was speaking at an event to celebrate 140 years of excellence at St Dominic's. He said it was the first time that he had been invited to West Belfast as Lord Chief Justice and the first time that any serving Lord Chief Justice had attended an event there in his official capacity.

The Lord Chief Justice referred to some of the successful past pupils of the school who play a full and active part in public life. He said that since it opened, the school has raised the line of vision of those who have been fortunate enough to attend and that the community at large have been the beneficiaries.

Paying tribute to the many different professionals who work in the criminal justice system, the Lord Chief Justice then focussed on the voice of victims. He said that while devolution means we have the ability to find our own solutions to problems it does not make the problems go away. The Lord Chief Justice referred to discussions he had with groups across Northern Ireland where he heard about the problems faced by householders disturbed by joyriders, families struggling to get help for a drug addicted teenager, or pensioners afraid to leave their home because of anti-social behaviour.

The Lord Chief Justice stressed the importance of hearing the victim's voice within the criminal process. The use of victim impact reports and victim impact statements came about at the request of judges because they were anxious to have as much information as possible from and about victims in serious crimes. These reports and statements provide the court with a

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comprehensive picture of the victim's injuries both medical and psychiatric and the after effects of the crime committed. They may be written by experts or by the victim or their family. The Lord Chief Justice said these reports help judges to understand the impact of the crime in the real world. Hearing the victim's voice speaking of the harm done to them helps to acknowledge their needs and is of great assistance to the judge in setting an appropriate sentence.

The Lord Chief Justice also referred to the recent concept of community impact assessments. He said that the judiciary are increasingly recognising that crimes don't just affect the individual victim but can also affect the other people who live in the same community. This is a new development in the criminal justice system and the Lord Chief Justice encouraged criminal justice professionals to work together to develop a form of community impact report which:

"Sets out the facts about the type of offending in the area, the frequency with which it occurs, which explains the impacts it is having on local people, the harm which is being caused in simple, straightforward terms, is a different thing. The judge may not know all that is happening in that area."

The Lord Chief Justice concluded by saying that he was very pleased to celebrate a school that has helped generations of young women to aspire to excellence. He wished the pupils well in their future life and career: "As you follow your passion, whatever it is, I hope that you will have every opportunity to build a future for yourselves, your families and this community of which we can all be proud".

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The full text of the Lord Chief Justice's speech will be available on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website ([www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)).

**ENDS**

# Judicial Communications Office

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