

Dorset police chief's plan to put victims first

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DORSET'S Police and Crime Commissioner has outlined ambitious plans to put victims first in the fight against criminal and antisocial behaviour.

Former police officer Martyn Underhill told a Victim Seminar at Poole Civic Centre that the police were "atrocious" at keeping victims of crime informed and said a new Victims' Bureau was being set up.

"This is a first nationally – we are breaking new ground here. There will be a dedicated team who do nothing but update people through the process. It's going to represent all agencies in the criminal justice system," he pledged.

He said the bureau would support victims of crime, treating each as an individual and responding to their differing needs. Mr Underhill said this part of the service would have to be commissioned from an organisation such as Victim Support.

And he added: "I want it to be a non-police building and telephone number, otherwise people who won't go to the police aren't going to come to my bureau.

"We must get away from the approach that you're only a victim if you report to the police. There are lots of people who never engage with the police and we need to give them our support."

Mr Underhill said the initiative had been prompted by meeting eight victims of crime.

"What a nightmare that was, meeting people who told me absolute horror stories, including the amazing woman from Portland who phoned the police 80 times before they got it right. I can't ever go through that again, facing eight people whose lives have been destroyed," he said.

He also announced that victims' forums were being set up this summer. "If anyone joins I will only meet them once. It isn't about beating up the police, it's about learning from people's experiences."

Mr Underhill also talked of his support for early intervention to reduce the numbers of criminals and victims, and for community resolution. Two pilot schemes have been running in Dorset, one in north Bournemouth and one in Bridport.

"Research everywhere shows that victims involved in restorative justice feel listened to.

"They often get an apology from the offender and have the right to say what they think could make things better," he said.

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