

Police and Crime Panel

12th December 2017

Durham and Darlington Victims and Witness Group

Report of Chief of Staff



Putting victims first in County Durham and Darlington

Purpose

- 1 To provide panel members with an update on the work of the Durham and Darlington Victim and Witness Group and how this has developed during the past year.

Background

- 2 The Victims and Witnesses Group (VWG) is a sub-group of the Cleveland and Durham Local Criminal Justice Partnership Board (LCJPB).
- 3 The VWG works in partnership to ensure victims and witnesses receive end to end, co-ordinated care and support that enables them to cope and recover from their experience and participate in criminal justice processes. The group also supports the achievement of all objectives and relevant core deliverables in relation to this as identified on the VWG Plan on a Page (Appendix 2).
- 4 The VWG is chaired by the OPCVC who jointly commission the current referral service for victims. Representation from the statutory CJS services is at a senior level but there is wider membership from those organisations providing specific services to victim and witnesses, these include local authorities, Victim Care and Advice Service, Witness Service, Witness Care, as well as representation from the voluntary sector.
- 5 The VWG is a strategic group within the Durham and Cleveland Criminal Justice Board's group structure. The VWG will report up to the Durham and Cleveland Criminal Justice Board where the VWG needs to raise an issue or awareness at the full board. The board may also seek advice or action from the VWG.
- 6 Meetings are held at least quarterly or more frequently if objectives / strategies require urgent decisions and reviews.

Vision

- 7 An overall vision for the board has been agreed and signed off by all members;

'Victims and Witness receive end to end, co-ordinated care and support that enables them to cope and recover from their experience and participate in Criminal Justice Processes.'

- 8 We will achieve this by taking a collaborative approach so that by 2021 we have an end-to-end service for supporting victims and witnesses so that they receive the support they need to cope and recover from the impact of the crime and are able to give their best evidence where applicable.

Key Priority Work

- 9 Current work streams relate to the victim experience, vulnerable victims, performance management, registered intermediaries, Victim Personal Statements and Restorative Justice provision.

Vulnerable Victims

- 10 The primary aim of this review was to scope the issues surrounding vulnerable victims seeking a criminal justice outcome.
- 11 The group analysed the process from start to finish for a cohort of cases to identify any trends/themes. Of 17 cases identified only one case required further investigation. All other cases had been investigated appropriately and where the decision had been made to take no further action, this was made on the basis of insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction against a suspect and not due to a victim's vulnerabilities or capacity.
- 12 It was evident however that there was an information gap, as reasons for a criminal justice outcome were limited on partner's case files. Work now continues to look at how the group can more effectively share information between partner agencies regarding criminal justice outcomes.

Intermediaries

- 13 This review was initiated due to the local shortage of intermediaries which was preventing victims and witnesses from giving their best evidence and causing significant delays in relation to trials.
- 14 While the Ministry of Justice is responsible for recruitment of intermediaries it was suggested that a case could be made to have some training delivered locally in order to address the shortage.
- 15 Communication has been made with the Ministry of Justice regarding local training and now that the initial recruitment exercise is live the group continues to work with the Ministry of Justice to ensure that the successful training provider delivers training locally to the North East.

Victim Experience

- 16 The group is reviewing the support and communications with victims throughout the Criminal Justice System to better identify the needs of victims and manage expectations of victims and witnesses, reduce duplication and confusion and streamline existing processes.
- 17 The overall aim of this work is to ensure that victims are fully supported through the criminal justice process and able to give their best evidence where required.
- 18 Representatives from all partner organisation met on the 8th of November to suggest improvements and provide insights into the current victim's experience. This provided a greater understanding of how the system operates as a whole and identified some key issues and potential solutions.
- 19 The key actions and issues identified during the morning were written up and have been presented in a prioritisation matrix (appendix 3). This has now been agreed by partners and work is underway to progress the work.

Victim Personal Statements

- 20 The group continues to build on the work previously carried out in relation to Victim Personal Statements and attempts to address the poor quality of VPS statements across the county.
- 21 A review of compliance with recommended national standards showed no evident gaps in relation to process however, the number of Victim Personal Statement read out in court remains low across the North East.
- 22 Training opportunities to allow partners to support the writing of Victim Personal Statements are being investigated to address this. While, the group has agreed to dip sample VPS statements over the next quarter to create an evidence base for quality improvement.

Performance

- 23 Work to develop a performance management framework which effectively records a victim's ability to cope and recover from their experience and satisfaction across the CJS is underway.
- 24 This will support the work of the Victims and Witness Group to enable monitoring of services, comprehensive data sharing among partners and enhanced analysis to improve performance.
- 25 A task and finish group has been established and they held their first meeting on the 23rd of November at which, a series of key performance questions were agreed. The group is now working to identify key indicators to answer those questions and have arranged to meet in the New Year to share this information. It is anticipated that a

full performance framework will be available for the next Victims and Witness Group in March 2018.

Restorative Justice

- 26 The Victim and Witness Group is also working to ensure that at any stage of a victim's journey they have access to high quality Restorative Justice through supporting the work carried out in Durham and Darlington.
- 27 The Restorative Justice task and finish group has been re-established and partners are working on developing innovative ways to improve referrals and information sharing between agencies to improve access to Restorative Justice provision across the system.

Domestic Abuse

- 28 The PCVC is working with partners to support achievement of County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) objectives i.e. reduce repeat victims and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse, early intervention through education and awareness in schools and better identification and support of 'hidden' victims. In addition, a successful bid to the Police Transformation Fund has enabled work to resume on developing a 'Whole System Approach' to addressing Domestic Abuse. Specifically:
 - Ensuring all police officers are trained to recognise and respond appropriately to victims subject to coercive control;
 - Building effective partnerships across the Criminal Justice system, including the development of evidence collection and recording processes that aid prosecutions;
 - Improving information sharing and support for victims across the criminal, civil and family courts to reduce the risk of victims falling through gaps in the system;
 - Streamlining access to, and availability of, multi-agency support for victims and developing clear, innovative programmes that ensure meaningful consequences for perpetrators.

Sexual Violence

- 29 The Health and Justice Partnership Board is now fully established and is in the process of defining and delivering a shared strategy and action plan for the support of victims of rape and sexual assault. The strategy will encompass children, young people and adults and be based on a 'Report to Court' seamless model of care that includes access to crisis support, Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) services and appropriate follow-on support.
- 30 The strategy will also acknowledge and take account of those victims who do not necessarily need or want (or it would be inappropriate for them) to attend the SARC. In all cases, quality assured referral pathways and risk and need assessment processes will be in place to ensure victims are identified and appropriate care and support planning undertaken.

31 The strategy for commissioning, procurement and delivery of services for victims of rape and sexual assault will be underpinned by the development of:

- **Collaborative relationships across all stakeholders;**
- **A mutual understanding of definitions relating to the needs, rights and support of victims of rape and sexual assault;**
- **Jointly owned policies and protocols to connect the work between appropriate partners, ensuring clear definition of roles and responsibilities;**
- **A ‘whole systems’ approach in terms of the development, delivery and evaluation of support for victims**

Recommendation

32 The police and crime panel is recommended to:

- a. Note the progress of the work
- b. Ask for a further report as appropriate.

Alan Reiss
Chief of Staff

Appendix 1: Risks and Implications

Finance

All decisions with financial implications are made with value for money as a key consideration, and are affordable within budgets.

Staffing

The budgetary implications for staffing are dealt within the OPCVC. Staff numbers are budgeted to be broadly static during 2017/18.

Equality and Diversity

n/a

Accommodation

n/a

Crime and Disorder

The work of the Victim and Witness Group relates directly to victims and witnesses and successful prosecutions.

Children's Act 2004

n/a

Stakeholder/Community Engagement

Feedback in relation to victim and witness experiences includes direct feedback from partners and service users.

Environment

n/a

Collaboration and Partnerships

The work of the Victim and Witness Group focuses on collaboration and partnerships to ensure an effective CJ system that meets the needs of victims and witnesses.

Value for Money and Productivity

n/a

Potential Impact on Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The work of the Victim and Witness Group will impact directly or indirectly on the pursuit of Police and Crime Plan priorities.

Commissioning

Some decisions may relate to commissioning of services.

Other risks

n/a

Appendix 2: Plan on a Page

County Durham, Darlington and Cleveland Victim and Witnesses Strategy on a Page (2017– 2021)

Vision: Victims and witnesses receive end to end, co-ordinated care and support that enables them to cope and recover from their experience and participate in Criminal Justice Processes

Outcomes

Victims and witnesses cope with and recover from their experience

Victims and witnesses engage with CJS processes in a positive way

Objectives

Provide co-ordinated, end-to-end care and support for victims and witnesses

Deliver positive outcomes for victims and witnesses

Enable the victims voice to be heard throughout the CJS process

What do we need to be good at ? (Our Core Deliverables)

Cope and recovery

- Development of victim care advice services tailored to local need and sensitive to victim and witness experience
- Consistency of outcome based needs and risk assessment processes
- Understanding the different ways in which victims and witnesses are affected by and cope with their experience
- Cross-agency/stakeholder engagement
- Development and promotion of victim /witness centred practice

Pathways

- Understand partner agency roles and impact they have on supporting victims and witnesses
- Identify where gaps in service provision are
- Understand how different pathways impact on victims and witnesses
- Review information sharing protocols
- Improve our understanding of pathways in relation to VCOP and Witness Charter

Victim centred CJS processes

- Targeting of resources based on assessment of individual need
- Increasing the voice of the victim or witness through the CJS process
- Ensuring services are available and appropriate to support vulnerable victims and witnesses
- delivering against a performance framework that reflects national, regional and local policy and guidance

What will help us achieve our objectives? (Enabling Factors)

Communication

- Promoting successes in supporting victim and witnesses in order to increase public confidence
- Improved and clear communication with internal and external partners and the community
- Aligning our priorities to strategic needs

Performance Management

- Performance framework in place to enable monitoring against outcomes, targets and delivery plan
- Comprehensive data sharing among partners
- Enhanced analysis of data to improve performance

Knowledge and skills

- Key stakeholders are aware of partner agency roles and priorities
- Stakeholder skills and knowledge are utilised
- Increased awareness of gaps in provision to support commissioning

Appendix 3: Prioritisation Matrix

		Effort	
Impact	High	Quick Wins	Major Projects
Low	'Fill ins'	Hard Slogs	

High Impact - High Effort (Major Projects)

- Develop a scrutiny group that looks at specific cases with significant issues and completes a root / cause analysis on these issues.
- Providing a resource that provides sentencing support and advice to all victims.
- Explore soft intelligence issues as part of a VWG subgroup.
- Increase frontline officers' knowledge of victim and witness services.
- Ask officers to re offer victim support when re-thriving the process at the end of the investigation.
- Increase number of referrals to the WS from the WCU.
- Review opportunities for innovation nationally.
- Establish how victims of ASB fit into the criminal justice process and how services can interact with each other to provide the best service to victims.
- Develop and pilot new working models across the Criminal Justice System.
- Develop a performance framework for the victims and witness group through utilising the plan on a page.
- Improve witness facilities at court.

High Impact - Low Effort ('Fill ins')

- Ask officers to re offer victim support when re-thriving the process at the end of the investigation.
- Establish frontline police officers' understanding of victim and witness services.
- Establish how the VCAS pilot operates within the resolution without deployment team.
- Explore the purpose and effectiveness of a supervisor ring back and what it entails exactly.
- Gain an understanding of the referral numbers to the Witness Service in comparison with our familiar forces.
- Stagger the times witnesses are called to give evidence.

