

Listening and Learning: Improving support for victims in Cleveland.

1. Background

The *Listening and Learning – Improving support for victims in Cleveland* report outlines the findings from the Victims Services Advocates (VSA) project. The project was commissioned by the former Victims Commissioner in anticipation of the arrival of the PCC for Cleveland. This paper to the Safer Stockton Partnership outlines the key findings of the report along with the final recommendations which the VSA have suggested the incoming PCC takes into consideration. A full copy of the report can be provided on request.

This report aims to:

1. Provide a picture of current support for victims in Cleveland
2. Identify what victims need from local services
3. Propose a course of action by the PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) to meet those needs

The report was commissioned to look particularly at the needs of the following groups:

- victims of anti social behaviour
- victims of domestic abuse
- victims of sexual violence
- victims of hate crime
- people bereaved by murder of manslaughter
- young victims of crime

Support for victims of crime in Cleveland is provided by a range of voluntary, public and independent sector providers and there is evidence of strong partnership working. Whilst overall crime in Cleveland is falling, there are still significant issues with under reporting of crimes such as domestic abuse and hate crime.

There were five sources of information that contributed to the findings of the report:

1. A mapping exercise to identify the services that currently exist for victims in Cleveland
2. Consultation with local organisations and stakeholders
3. Focus groups and interviews with victims of crime
4. A review of statistical data from sources including the British Crime Survey
5. Existing local evidence and research

2. Key findings

2.1 Mapping services to victims in Cleveland: this involved desk based research into local services, discussions with key organisations and feedback from local victims of crime over a 12 month period. This identified over 40 organisations either delivering or commissioning victim specific services. A number of organisations expressed concern over increasing numbers of referrals and the capacity to deliver, as well as consistency and sustainability of funding – with future funding and commissioning arrangements a significant issue.

2.2 What victims in Cleveland told VSA: Focus groups and interviews with victims of crime were held, they were recruited from 'gateway' organisations, partner organisations, advertising and publicity. All participants had generally experienced the crime in the last two years. The project was also asked to consider the needs of young people as victims of crime. In many police force areas, there are very few specialist services for young victims. Victims in general accepted the limitations sometimes imposed by the criminal justice system but this was combined with a view that more could and should be done to address some very basic needs. Some victims felt that they had not been treated with dignity and respect, listened to or taken seriously and often felt more like a hindrance than a victim or witness. Communication and information were repeatedly reported as inadequate and the first point of contact was considered to be the most important. Both victims and stakeholders shared the view that communication within and between agencies was sometimes not as good as it could or should be and this resulted in victims having to repeat their story several times to various agencies.

2.3 What existing evidence and research from Cleveland tell us: The sources told VSA that in the main the crime types identified were priorities for local and national action. In common with many other areas, Cleveland has seen a rise in the number of domestic abuse, anti social behaviour and hate crime cases reported. An area which was identified as being underdeveloped, but a priority for the victims that were consulted was the way in which support was assessed and delivered. There was an acknowledgment from stakeholders that commissioning and delivering support to victims was still predominantly linked to specific crime types rather than person-centred approaches based on likely harm or impact. Taking an individual harm or impact based approach is recognised as requiring a partnership approach; multiple needs are likely to need multiple solutions that cannot be provided by one single agency. In Cleveland, there are examples of successful partnership working in terms of identifying and addressing many community safety issues. Developing this model further in relation to supporting victims is likely to contribute not only to better support for individuals but also the wider economy in terms of long-term savings to health and social services and the criminal justice system for example.

2.4 What the data tells us about victims and witnesses in Cleveland –

When asked how much they agreed or disagreed that the Police and local council were dealing with the anti social behaviour and crime issues that mattered in the area, 50% of respondents who had been a victim of crime strongly agreed or tended to agree. The top three responses for what the highest priority for the criminal justice system should be were;

1. Bringing people who commit crime to justice
2. Reducing crime
3. Dealing with cases promptly and efficiently

The top four responses that the criminal justice system could do to improve crime were;

1. Tougher sentences
2. Tackling anti social behaviour and minor crime
3. Reducing re-offending
4. Bringing more offenders to justice

2.5 What partner organisations and stakeholders in Cleveland told us

discussions demonstrated that there are likely to be multiple victim needs in any given area and that it is unrealistic to expect one single agency to provide all the support necessary to ensure a seamless pathway of care. Despite the number of services delivering support to victims, many stakeholders told us they were concerned about increasing demand, stretched capability and sustainability of funding. Public sector services are also under pressure to reduce spending and this could have implications for future service delivery.

3 The Service needs of victims of crime

3.1 This area of the research considers all the information gathered and aims to draw some conclusions about the priority service needs of each of these groups of victims in Cleveland. These conclusions have been informed by existing evidence and research, both national and local.#

3.2 Victims of prolonged anti-social behaviour – The Cleveland Local Policing Plan reports a 9% reduction in incidents of anti social behaviour. According to British Crime Survey data, 27% of respondents who had been a victim of crime thought that levels of anti social behaviour were high in Cleveland. 50% of respondents who had been a victim were not very confident or not confident at all that the local authorities in the area were effective at reducing anti social behaviour. All four Community Safety Partnerships take a multi-agency approach to tackling anti social behaviour. The local authorities, Police, social landlords and communities themselves are considered key partners. They all have anti social behaviour teams who have an investigative, enforcement and victim liaison role. Some teams, Stockton for example, have a dedicated victim liaison officer. There are a variety of landlord liaison schemes, target hardening, mediation and operations that focus on particular hotspot areas by providing extra Police patrols and increasing Police presence at peak times. The victims told us that the systems and processes involved in addressing incidents of anti social behaviour are very long and drawn out and require a number of agencies to work in a co-ordinated way. The

net impact of sustained episodes of anti social behaviour had left many victims feeling depressed, anxious, and unable to sleep and relatively isolated. Some victims who owned their home referred to feeling trapped because they were unable to move to escape the problem as it was impossible to sell their property. Overall this had resulted in confusion and sometimes a loss of confidence for victims who felt they'd been forgotten because processes had not been explained properly, they weren't kept up to date, and because they saw little progress but had to continue living with the problem.

3.3 Victims of domestic abuse –Much has changed in how the Police and other agencies view victims of domestic abuse. The creation of multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC's) and independent domestic violence advisors (IDVA's) have led to improvements in the services victims receive. The government's Action Plan to End Violence against women and girls (2011) contains 35 wide-ranging proposals, which require partnership working with and between government departments. A recurring theme in conversations with victims of domestic abuse was that their first experiences with a support agency were a key factor in determining whether they would continue with any action that had been initiated and whether they would report any future incidents. The principles of protection, prevention and provision are evident in all relevant strategies across the four Community Safety Partnerships and there are a number of common themes across each of the locality-based domestic abuse strategies. All refer to the need to:

- improve information collection and sharing
- address issues of under-reporting and repeat victimisation
- improve co-ordination between, and referral processes into mainstream services such as mental health, substance abuse and alcohol services
- strengthen early identification and protection processes for at risk and vulnerable victims
- identify young victims and their support needs early

In addition, the stakeholders that were consulted described the necessity of introducing whole family assessment processes rather than focusing on the needs of an individual in isolation from their wider networks. Stockton for example has a designated domestic abuse worker who supports victims in a variety of ways such as co-ordinating multi-agency input, liaising with agencies, advising on what support is available and using a person-centred approach to empower victims to make informed choices. Victims in Cleveland most frequently mentioned the lack of information about what support could be offered and communication with and between the various agencies. They described feeling as though they weren't being listened to and that their experience was not always taken as seriously as it should be. Holistic assessment, acknowledgement of their fears, early intervention, appropriately tailored support and being kept informed of the progress of any criminal investigation was identified as key factors in recovery. What is also clear is that the needs of victims of domestic abuse rarely fit into one category but require a co-ordinated approach from a number of specialist and mainstream agencies.

3.4 Victims of sexual violence – For a variety of reasons sexual violence often goes unreported. It is estimated that 9,264 people across Cleveland will have experienced serious sexual assault on one or more occasions since the age of 16. In terms of provision, Cleveland has one Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and three independent sexual violence advisers (ISVA). There are also a range of voluntary agencies providing specialist sexual violence services including: Women's Support Network and Jigsaw, Eva Women's Aid, Harbour and Barnado's. The needs assessment (by Teesside Sexual Violence Strategy Group in January 2012) concluded that there was good provision of specialist sexual violence services with a skilled and committed workforce. However, it was thought that some victims' needs were not being met effectively. These included:

- victims who are awaiting trial
- children and young people
- victims who have been abusers
- people from black and minority ethnic communities
- people with learning difficulties.

The key themes to emerge were the need to:

- develop services around the needs of victims
- ensure victims can receive the right service at the right time
- commission a 'whole system' that describes how elements of services work together
- clarify what is being commissioned through up-to-date service level agreements
- ensure service standards are equitable across Teesside
- routinely monitor outcomes
- develop clear pathways of care, and for agencies to develop joint protocols and agree minimum standards
- invest in training and professional development by service providers
- raise professional awareness of sexual violence.

Despite improvements in support victims still referred to the need for a more sensitive approach by the criminal justice agencies including the Police and courts. Some had experienced what they perceived as disbelief and this was particularly so for those victims who had disclosed abuse retrospectively. Waiting lists for certain services was noted as a major issue for some victims. It was also noted that the need for support doesn't always end when the court case does and that victims often want to take control of their lives again. Victims and stakeholders point to the need for a more consistent response to victims who report sexual violence and the need for more information about the support available. Independent advocacy is required along with a crucial need for follow up support for victims.

3.5 People bereaved by murder and manslaughter – No focus groups or interviews were held with victims, however, the report refers to the Review into the Need of Families Bereaved by Homicide, Louise Casey CB 2011 which called for:

- A dedicated casework service to help families with practical problems and support in the early weeks and months
- Trauma and bereavement counselling as necessary
- An offer of peer support through a national network of peer support / self help
- Age-appropriate services for children

Mainstream and general services however tend to focus on the physical, emotional and psychological recovery of the person rather than advocacy or practical help with claiming grants for funeral costs for example. In addition there is the issue of identifying and providing support to those outside the victim's immediate family. Taking a harm based approach to delivering support would ensure that services would be available to help secondary victims in the case of homicide. This would mean that all those affected by the crime would be identified and offered support.

3.6 Victims of hate crime – Hate crime does not only affect the targeted individual. It affects victim's families and the wider community, and can lead to further violence and aggressive behaviour. A particular issue that emerged was that the boundaries between anti social behaviour and hate crime can be blurred. The Home Office hate crime action plan 'Challenge it, Report it, Stop it' (March 2012) outlines the new national strategy for tackling hate crime by focussing on prevention, early intervention and improving the response to victims. Aiming among other things, to achieve better multi-agency working to identify and support victims and to reduce the grey area between ASB and hate crime by:

- Working with Police forces, councils and housing providers to improve handling of public calls about anti social behaviour to identify possible hate crime victims
- Publishing risk assessment tools that allow Police and other call handlers to identify victims of hate crime early in the reporting process
- Engaging with communities at risk of hate crime to raise awareness of the law on hate crime
- Putting Safeguarding Adults Boards on a statutory footing, to increase awareness, detection and prevention of abuse and exploitation of vulnerable adults

Hate crime is believed to be under-reported and further work is necessary to measure the full nature and scale of the problem. There is generally very little evidence of specialist support services for victims of hate crime. Much of the support is delivered by organisations with a broader remit such as Victim Support. Victims said their experience of hate crime had intruded into many aspects of their lives. Understanding, respecting and providing support was essential, with victims also describing what they perceived as a 'hierarchy' of hate crime where some incidents were taken more seriously than others in relation to motivation and prejudice. A number of principles are suggested to underpin the development of an appropriate response to victims of hate crime:

1. Improved agency training in relation to understanding issues such as culture, background and special needs
2. Scrutiny of recorded recognised hate crime to identify trends
3. Avoiding all hierarchy of hate crime where some are seen as more important than others
4. Strong community engagement to build confidence, trust and encourage full reporting
5. Sharing good practice
6. Effective reporting mechanisms including carefully monitored and evaluated third party reporting

3.7 Young victims of crime - Though many young people are affected by crime they are less likely than adults to report it, seeing it more as a 'fact of life'. In a recent study, almost one in five young people (22% of girls and 13.5% of boys) said they had experienced cyber bullying. Crime perpetrated in school can be difficult to identify and to address as teachers are not always trained to deal with issues beyond bullying. Young people can also be vulnerable to further abuse and repeat victimisation if they speak about what has happened to them. There is little specific information about young victims in Cleveland. Generally, children and young people are far more likely to become victims of crime than adults. The young people consulted as part of the report described a variety of experiences from the relatively minor such as theft of a mobile phone to more serious bullying by peers and very serious sexual abuse. A number of principles should underpin the support available for young victims of crime which include:

1. A variety of ways, both formal and informal to assess young victim's individual needs
2. A variety of ways to support young victims including one-to-one sessions and group work
3. Using existing provision including sports clubs, youth groups and statutory services like housing and health

4 Delivering the services to victims

4.1 The report suggests that the incoming PCC should understand and respond to the needs of victims and prioritise their needs accordingly. The following actions are proposed to address the issues identified:

1. Introduction of harm/impact based model of assessment and support, the PCC should:
 - Recognise all victims of crime and anti social behaviour as individuals with individual needs
 - Respond to crime and anti social behaviour according to the likely harm or impact experienced by the victim
 - Treat victims according to their needs, taking into account the needs of their children and wider family as appropriate, in service provision, and making regular assessments of how a victim's needs change over time
 - Introduce incentives for services that can demonstrate how they achieve the best overall outcome for victims

2. Clear, jointly agreed, monitored and evaluated pathways for referral, assessment and support, the PCC should:
 - Review existing referral processes and pathways across specialist support services to ensure seamless provision
 - Review current flexibility of pathways into mainstream and wider support networks to support early intervention and reduce potential for re-victimisation
 - Develop advocacy provision to enable victims to make their own views and wishes clear, express and present their views effectively, obtain independent advice and accurate information, and negotiate and resolve conflict
3. Review of communication and information standards, monitoring and evaluation, the PCC should:
 - Introduce standards of communication with victims of crime that include measures not only of frequency, but sensitivity, timeliness, appropriateness and tailoring to those with special communication needs and the use of appropriate language
 - Implement more efficient ways for victims to request/receive feedback according to their needs whilst managing their expectations
 - Introduce effective monitoring and reviewing of compliance
 - Introduce sustained awareness raising campaigns about services available to victims, especially for hard to reach groups
4. Introduction of robust models of victim engagement, the PCC should:
 - Work with key stakeholders as well as local and national organisations to regularly gather and update information on current services and their scope, by crime type and victim demographic, and to report back on service gaps and victim needs
 - Create local mechanisms that are sensitive to the needs of victims to enable them to give feedback on their experiences
 - Identify/appoint victims advocate's/champion's to work with victims and stakeholders to ensure that due care is given to victims needs
5. Explore, agree and initiate models of consortium/collaborative service delivery, the PCC should:
 - Acknowledge and support current partnership and commissioning arrangements
 - Be sensitive to the challenges that local commissioning arrangements may present, and work with relevant stakeholders to support an effective and high standard of service delivery for victims
 - Explore and support consortium/collaborative service delivery arrangements to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and economies of scale