



VICTIMS SHOULD COME FIRST - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Introduction

The Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands held his first Victims Summit on the 11 January 2013, and it had a number of specific objectives which included the opportunity to:

- speak to victims and representatives in order to ensure that adequate support services are in place for victims and their families
- discuss the distribution of victims funding which is being transferred to the Commissioner in October 2014 and to consider how the needs of victims will be represented locally. Police and Crime Commissioners will be responsible for ensuring that the emotional and practical support services for victims of crime are met. These services help victims to cope with and recover from the impacts of crime.

At the event the Commissioner set out his ambitions for community led local policing and crime boards in each of the seven local authority areas to ensure that the views of local people are reflected in priorities set locally for policing and crime, and also that those priorities are delivered. They will also be part of the decision making process on the local allocation of funds and monitor their local police and crime plan. The boards will be made up of members of the community as well as responsible authorities. The exact composition will be a matter for local determination.

Roundtable discussions gave participants the opportunity to discuss and develop options for distribution of the victims funding from October 2014. The information gained from the Summit formed the basis of the public consultation document 'Victims Should Come First' which was launched on the 4 March 2013. The closing date for responses to the consultation was the 31 May 2013.

This document provides a summary of the main themes emerging in response to the consultation questions. The Strategic Policing and Crime Board report that sits alongside this response indicates the direction the Commissioner intends to take, following consideration of the views expressed. In total, we received 119 formal responses to the consultation and the appendix to this summary paper provides further details of those who responded.

Development of a Victims Commission

We said:

The Commissioner will benefit immensely from external involvement from individuals, groups, organisations and communities. Ensuring that there is a wider perspective makes

policing at both a strategic and local level more effective and more responsive to community needs. Independent advice is especially valuable in relation to:

- developing policies and procedures
- ensuring that the priorities for the local authorities areas, and also the West Midlands are appropriate by working with communities and partners to identify local concerns and solve problems
- input into and influence the Commissioners Police and Crime Plan
- make final decisions on funding and its allocations
- ensure that the Commissioner is giving victims a reliable and responsive service that is visible and accessible

In order to address these needs, the Commissioner is proposing the development of a *Victims Commission* which will consist of representatives from the VCSE sector. The group will be independent of the Commissioner, the police and members will have an interest in improving services, bringing expertise, knowledge and experience to the development of policy as they relate to victims of crime.

We asked: Do you agree with the setting up of a Victims Commission?

Tell us your thoughts about the name of such a group, how and by whom representation should be determined, and the role and nature of such a group.

You said:

Yes: 61% **No: 39%**

Responses to this question tended to agree with the setting up of Victims Commission but felt that the group must come from the diverse range of groups that support victims. One consistent message was that representation on the Commission should ensure involvement from groups that cover the diversity of victims groups and support the diversity of the population of West Midlands. The terms of reference should be inclusive. Groups such as Birmingham Voluntary Sector Council would be helpful in ensuring that smaller groups are aware of the opportunity to participate. It is felt that to ensure that there is faith in the process, the commissioning process needs to involve groups that know and understand the specific issues of all victims eg. black and minority ethnic groups, women only groups and disability groups. It should also utilise existing structures that across the West Midlands to nominate appropriate representation. One example of such a structure is the West Midlands Sexual Violence Providers Consortium - mentioned by more than one respondent.

Another clear message was that smaller community groups had little or no voice, and they felt as though they are often not invited to the table - however their involvement is necessary. There needs to be a mechanism to ensure that they are involved. It should ensure that marginalised victims such as those who experience racial harassment or sex workers who get lost within a mainstream organisation such as Victim Support, are involved.

It was generally felt that the role and nature of the Victims Commission should be to represent the interests of victims of a range of crimes including domestic violence, violent and hate crime, as well as serious acquisitive crime and anti-social behaviour. Those interests can be represented by a mixture of providers of services for victims. The Commission would be a reference group to support the commissioning process of securing

services for victims. It would therefore have the following functions: understanding the needs of victims, identifying victim's services design options and reviewing the effectiveness of services for victims.

It was felt that there was an opportunity for the Commission to fulfil many important functions including the sharing of best practice, supporting innovation, and identifying gaps in service provision. One other crucial role would be to ensure that smaller groups that do not have extensive experience or expertise in engaging with commissioning processes, are supported in order to develop their capability to do so. The Commission should also be actively involved in developing and advising on policy and strategy in relation to supporting victim's services in the West Midlands.

The role of the Commission should include consultation on the needs of victims, research and response options, effective, evidence based practice, review and monitoring of provision, encourage partnership working where crossovers exist, and share gaps in service with existing providers to enable them to consider widening their scope of activity. It should also act as an expert stakeholder forum gathering information about victim's needs, collating service user input and providing an updated audit of current provision and the vulnerabilities of that provision. It could lead on strengthening the links between the police, CJS and the range of support agencies accessed by victims.

Not all victims of crime see themselves as such and the branding of support services needs to ensure that it does not become a barrier to engagement or create a stigma that prevents people seeking help.

Commissioning Framework and Delivery Options

We said:

Now we would like you to choose your preferred option for delivery of services and the reasons why you have chosen that option.

Engaging with community organisations in the design, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of services, whether through a Victims Commission as outlined above or otherwise, is essential to ensuring effective and efficient services that respond to local needs. The challenge for the Commissioner is to ensure that all organisations are able to engage fully with local commissioning processes, including decision making. Given the current economic climate, the Commissioner is committed to commissioning services which adopt a set of clear principles which will underpin the approaches to service delivery. The Commissioner wishes to passport funding to the VCSE sector to allow decisions about victims' services to be victim led and made by those who have a good understanding of the needs of victims. This would be accompanied by 'light touch' accountability systems.

The following proposed options are based on the responses that the Commissioner received from attendees at the Victims Summit held on 11 January 2013.

1) There should be a West Midlands wide structure, led by Victim Support, in consultation with other VCSE sector organisations?

This approach maximises the capacity and capability of an established organisation, Victim Support, which already has a commissioning process in place. It allows the skills of partner organisations, working with a shared agenda, to make decisions on an informed basis about

the needs locally. This would also ensure that the lead agency (Victim Support) uses both the market place and service users working together to define the issue, understand need, and develop a service model based on service requirements.

2) There should be a West Midlands wide structure comprising VCSE organisations?

This grouping would operate as described above but with no lead organisation. Representation would come from the VCSE sector across the seven local authority areas. This has the potential to maximize the capacity and capability of existing organisations but a mechanism would need to be found for establishing membership of the group and setting up processes and procedures for commissioning.

3) The West Midlands Office for Policing and Crime should operate in-house procurement through a commissioning team?

This would require the Commissioner to establish a commissioning structure which does not currently exist. This option potentially does not make use of existing capacity, skills and expertise that exist within Victim Support or other VCSE sector organisations. The latter potentially continuing with commissioning as a result of funding that they may receive from other sources thereby duplicating commissioning structures.

You said:

Option 1 78% Option 2 18% Option 3 3.2%

None of the above 0.8%

Option 1

Respondents felt that Victim Support were very well established and experienced in keeping victims of crime as the main focus, had experience of working with all types of crime and also have specialist workers dealing with particular crimes. It was also felt that they had a good structure in place to support victims of crime and had good links within the Force. Some respondents described their service as excellent, and very responsive to the needs of victims.

Other comments included

- that marginalised victims get lost within a mainstream organisation such as Victim Support
- there is a conflict of interest for Victim Support who are or perceived to be direct competitors of many of the voluntary and community specialist organisations, and therefore it is inappropriate that a direct competitor takes on the role of administering the commissioning process
- Work needs to be done between Victim Support and the voluntary sector to combat any conflicts of interest as without the trust of the broad range of organisations that work with victims - the structure will not work.
- The commissioning process needs groups that know and understand the specific issues of victims eg. BME groups, women only groups and disability groups
- Option 1 will make best use of existing structures and mechanisms so that setting up commissioning structures is not a consideration, therefore less cost and resources will be involved

- A lead organisation is needed otherwise it may mean that things are not as driven and they could otherwise be.
- There is a need to ensure that there is not one dominant group with the greater power in decision making.
- May be perceived as favouring the continuation of existing Victim Support services over that of other providers.

Option 2

There was a view that Victim Support it does not have the requisite knowledge to make accurate judgements about the specific and unique client needs that the VCSE organisations have - because they are seen as a general organisation. It also does not encompass the variation in local need provided by specialist agencies as they have always referred victims needing specialist care to specialist agencies because they are unable to provide these services directly. In order for a new framework to be effective, it needs to ensure that all agencies have trust in it.

Comments included - this option offers the opportunity to lay down a robust structure for utilising the specialist skills that are available across the victim care and support framework and there is also the opportunity to include research expertise within the structure. It supports the diversity of the population of the West Midlands and of the voluntary and community sector - it was felt that voluntary and community sector organisations are clearly sites of authority and expertise and should be at the centre of the structure.

This option gives the opportunity for a non-affiliated Commission, empowered to commission services based on need and to apply scrutiny measures in terms of efficacy, value for money etc. It therefore should lead to a more transparent, needs-based commissioning process, in which the most vulnerable of victims are able to have their needs met.

There are a wide range of victims groups operating across the West Midlands area, many of which provide specialist support for victims. These support services need to be recognised for the work they do and feature as part of a suite of provision which can be accessed by victims across the area. Developing a consortia of voluntary and community groups will provide greater transparency in how future funding for victims services are provided and commissioning decisions made. This should address any perceived bias towards Victim Support, but it may be more difficult to achieve a consensus regarding decision making.

Option 3

This process opens up the commissioning debate and application process with the need to have an assurance of an underpinning in-depth knowledge of victims services. One drawback will be the length of time that the process may take to result in effective commissioning of services that actually respond to the needs of the community it serves. This could lead to the risk of opting for services that have no specialism, but are very good at responding to tenders and providing generalist care approaches as a way of supporting their core costs.

Finances are held centrally and it makes sense to sit all commissioning, performance management, procurement and tendering under one roof.

In order for the commissioning process to have an appropriate spread across the West Midlands, accounts for national good practice and shared learning from the MoJ, EU and HO best practice research, it was felt that the process should not be led by VCSE organisations

with an interest. One respondent felt that the best option is an in-house procurement with a specialist advisory group through the Victims Commissioner, advising on need - not wants. Victim Support while representing an umbrella body, are a large competitor of many of the VCSE organisations and relations are at times challenging. Any party with an interest can not have any role in commissioning. Furthermore, commissioning of services needs to account for both localised and regional approaches and where in the past it has not been the case, we have an opportunity to commission services based on needs and partnership with the Force.

None of the above

In line with the Commissioners vision to drive priorities from a local level and passport Community Safety Funds back to Community Safety Partnerships and the newly developing local policing and crime boards, that the money is awarded to CSPs for them to commission the support of victims from the voluntary and community sector, locally based on local need.

Or

That the funding be made available to the 7 CSPs for services to be commissioned across the region from the voluntary and community sector, as collective of CSPs.

Appendix

Organisations that responded:

Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre
The Survivors Trust - Victims Support
National Homicide Service - Victim Support
Victim Support
Wolverhampton Domestic Violence Forum
The Safer Solihull Partnership
Sai Datta Sarees
Dudley MBC Community Safety Team
Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire Ltd
Sandwell Women's Aid/Birmingham City Council
Kairos Women Working Together
Savana
Sure Start Blakenhall Children's Centre
The Haven Wolverhampton
Sandwell Targeted Youth Support
Neighbourhood Watch
Erdington Residents
West Midlands Police
Crisis Point
HMP YOI Brinsford
EKTA - Unity Group
Safer Wolverhampton Partnership
Barnardos
Birmingham City Council
Coventry Women's Voices
Walsall Housing Group
St Joseph's Primary School
Rights and Equality Sandwell
Flamesurge UK Ltd
Solihull IAG
One Point Three Ltd
Coventry Haven
Engage Youth Empowerment Services
Local Neighbourhood Partnership Service
Wolverhampton Inter-Faith and Regeneration Network
Wolverhampton Autism Spectrum Support Group
Solihull MBC
Imaan Group

Thank you to all the individual members of the public and victims of crime who also took the time to respond to the consultation.