

Victims' Services

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The Government is looking to improve the services delivered to the victims of crime. Javed Khan, the Chief Executive of Victim Support, the largest independent charity supporting victims in England and Wales has agreed to come and address the Board about the implications of these changes and what they will mean for Victim Support. This paper also sets out the Ministry of Justice's intention of reforming the commissioning of services for victims and seeks members' views on the proposal that local commissioning should be conducted by police and crime commissioners.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Consider Mr Khan's presentation and ask questions as appropriate;
2. Note the Ministry of Justice consultation on improving services to victims of crime; and
3. Provide comments on the Ministry of Justice proposals in the consultation to inform the Board's response to it.

Action

Officers to reflect members' views in the Board's response to the Ministry of Justice consultation and action as appropriate any other matters arising out of the Board's consideration of this item.

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Victims' Services

Background

1. One of the government's commitments has been to improve services to the victims of crime, with the Coalition Agreement making reference to using money recovered from criminals or any money they earn in prison to invest in victims' services. Further commitments were made in the Ministry of Justice's Green Paper 'Breaking the Cycle', published in December 2010, to increase the financial reparation that offenders make to victims, to give more opportunities to victims to make personal statements in court, and increase the use of restorative justice as a means of improving victim satisfaction.
2. The government also indicated that the Green Paper should be seen as the first step towards a comprehensive rethink of the services provided to victims. The government has been conducting a review of the services provided to victims and witnesses covering three strands: the support available to victims and witnesses; ensuring victims benefit from greater restoration and reparation; and, the responsibilities placed on victims and witnesses are matched with a clearer set of rights.
3. Many of the services currently provided to victims are provided by the voluntary sector, and the oldest and largest independent charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales is Victim Support. Established in 1974 Victim Support runs the Witness Service in every court and the national victim support line. Mr Javed Khan, the Chief Executive of Victim Support, has been asked therefore to come and give a presentation to the Board about the development of victims' services and the impact government policy is having on this area.

Current issues for Victim Support

4. There are a range of issues where Victim Support's work overlaps with that of the Board. This includes anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, community sentences, and the changes the government is looking to make by implementing the Ministry of Justice Green Paper. Two areas where Victim Support are currently engaged in work is the transition to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and the forthcoming White Paper and then legislation on anti-social behaviour.
5. As members will recall the Home Office consulted on changes to the tools and powers available to councils and the police to tackle anti-social behaviour at the start of 2011. As well as simplifying the existing range of tools and making them

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easier to use the Home Office also wanted to ensure that victims of persistent anti-social behaviour such as Fiona Pilkington, are able to ensure that those responsible respond to complaints they have made. The government therefore proposed the introductory of a community trigger – a statutory duty on the responsible authorities on a community safety partnership to respond to reports that they had not done anything to tackle persistent anti-social behaviour.

6. The Home Office was due to publish a White Paper on anti-social behaviour at the end of January, which would provide the government's response to the earlier anti-social behaviour consultation, and would also set out the wider work across Whitehall to tackle anti-social behaviour. It is anticipated that the White Paper will be published in the near future and will be followed by a bill in the new Queen's Speech in early May. We understand that the White Paper will set out the government's intention to implement the proposals in the anti-social behaviour consultation, including the community trigger, with some amendments. Details of the LGA's response to the anti-social behaviour consultation can be found in the copy of the Board's response to the consultation set out at **Appendix A**.
7. The ability of PCCs to make community safety grants combined with the transfer of funding to them to commission services from April 2013 could mean a considerable change in the way services to victims are delivered. The possibility for this is further increased by the Ministry of Justice consultation, 'Getting it right for victims and witnesses', published in January. This consultation sets out reforms which are designed to ensure that there is a more coherent service for victims of crime.

The 'Getting it right for victims and witnesses' consultation

8. The proposals in the consultation are based on the government's view that important needs of victims are not being met, and the principles that support should be given to those needing it most, that support is available as and when the victim needs it, that different areas need different services, and offenders should make reparations for their crimes. The government is therefore looking to assist victims of serious crime, the most persistently targeted and the most vulnerable.
9. The government has in the main been funding services to victims at a national level. Some of this funding is due to continue such as putting money into rape support centres, investing in the National Homicide Service, protecting funding for services under its strategy for tackling violence against women and girls, and investing in voluntary organisations providing support to the most vulnerable victims.

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10. However the government believes that services for victims need to reflect and be more responsive to local needs, with most services commissioned at a local level. The Ministry of Justice's proposal is for the bulk of victims' services to be commissioned by PCCs from 2014, with a limited number of services commissioned at a national level. PCCs are specifically required under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act to obtain the views of victims about their plans, and the government takes the views that as PCCs will have links to councils, the criminal justice system and the third sector they are better placed than others to work effectively with them all.
11. To assist PCCs in assessing if there are the right services locally the Home Office along with the Victims' Commissioner funded Victims' Services Advocates to catalogue local services and provide a report for PCCs. Victim Support have provided the advocates and will publishing the reports on their website when they are published around May. This work is unlikely to be repeated in the future now that the last Victims' Commissioner, Louise Casey, has moved across to the Department of Communities and Local Government to lead their work on troubled families, as the government has not appointed a replacement Victims' Commissioner, and is currently considering the future of the role.
12. The government will establish a framework for local commissioning which will reflect the government's priorities set out in paragraph 8 above, and will be designed to encourage more joint working between the police and the voluntary sector. PCCs will then have to apply this framework and commission the services they think best meet local need. These changes will have an impact on Victim Support which has previously received a £38 million per annum grant from the government for supporting the victims of crime. They will also impact on councils. There is the potential for service provision to be duplicated if a PCC decides to invest in a service across their force area, such as refuges for victims of domestic violence, which a number of councils also deliver.
13. It is this fragmented approach to commissioning of voluntary services that concerns Victim Support. From a position where Victim Support are commissioned at a national level to support victims, the government's agenda in this area will mean that they alongside other voluntary bodies will have to bid to individual PCCs, with some deciding to commission services and others deciding to do something different. Although the LGA sees no problem with different services being delivered in different areas, we have been concerned about fragmented commissioning at a local level, with partners carrying out separate commissioning rather than merging budgets and working together – something community budgets have been designed to address.

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14. The Ministry of Justice is seeking views on their new commissioning proposals in the consultation and in particular would like responses to the following consultation questions:
- 14.1 Is a mixture of locally-led and national commissioning the best way to commission support services for victims of crime?
 - 14.2 Should police and crime commissioners be responsible for commissioning victim support services at a local level? Who else could commission support services?
 - 14.3 Who do you think should commission those services at a national level?
 - 14.4 Which services do you think should be commissioned at a national level?
 - 14.5 Should there be a set of minimum entitlements for victims of serious crimes, those who are persistently targeted and the most vulnerable?
 - 14.6 Is there further support that we need to put in place for victims of terrorism, and bereaved family members?
15. Members' views on these proposals are sought in order to inform the Board's response to the consultation.

Conclusion and next steps

16. Officers will draft a response to the 'Getting it right for victims and witnesses' consultation based on Board members' comments, and then circulate a draft submission for members to comment on, before submitting a finalised response in time for the 22 April 2012 deadline.

Financial Implications

17. There are no financial implications arising from the LGA from this report.