



Victims and Survivors Service

Quarterly Review Report

October to December 2015

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Summary

1. The Office of the First and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has requested that the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland (CVSNI) review the progress of the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) and produce a report that comments on that progress.
2. This report focuses on the period from October to December 2015.
3. This reporting period has been a busy operational time for the Service, with ongoing communication with individuals, progressing monitoring and evaluation processes and managing the pilot on personalised budgets and caseworkers.
4. Communication and interaction between the Commission and the Service has remained constructive during this reporting period. This productive working relationship is essential regarding the Collaborative Design Programme, ongoing work relating to eligibility and ascertaining the best way forward regarding assessing the needs of individual victims and survivors.
5. The Quarterly Review Reports remain an important element of the Commission's responsibility to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors. The reports are used by the Commissioner, in line with her statutory duties, to keep under review services provided for victims and survivors. They also act as a useful reference point for other stakeholders.
6. The Commission is committed to partnership working with the Department, Service and the wider sector to ensure that everyone delivers the best for victims and survivors, enabling an effective support service for those accessing support.

Recommendations

7. After taking into consideration all the information contained within this report, the Commission does not propose any recommendations to the Department.

Background

8. Target 1.2 of the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI and 'the Commission') 2015/16 Business Plan requires the Commission to produce four quarterly reports on the progress and operation of the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS and 'the Service').¹

¹ The provision of these review reports represents a key component of the Commission's responsibility to 'keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for victims and survivors by the Victims and Survivors Service' as outlined within the Victims and Survivors Strategy: Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (2009) *Victims and Survivors Strategy*, Belfast: The Stationery Office, p.7.

9. This is the third Quarterly Review Report of 2015/16. Whilst building on previous reports and their recommendations, this report provides an update on the operation of the VSS during the period from October to December 2015.
10. In order to identify these findings, the Commission has collated information from a range of sources. The primary source of information is that supplied to the Commission directly from the Service. The Forum Services Working Group (FSWG) has also proved to be a valuable source of information, as has information provided by individuals who have direct experience of interacting with the VSS. Finally, Commission staff collate views and issues from across the sector during the course of their work, for example, through arranged group visits and feedback from individual victims and survivors.

Individual Needs Programme

Support Schemes

11. The Individual Needs Programme (INP) was opened for 2015/16 at the end of April 2015. The schemes opened in 2015/16 mirrored the support schemes that were opened by the VSS in 2014/15. These schemes are:
- Financial Assistance;
 - Support for the Bereaved;
 - Support for Carers;
 - Support for the Injured;
 - Support for Chronic Pain; and
 - Education and Training.
12. Due to budgetary constraints the schemes were administered on the basis of one award per person for the period of 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.²

Reporting Data

13. As of 31 December 2015 the Service has provided the following summary of award letters issued to individuals:

Scheme	Awards Issued 2014/15	Awards Issued 2015/16	Increase	Award Value	Total Committed £K
Financial Assistance	2,248	2,661	413	£820	£2,182
Support for Bereaved	2,117	2,452	335	£500	£1,226
Support for Injured High Rate Care DLA	423	553	130	£1,500	£830

² Individuals could also apply for and avail of Financial Assistance alongside one other support scheme.

Support for Injured Middle Rate Care DLA	403	507	104	£500	£254
Support for Carers	417	495	78	£500	£248
Chronic Pain Treatments	294	45	-249	£500	£30
Education and Training	167	24	-143	£500	£12
				Total	£4,782

14. The Service has advised that all of the schemes have seen an increase in the numbers of eligible clients who are accessing the schemes in 2015/16. As a result of the additional resources provided through the October Monitoring Round the Service has advised that an additional 200 awards were issued for all those with relevant evidence up to October 2015. In December 2015 an additional 26 awards were issued under the Support for Bereaved Scheme, 23 under Support for Injured High Rate Care DLA, 31 under Support for Injured Middle Rate Care DLA and 18 under Support for Carers.
15. During the last reporting period the VSS provided support to a number of individuals towards Chronic Pain treatments who did not meet the DLA criteria under the Support for Injured scheme. During 2015/16 the Commission has received a number of contacts from individuals expressing disappointment at the use of DLA to establish eligibility. Any assistance for individuals in this position is welcome. The Service has advised that discussions are ongoing with the Belfast Trust to establish how best to pursue receiving clarification around the appropriateness of these services. This work will be taken forward by the Service in February 2016.
16. The Service has advised that contact with the Musgrave Pain Clinic to examine the potential for the clinic to assess applications and for the VSS to potentially pay for any budgetary shortfalls for aids continues. The Service and the WAVE Trauma Centre's Injured Group met with the Musgrave Pain Clinic in October to ensure that any scheme is appropriate and does not present any duplication in services already being delivered. A draft framework and process for accessing this scheme was completed by the Service during this reporting period with the view to a pilot commencing in January 2016.
17. The Commission welcomes the Service's continued engagement with statutory services during this period.

Personalised Budgets, Caseworker Approach and Individual Needs Consultation

18. The Service has advised that during this reporting period VSS Caseworkers met with clients face-to-face and also by telephone for the purpose of completing Individual Needs Consultations. For those individuals who contacted the VSS and were members of groups, they were given the option of completing the process with the group's nominated Caseworker.
19. As of the 31 December 2015 the VSS advised that 346 individuals were registered to take part in the pilot within the Service and 99 individuals were registered to participate

in the pilot project with a Caseworker within groups. The individuals participating are broken down as 258 injured, 180 bereaved and 7 carers.

Forum Services Working Group

20. During this reporting period the Forum met with members of the VSS board and their senior management on 22 October 2015. Issues discussed related to future planning for schemes, eligibility, funding for groups, research and the pilot on Personalised Budgets, Caseworker Approach and Individual Needs Consultation. Subsequently, the Forum met with the Interim Chief Executive on the 20 November 2015 along with the Department for a workshop to eligibility and the design of schemes as part of the Victims and Survivors Forum’s residential.

Victim Support Programme

21. The Victim Support Programme (VSP) provides funding for organisations that provide health and wellbeing services and social support to victims and survivors. The VSP has two funding streams: Large Grants (amounting to more than £75,000) and Small Grants (up to £75,000).
22. During this reporting period the Service conducted a review of year end estimates and reports, in partnership with each group, was conducted. All groups were issued with interim letters of offer and these were converted to full letters of offer during the year following a review of work plans and targets being met with the exception of one group. This development will provide some comfort to those currently receiving funding. However, the Commission is conscious that a number of groups have experienced an increased in demand for services since the last application process. Further, CVSNI has received representations from non-VSP funded groups wishing to access support from the VSS.
23. In December additional funding was assigned towards assisting groups with the delivery of additional Health and Wellbeing services. The Service communicated this to groups with a call for applications and additional services will be delivered before the end of 2015/16.

Reporting Data

24. The Service has provided a summary of reporting data received to date for 2015/16:

November 2015 - Reflecting data submitted to VSS by 6 January 2016	
> £75k contracts	
Number of groups issued with the finalised M&E materials	40
< £75k contracts	
Number of groups issued with the finalised M&E materials	24

Number of unique clients registered in VSS-funded organisations for period 1 April 2015 – 30 November 2015	8,830
Number of clients that we can see have exited services for period 1 April 2015 – 30 November 2015	12,098
Gender	
Males (plus as a percentage of total)	3,518
Females (plus as a percentage of total)	5,303
Transgender	1
Blank	8
Age	
Age range	7 to 97
Average age	53
Primary identification with Victims & Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006	
Injured (physically)	586
Injured (psychologically)	5,747
Bereaved	1,862
Carers	28
Identifies with more than one category	137
Blank	213
Health and welling numbers accessing Services	
Total number of clients accessing HWB services (note: not unique records, includes duplicated instances of individuals accessing multiple services)	4,124
Counselling	1,530
Complementary Therapies	2,421
CBT/EMDR	107
Other H&W services	66
Total number who have exited services	2,495
Social Support numbers exited and numbers current	
Total number of clients accessing Social Support services (note: not unique records, includes duplicated instances of individuals accessing multiple services)	13,958
Total number who have exited services	9,603

25. The Service continues to signpost individuals to support within VSP-funded organisations. The VSS has advised that during this operating period they made 4 referrals in December, 8 in November and 15 in October.

Support Visits

26. VSS staff continued to meet with VSP-funded groups during this reporting period. Support Officers conducted 21 visits in December, 20 in November and 17 in October.
27. During this reporting period Support Officers provided support on monitoring and evaluation proposals. Service board members also accompanied Support Officers to visits during this reporting period and Support Officers also commenced holding focus groups with members which provided an opportunity for members of groups to share their experiences of funded services.

Monitoring and Evaluation

28. Monitoring and evaluation remains a matter of priority for the Commission. The RSM McClure Watters INP research recommended that a robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be established in line with the aims and objectives set in the business case with any monitoring and evaluation framework being in place and operational in time for the delivery of the 2015/16 programme.³ This is echoed in the VSP research, recommending the development of robust monitoring and evaluation processes/procedures in order to help to enhance the understanding of the most effective treatments for addressing conflict-related mental health conditions.⁴
29. During this reporting period the Service has advised that they continued to develop and progress monitoring and evaluation processes. The Service reports that this has involved the completion of a literature review of previous reports and consultations within the sector. During December a focus group was conducted with the programmes team and as result, VSS facilitated focus groups with beneficiaries during December. The aim of each focus group was to discuss the outcomes currently recorded with each funded group.
30. During this reporting period the Service continued to implement the rollout of evaluation tools. Training on the implementation of the MYMOP evaluation tool was delivered on 3 December 2015. The Service has advised that groups were invited to provide feedback and detail any changes that would be of benefit to individuals and those involved in the administration process. The closing date for responses was 30 December 2015. The Service has advised that MYMOP will be activated in early January 2016.
31. An introduction and consultation on CORENET is planned to take place on the 5 February 2016 with formal training for practitioners taking place in early March 2016.
32. In December the VSS identified budget to assist groups to apply for support towards small capital items that could assist them with monitoring and evaluation. The indicative budget for this area was £100k.
33. The Commission recognises that the Service has taken steps to engage with funded groups regarding monitoring and evaluation. The need for robust evidence-based information will be central to the demonstrating improvement in the lives of victims and

³ CVSNI (2014a) *Impact of the Individual Needs Programme Research Project*, Belfast: CVSNI. p.92.

⁴ CVSNI (2014b) *Impact of the Victim Support Programme Research Project*, Belfast: CVSNI. , p.11.

survivors and the sustainability of the sector. The Commission looks forward to a new process being formalised and rolled out.

Workforce Training Plan

34. The Service continues to deliver a workforce training and development plan for those working within the sector.
35. The Service delivered a one day Introduction to Mindfulness workshop on 14 October 2015 and commenced an eight-week Mindfulness course, which started on 14 October 2015 and concluded on 9 December 2015. A two-hour workshop on Caring for the Carer was delivered on 28 October 2015 and a training day for befriending coordinators was delivered on 1 December 2015.

Revision of Standards

36. In October 2011 the Commission published a Minimum Practice Framework as a guide to groups providing services in the victims sector in order to identify the minimum standards expected. At the April 2015 meeting of the Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Group members highlighted that the document required revision to reflect practice within the sector. As a result the Commission requested volunteers at the June 2015 meeting to assist with the first consultation exercise.
37. The working group met twice during this reporting period (2 October and 4 December). A number of changes have been made to the 2011 document, including the adoption of Public Health Agency standards where relevant. The draft document has been presented to the Commissioner for comment and it is planned that further work will be completed before being formally shared with the Service prior to a wider consultation exercise with the sector.

Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Groups

38. During this reporting period the Service rolled out the two new groups, covering the North West and the South/South West areas of Northern Ireland. Both groups convened in October and met again in November.
39. The Commission and the Department attended the inaugural meetings of the two regional groups. Going forward, the Department and Commission has registered a preference for the Service's proposal to meet the Chair and representatives on a quarterly basis. The Commission has also stated that staff would attend for specific reasons, such as a consultation.
40. During this reporting period a revised terms of reference was produced for the groups engaging with the three groups. This was designed to establish the development of work programmes and act as a means for maximising opportunities for collaborative working. At November's meetings key areas which the groups would focus on were identified. The North West group will look at gaps in services in relation to family work and transgenerational support with a focus on carers. The South/South West area group will begin a programme of work on evidencing the benefits of social support and will then look at strengthening health and wellbeing networks in rural areas, with particular emphasis on the growing number of individuals coming forward for counselling. The group based in Belfast has identified the area of resilience as one they would like to explore in the coming months.

Information and Communication

41. Strategic communication changes implemented during 2014/15 have continued. This has facilitated positive and proactive interaction with the sector and individuals during this reporting period.

Telephone calls and Unscheduled Client Visits

42. The Service has reported the following figures for telephone calls and unscheduled client visits (drop-ins) for this reporting period:

Month	Telephone calls	Unscheduled client visits
December	1,191	206
November	Unavailable	266
October	1,170	304

Website

43. The Service continues to utilise analytical data in relation to users accessing their website. Headline data for this reporting period are summarised below:

	December 2015	November 2015	October 2015
Individual visitors	922	1,459	1,221
New visitors	64%	64%	60.5%
Average number of pages	3	3	2.8
Bounce rate	55%	56%	53%

44. Delivery of the Service's improved website was originally scheduled for December 2015. The Service has advised that this additional time will facilitate stakeholder feedback and related amendments.

Freedom of Information & Data Protection

45. In terms of operational issues, the Service has reported the following:

Subject access requests

The Commission has been informed that there were three subject access requests for this reporting period (all in December).

Freedom of Information requests

The Service has advised that there were seven Freedom of Information requests for this period (two in October and November and three in December).

Breaches

The Commission has been informed that there were no Data Protection breaches during this reporting period.

Commission and Service Engagement

Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

46. The Commission and the Service both recognise the impact that unacceptable behaviour can have on staff. It is accepted that staff in both organisations should be able to conduct business in a safe and non-threatening environment and unacceptable behaviour from members of the public will not be tolerated. Since 2014 the two organisations have operated the same policy and share information regarding individuals placed on each other's register.⁵
47. In September the Service reviewed the policy and compared it with policies operated by similar bodies. The Commission welcomed the Service's review and amendment to ensure that the policy offers clear guidance on proportionate responses to different kinds of challenging and unacceptable behaviour. In recognition of the Service's amendments the Commission reviewed its policy and was presented for Board approval in November. The Commissioner recommended a number of further amendments and the Commission will be in position to share the revised policy in the next reporting period.

VSS Board

48. During this reporting period the Commissioner and the VSS Chair held face-to-face meetings once in October. It should be noted that there was also frequent interaction through telephone and email communications during this period.

Trilateral Meetings

49. The Commission can report that the trilateral meetings between the Commission, the Department and the Service continued during this reporting period. Meetings for this period took place on 23 October, 25 November and 17 December 2015.

Collaborative Design

50. The Department's Collaborative Design process began in April 2015. The process is intended to be a partnership approach with the sector in order to shape the best service delivery model for victims and survivors whilst ensuring value for money.
51. In this reporting period the Commission and Service attended four meetings (12 October, 10 November, 1 December and 10 December).
52. The outstanding recommendations from the Commission's Independent Assessment of the Service continues to inform the work of the Collaborative Design process and work during this reporting period concentrated on eligibility, assessment of individuals and monitoring and evaluation.
53. Formal consultation with the sector, through engagement seminars, last took place in June 2015. Further engagement is planned to take place in the next reporting period.

⁵ The Commission's policy was approved on the 6 June 2014 and adopted by the Service on 10 October 2014.

PEACE IV

54. The Department, in consultation with the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB), has developed a proposal in relation to PEACE IV funding across an overarching theme of improving the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.
55. The Service's nomination as Lead Partner for the Victims and Survivors element of the programme was approved as part of the EU Commission's approval of the Peace IV Co operational Programme on 30 November 2015. The support is for €17.6m.
56. Full detail on the Shared Spaces and Services – Provision of Services for Victims and Survivors element of PEACE IV can be accessed from SEUPB.⁶
57. Consultation and engagement on this area will continue in the next reporting period.

Queries and Complaints

58. The Service has a complaints procedure in place to answer, investigate and/or appeal feedback from individuals and groups. The Commission can assist or signposts individuals and groups once the Service's process has been exhausted. In addition, the Commission also logs complaints from individuals not wishing to make a formal complaint.
59. For this reporting period, the Service has advised the Commission that they have received a total of one complaint from individuals:

Period	No.	Identified themes
1-31 October	1	- Unacceptable behaviour marking.
1-30 November	0	- N/A.
1-31 December	0	- N/A.

60. For this reporting period, the Commission logged a total of four complaints from individuals (an anonymous version of the log is shared at each trilateral meeting)⁷:

Period	No.	Identified themes
1-31 October	0	- N/A.
1-30 November	2	- Communication.
1-31 December	2	- INP eligibility criteria (use of DLA); - Jurisdictional (accessing VSP in GB).

61. During this reporting period the Commission considered the legal advice it received in relation to its role in the adjudication or appeals of complaints. The advice considered a possible complaints role under the Victims and Survivors (NI) Order 2006 and powers under the legislation; particularly under Article 7. The Commission has been advised that there is no indication of any role in complaints and/or any powers to obtain any information or call evidence in the legislation. The advice added that exercising a role in relation to complaints may be ultra vires, and if it been intended that the Commission would have a role in complaints, this would have been provided for in the

⁶ Detail can be accessed at:

http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/PEACE_IV_Call_Documents/PIV_VictimsSurvivors_03-03-2016_CallDocument_1stCall.sflb.ashx

⁷ It should be noted that some complaints received relate to policy decisions.

legislation. Overall, the advice concluded that the Commission does not have the power to adjudicate on complaints appeals under the Service's Complaints Policy and Procedures and that a role in a complaints process would be outside the Commission's statutory functions.

62. The Commission notified the Service on the 17 December 2015 and requested that Service's Complaints Policy and Procedures was amended to reflect the advice received.
63. The Commission is conscious that the process of managing complaints featured in the Independent Assessment and was reflected in Recommendation 15.⁸ Considering the advice that the Commission has received and considered, and the Department's role in tracking the implementation of the Independent Assessment's recommendations, the Department were formally notified on 17 December 2015.
64. Considering legal advice and recognising the Commission's desire to continue to provide practical assistance to individuals, the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations was revised and to reflect these changes.⁹

Commission Research

65. During this reporting period, the Commission received a draft Final Report from the appointed consultants PACEC (formally RSM McClure Watters) in relation to the Personalised Budget Pilot Evaluation Project. The key objectives of the Project included assessing the individual experiences engaging within the Personalised Budget approach and the appropriateness of the newly developed assessment process or the 'Individual Needs Consultation', as well as the utility of the caseworkers in supporting service users through the assessment process and coordinating access to services. The draft Final Report contains a generally positive level of feedback from pilot participants. Choice, control and flexibility were cited by participants as key reasons for taking part in the pilot. Individual feedback from interviews and surveys suggests that, compared to the INP, clients perceived the personalised budget approach to be less rigid and restrictive. Participants on the pilot generally reported a positive experience in their interaction with their appointed caseworker around case management and providing ongoing support in utilising their award in accessing appropriate service provision. The final report including recommendations will be finalised in January 2016 and can therefore be commented on further in the next reporting period.
66. PACEC were awarded the contract to undertake this six month research project to review the Strategy for Victims and Survivors 2009-19. The project will focus on the progress and impact of implementing the overall aims of the Strategy, the application of the overall principles of the Strategy and the arrangements in place to take forward victims and survivors work in the areas of service provision, dealing with the past and building for the future. It is anticipated that the project will be initiated in January

⁸ Recommendation 15 stated: "We recommend that the complaints procedure includes an independent review or appeals stage. In our view, this role would sit best within CVSNI." CVSNI (2014c) *The Victims and Survivors Service: An Independent Assessment Report*, Belfast: CVSNI. p.21.

⁹ The revised MoU was signed by the Secretary to the Commission on 17 December 2015 and Interim CEO of the Service on 22 December 2015.

2016. An update on the progress of the project will be provided in the next reporting period.

Conclusions

67. The Commission is determined to continue to develop the tripartite relationship whereby the three organisations communicate in a collaborative way in order to improve service delivery for victims and survivors. This partnership approach will continue through operational interaction, regular meetings and consultation with the Victims and Survivors Forum.
68. The first two quarters of 2015/16 has been a period of assessing and defining future service delivery. The Department's Collaborative Design process had begun; the outstanding recommendations from the Independent Assessment are being taken forward through the Collaborative Design process; piloting personalised budgets and caseworkers had commenced; and progress has been made regarding developing monitoring and evaluation systems for VSP-funded groups.
69. Monitoring, evaluating and measuring outcomes remains a key focus for the Commission. The Commission would like to recognise the efforts made by the Service during this quarter. This has included engaging with groups regarding bespoke training and making funding available for small capital items to assist with monitoring and evaluation. The need for robust evidence-based information is central to demonstrating improvement in the lives of victims and survivors and the sustainability of the sector. The Commission looks forward to the new process being formalised and rolled out by the end of 2015/16.
70. There does remain key challenges and priorities moving forward. In relation to services, the sustainability of the sector remains a key priority for the Commission. It is evident that demand is rising. The Commission looks forward to final numbers for individuals accessing both INP and VSP in 2015/16 in order to detail demand on services. Equally important is the necessity to continue ongoing work regarding eligibility and ascertaining the best way forward regarding assessing the needs of individual victims and survivors.
71. In reviewing this report's content the Commission believes the needs of victims and survivors can be addressed by all partners to ensure that everyone delivers the best for victims and survivors, enabling effective support services for those accessing support.