



**The Commission for
Victims & Survivors**

Victims and Survivors Service

Quarterly Review Report

January to March 2020

	Page
Summary	3
Recommendations	3
Background	3
Impact of VSS Services	4
• Improved health and wellbeing of victims and survivors	4
• Victims and survivors, and those most in need, are helped and cared for	7
• Victims and survivors, and their families, are supported to engage in legacy issues	7
• Improved access to opportunities for learning and development	8
Standards	8
• Compliance	
Communications and Engagement	9
• Commissioner and VSS Board	9
• Collaborative Design	9
• Trilateral Meetings	9
• Victims and Survivors Forum	9
• Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Groups	9
• Health and Wellbeing Caseworker and Advocacy Working Networks	9
• Informing advice on a new strategy for victims and survivors	9
Conclusions	10

Summary

1. The Executive Office has requested that the Commission for Victims and Survivors reviews the progress of the Victims and Survivors Service and produce reports commenting on that progress.
2. This report focuses on the period from January to March 2020.
3. This reporting period, and throughout 2019/20, was a busy operational time for the Victims and Survivors Service with: the ongoing delivery of the needs-based service delivery model; continued embedding of the Health and Wellbeing Caseworker and Case Manager Network; delivery of the Advocacy Support Programme; and, the ongoing development of monitoring and evaluation processes with community-based partners.
4. During this reporting period, communication and interaction between the Commission and the Victims and Survivors Service was focused on strategic planning and responding to external political developments. Interaction between both organisations was essential for furthering conversations regarding: the future operation of both the Regional Trauma Network and Victims' Payments Scheme; the ongoing delivery of the PEACE IV-funded Research Programme; and, developing advice on informing a new strategy for victims and survivors.¹

Recommendations

5. All policy-related matters during this period were addressed through operational and strategic engagement detailed in the Memorandum of Understanding. Therefore the Commission does not propose any recommendations to the Executive Office.

Background

6. In line with the framework of strategic relationships outlined in the Strategy for Victims and Survivors, the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland (CVSNI, or 'the Commission') reports quarterly on the progress of services delivered by the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS, or 'the Service') to the Executive Office (TEO, or 'the Department').²
7. The requirement to produce Quarterly Review Reports is detailed in Outcome 2.3 of the Commission's 2019/20 Outcome Delivery Plan.

¹ It should be noted that during this reporting period a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors was in office. Any references to 'advice' or a Commissioner's statutory and powers are therefore made in the context of this reporting period.

² 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 Strategy for Victims and Survivors: Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (2009) *Strategy for Victims and Survivors*, Belfast: The Stationery Office, p.7.

8. This is the final Quarterly Review Report of 2019/20. Whilst building on previous reports, this paper provides an update on the operation of the VSS during the period from January to March 2020.
9. In order to compile this report the Commission has collated information from a number of sources. The primary source of information is supplied directly from the VSS through agreed information sharing processes.

Impact of VSS Services

10. Reporting data provided by the VSS, for services delivered through the Individual Needs Programme (INP), Victims Support Programme (VSP) and PEACE IV continue to be reviewed against a collective set of strategic outcomes for victims and survivors:
 - *Improved health and wellbeing of victims and survivors;*
 - *Victims and survivors, and those most in need, are helped and cared for;*
 - *Victims and survivors, and their families, are supported to engage in legacy issues; and*
 - *Improved access to opportunities for learning and development.*
11. Information for this reporting period was provided to CVSNI and TEO on 7 September 2020.³

Improved health and wellbeing of victims and survivors

12. The VSS has provided the following headline figures for health and wellbeing support services up to 31 March 2020:

Support	Prog.	Individuals (Q4 2019/20)	Year to date (cumulative)
Talking Therapies	VSP	629	2,770
Complementary Therapies	VSP	1,072	3,004
Social Support	VSP	896	10,090
Transgenerational Activities	VSP	133	444
Disability Aids	INP	19	107
Persistent Pain	INP	10	894
Psychological Support	INP	42	271
Trauma-focused Physical Activity	PEACE IV	119	395

13. The headline figures provide a useful insight into the range of support services delivered by the last quarter of 2019/20 and throughout the year.
14. Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation (CORE Net) continues to be used by all organisations delivering Talking Therapies. This reporting tool has been used since mid-2017; however, a new version, more aligned to the VSS service users, has been used since the beginning of 2019/20. The VSS has advised that 1,496 individuals

³ VSS Quarterly Outcomes and Monitoring and Evaluation Reports were delayed as a result of COVID-19 (VSS suspended monitoring and evaluation reporting in early April 2020 to relieve pressure on funded organisations).

completed their therapies in the initial database and the system was decommissioned by CORE Information Management Systems in January 2020. All new client episodes continue to be added to this new database, while ongoing therapies are being finished and closed down in the earlier version.

15. The long-term trend result for Talking Therapies has witnessed the percentage of those showing a reliable improvement stay relatively static at around 60%. The previous year had seen a sustained increase in this trend, with the improvement trending towards 65%. A smaller sample in the first quarter of 2019/20 saw this trend continue; however when reporting commenced on the new CORE Net database in the second quarter of 2019/20, the reliable improvement reduced to 57%, which was slightly lower than the normal trend of 65%, and remained relatively static throughout both quarters 3 and 4 of 2019/20.
16. It is noted that outcome data indicating improvement across the self-reporting tool's four domains (wellbeing; risk; problems; functioning) has consistently remained relatively static since CORE Net's introduction. The Commission understands that the VSS plans to conduct specific analysis of the individuals who did not experience a positive outcome following treatment. The Commission looks forward to this analysis being shared.
17. During this period, the VSS issued a funding call to funded organisations who are either BACP accredited or are working towards accreditation (or equivalent accreditation bodies). This additional funding was for capital items to support organisations to ensure that their premises are compliant with accreditation requirements. The Commission is pleased that five organisations applied to the VSS for service accreditation, which provide individuals with added reassurance that services are safe, secure and professionally managed.
18. During this reporting period, Psychological Support was delivered to 42 individuals. The VSS had advised that it anticipated 60 individuals would access this service during 2019/20; by 31 March 2020, the VSS had surpassed their predicted figure supporting 271 individuals in this area. The Commission notes the steady increase in individuals engaged with this element of the INP framework from 61 the previous year, which amounts to an increase of 344.26% this year. This support remains important for those unable to access support through statutory services or not wishing or able to engage with funded organisations.
19. The Commission recognises there may be many reasons for a growth in service demand and for service users' desire for tailored services to be accessible to them in the least challenging of circumstances. This includes delivery from private practitioners being sought out in particular geographical areas where there is limited community and public sector experience in specialist service delivery to those with cPTSD and other conflict-related needs.⁴ To aid service design and delivery and to provide an evidence base in this area experiencing significant growth, the Commission welcomes and encourages an overview of any available outcome data provided to the VSS by private practitioners.

⁴ The Commission notes that 18 individuals living outside Northern Ireland accessed Psychological Support (Talking Therapies) through the Health and Wellbeing Caseworker Network during 2019/20 (figure accessed from the VSS on 23/07/2020).

20. Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile (MYMOP) continues to be used by all organisations funded to deliver Complementary Therapies. Historically, this measure has registered that 80% of individuals have shown an improvement following therapy. From the last reporting period there has been a slight increase from previous quarters and from quarter 1 which recorded 75% based on a much lower sample size of n = 1,819. The most recent data (sample size n = 2,831) shows an improvement to 78%. Given the COVID-19 context, it is expected to return to trend over time.
21. The Disability Aids Scheme continues to provide a personalised approach to assessing and improving the safety and independence of victims and survivors living with conflict-related physical injuries providing functional aids and equipment. By the end of the previous (3rd) quarter, the Disability Aids Scheme had provided help to 89 individuals and in this quarter the figure increased resulting in a cumulative total for the year of 107. The target for 2019/20 was estimated to reach up to 80 individuals, however those accessing the scheme surpassed the original estimation and marks a 49.22% growth in the provision of support (n. = 46) from the period 2017-2018 and a 16.3% growth on the (n.92) figures for 2018-2019. The Commission is pleased that the scheme has surpassed the initial estimates.
22. The Persistent Pain Framework aims to improve the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors living with persistent pain. This is provided through interventions that include home heating, physiotherapy and complementary/alternative therapies. This year, the VSS had engaged with 894 individuals an increase of (n. 50) over the previous year. The target for 2019/20 was to engage with 750 participants; again the VSS has exceeded its original target by 19.2%. The Commission welcomes the exceeded response rate to this programme and further notes that home heating awards were pre-processed for 762 individuals during this year in preparation for payment at the start of the first quarter of 2020/21.
23. The VSS continues to employ the Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS) to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Trauma-focused Physical Activity Scheme. The PEACE IV-funded Trauma-focused Physical Activity programme aims to help to promote self-management of symptoms and facilitation of associated therapeutic processes aimed at promoting health and wellbeing. During 2019/20 this support service reached 395 individuals, a noteworthy increase of n. 259 (52.51%) individuals from 2018/19.
24. Areas such as Psychological Support, Disability Aids and Trauma-focused Physical Activity have seen continued growth in 2019/20 and this is expected to continue in 2020/21. The Commission welcomes the expansion such schemes and the efforts of VSS staff to help identify eligible victims and survivors who may not be aware of the support available to them.
25. The Commission welcomes the continued collation of WSAS scores for those availing of services providing the following: Disability Aids (50% respondents indicate improvements in this quarter), Persistent Pain (71% indicate improvements), Psychological Therapies (57% indicate improvements) and Trauma Focused Physical Activities (75% indicate improvements). Whilst sample sizes are low (a total of 219 participants by 31 March 2020 was reported by VSS under strategic Objective 1), work

is ongoing to address reporting consistencies, and information provided by the VSS indicates improvement.

Victims and survivors, and those most in need, are helped and cared for

26. This strategic outcome aims to help victims and survivors through the provision of support to improve their financial position, providing assistance to help meet day-to-day needs, and through the provision of access to advice in relation to welfare entitlements.
27. The VSS has provided the following figures for welfare support and Self-Directed Assistance (year to date figures, to assist with an accurate reflection of delivery):

Support	Prog.	Individuals (Q4 2019/20)	Individuals (cumulative)	Comments in relation to previous year
Self-Directed Assistance Payments	INP	14	5,792	Decrease of n.58. (.99%) from 5,850
Additional Needs Based Payments	INP	6	1,475	Increase of n.5. (.34%) from 1,470
Transition Payments	INP	3	1,262	Decrease of n. 34 (2.6%) from 1,296
Welfare Support	VSP	944	2,445	Decrease of n.311 (11%) from 2,756

28. The Commission notes each year a reduction in those individuals eligible for Self-Directed Assistance and Transition Payments, reflecting the unfortunate fact that some have passed away before the awards could be made.
29. The VSS has advised that approximately 1,300 individuals received Transition Payments during 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20. This support was in addition to Self-Directed Assistance Payments and the value has reduced each year from £200 in 2017/18, to £150 and 2018/19, to £100 in 2019/20. Having been operational for three financial years, Transition Payments will cease from 2020/21 onwards.
30. Welfare Support continues to be delivered by six organisations. This support service continues to play a vital role for individuals requiring assistance, particularly with the ongoing rollout of Welfare Changes across Northern Ireland. The VSS advised that there were 2,445 interventions during 2019/20. Whilst this indicates a decrease of n. 311 (11.2%) from the previous year, it is noteworthy that the yearly figures of 2,445 indicates an increase of n. 5 (.2 %) on the VSS anticipated figures of 2,400 interventions for the period.

Victims and survivors, and their families, are supported to engage in legacy issues

31. This strategic outcome aims to facilitate the engagement of victims and survivors in legacy issues with the assistance of community-based service deliverers.
32. The following headline figures for truth, justice and acknowledgement support services during this reporting period have been provided by the VSS:

Support	Prog.	Individuals (Q4 and cumulative total 2019/20)
Advocacy	PEACE IV	Total: 2,473
Truth, Justice and Acknowledgement	VSP	Q4: 289 Total: 1,102

33. Advocacy Support, delivered by eight organisations, has been assisted by PEACE IV funding. This additionality has led to the development of an Advocacy Support Network consisting of 6 Advocacy Managers and 21.5 Advocacy Support Workers. During this period organisations continued to deliver support to individuals engaged with legacy-related bodies, information retrieval processes and inquests.

Improved access to opportunities for learning and development

34. The key outcomes for this area include increasing confidence and reducing isolation, through acknowledgement and support; renewed relationships and trust within families and communities; and helping to improve mental health and social networks.

35. The VSS has provided the following details for personal development during his reporting period:

Support	Prog.	Individuals (Q4 2019/20)	2019/20 Cumulative	Comments in relation to previous year
Personal and Professional Development	VSP	486	2,400	Interventions across 23 organisations a 4% increase
Education and Training	INP	45	70	
1-1 Literacy and Numeracy	PEACE IV	6	25	Target 25
Social Isolation	PEACE IV	36	97	Target 250 people through individual and funded-led organisations
Volunteering	PEACE IV	4	12	Target 250 people through individual and funded-led organisations

36. Personal and Professional development continues to be delivered by 23 organisations. Outcomes in these areas are measured through case studies, interviews and the use of WSAS. Whilst the Social Isolation and Volunteering frameworks continue to be developed, the VSS reports that 67% of individuals availing of support through Education and Training or the 1-1 Literacy and Numeracy frameworks recorded a positive change using the WSAS metric.

Standards

Compliance

37. Following engagement between the VSS CEO and the Commissioner, it was agreed that a schedule should be developed, focused on identified Standards areas, and shared on a quarterly basis.

38. A draft schedule was provided to the Commissioner on 24 March 2020, with the view to discussion with VSS and confirmation of next steps.

39. Prior to a reporting schedule being agreed, the VSS continued to provide a verbal update at the Trilateral meeting, in line with the terms of reference for the meetings. This meeting took place on 3 March 2020.

Communications and Engagement

Commissioner and VSS Board

40. During this reporting period, the Commissioner met with the VSS Board twice (on 15 January 2020 and 11 February 2020).

Collaborative Design

41. In this reporting period there were three Collaborative Design engagements, held on the 13 and 27 January and 11 February 2020.

Trilateral Meetings

42. During this reporting meeting there was one Trilateral meeting, held on the 3 March 2020.

Victims and Survivors Forum

43. The Victims and Survivors Forum met the VSS Board and senior management on 28 February 2020.

Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Groups

44. During this reporting period the North East Region met on the 6 February 2020, while the South East Region met on the 13 February 2020.

Health and Wellbeing Caseworker and Advocacy Working Networks

45. The Advocacy Support Working Group met three times during this reporting period (10 and 16 January 2020 and 26 March 2020).

Informing advice on a new strategy for victims and survivors

46. During this reporting period, the Commission initiated the project planning process for advice on informing the development of a new strategy for victims and survivors.
47. It was agreed at the Collaborative Design meeting on 13 January 2020 that the advice paper would look the following areas: aims and objectives of any future strategy; approach and architecture of any future strategy; appropriateness of the three strategic areas; new areas for consideration; potential new stakeholders/partners; and the period of any new strategy.

Conclusions

48. 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. During this reporting period, the reports continued to be 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 those with an interest in how support is delivered to victims and survivors.
49. The last quarter of the year will always present pressures for the VSS. This year this was enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleagues in organisations across the public and community and voluntary sectors are working under extreme pressure. Their workloads compounded by internal procedures and controls at risk of being compromised and by added disruptions to their existing and otherwise strong governance and audit functions. From a service delivery perspective, the VSS and funded organisations reacted swiftly by reshaping how support could be delivered in these uncertain times. During 2020/21, the focus for all those engaged in supporting victims and survivors will be ensuring that services continue to be delivered in the most appropriate way and new approaches are considered and developed.
50. The Commission remains committed to partnership working with the Department, the Service and the wider sector to ensure that everyone delivers the best for victims and survivors, enabling an effective support service. During this reporting period, this approach proved essential in the planning stages of the Commissioner's advice on informing a new strategy for victims and survivors, the ongoing delivery PEACE IV-funded additionality and potential support under PEACE PLUS arrangements.

Ends