



Victims and Survivors Service

Quarterly Review Report

January to March 2016

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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 January to March 2016.
3. This reporting period has been a busy operational time for the Service, with ongoing preparatory work prior to schemes opening, 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, commencement of the Review of the Strategy for Victims and Survivors, 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 collaborative working with the Department, Service and the wider sector to ensure that everyone delivers the best for victims and survivors, enabling an appropriate and targeted service for those accessing support.

Recommendations

7. The Commission is content that, during this reporting period, Service-related improvements are ongoing through the Collaborative Design process. Therefore, 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
9. This is the last 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 January to March 2016.
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 and mirrored the support schemes that were opened by the VSS in 2014/15:
 - 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

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.

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

Reporting Data

13. As of 31 March 2016 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	2,664	416	£820	£2,184
Support for Bereaved	2,117	2,577	460	£500	£1,289
Support for Injured High Rate Care DLA	423	592	169	£1,500	£888
Support for Injured Middle Rate Care DLA	403	604	201	£500	£302
Support for Carers	417	510	93	£500	£255
Chronic Pain Treatments	294	44	-250	£500	£30
Education and Training	167	23	-144	£500	£12
				Total	£5,026

14. All of the schemes have witnessed an increase in the numbers of eligible clients accessing INP throughout 2015/16. In March 2016 an additional 96 awards were issued under the Support for Bereaved Scheme, 10 under Support for Injured High Rate Care DLA, 30 under Support for Injured Middle Rate Care DLA and 9 under Support for Carers.

15. The VSS continued to provide support to a number of individuals towards Chronic Pain treatments who did not meet the DLA criteria under the Support for Injured scheme. The Service has advised that discussions are ongoing with the Health and Social Care Board to establish how best to pursue receiving clarification around the appropriateness of these services. This work will be taken forward by the Service in April 2016, with a view to arranging a comprehensive review of cases in receipt of this award in conjunction with Primary Care. The VSS has advised that Chronic Pain awards will continue to be issued until each case has been reviewed.

16. In January 2016 a framework and process for accessing the Disability Awards Scheme was issued to Caseworkers who are undertaking a client support function through the Pilot Caseworkers programme. The VSS has advised that the following eligibility framework is applied for accessing the scheme:

- Individuals who have been physically injured as a result of a conflict-related incident and currently in receipt of a Support for the Injured award during 2015/16;

- Exceptional cases may be considered and will be awarded on a case-by-case basis; and
- Individuals will be required to engage with a Caseworker (either at the VSS or within a VSP-funded organisation) and complete an Individual Needs Consultation.

17. The framework also gives details about how the Service engages with statutory services to ensure that there is no duplication of services. The VSS has procured the services of Independability Ltd to ensure that, if required, an Occupational Therapy Assessment and report can be obtained within 10 days of referral for individuals registered on the scheme. As of 31 March 2016 a total of 34 individuals have applied to have their needs considered under this scheme. Of the 34 clients, 17 registered for the scheme with the Service directly and 17 registered through the VSP-funded organisations. At the end of this reporting period 16 awards had been issued with a total value of £65,487.98.

Personalised Budgets, Caseworker Approach and Individual Needs Consultation

18. The Service has advised that during this reporting period VSS Caseworkers met with individuals 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 March 2016 the VSS advised that 467 individuals were registered to take part in the pilot within the Service and 135 individuals were registered to participate in the pilot project with a Caseworker within groups. The individuals participating are broken down as 338 injured, 257 bereaved and 7 carers.

Forum Services Working Group

20. During this reporting period there was no interaction between the Forum and the VSS Board or their senior management. Once the Forum's replenishment process has concluded it is expected that the productive working relationship established in 2014/15 will resume.

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 a review of year end estimates and reports began in February 2016 and was completed in early March 2016 with a view to making new Letters of Offer available to groups prior to 2016/17.

Reporting Data

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

November 2015 - Reflecting data submitted to VSS by 29 February 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 – 31 January 2016	10,923
Gender	
Males (plus as a percentage of total)	4,423
Females (plus as a percentage of total)	6,488
Transgender	1
Blank	11
Age	
Age range	5 to 98
Average age	53
Primary identification with Victims & Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006	
Injured (physically)	734
Injured (psychologically)	7,492
Bereaved	1,804
Carers	391
Identifies with more than one category	192
Blank	310
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)	5,689
Counselling	2,192
Complementary Therapies	3,297
CBT/EMDR	126
Other H&W services	74
Total number who have exited services	3,542
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)	19,946
Total number who have exited services	14,863

24. The Service continues to signpost and refer individuals to support within VSP-funded groups. The VSS has advised that during this operating period they made 5 referrals in March, 7 in February and 9 in January.

Support Visits

25. VSS staff continued to meet with VSP-funded groups during this reporting period. Support Officers conducted 21 visits in March, 23 in February and 19 in January.

26. During this reporting period the focus of support visits in February and March was the completion of year end feedback reports in order to progress with the issuing of Letters of Offer for 2016/17. January's visits focused on the completion of application guidance and assessments of applications for additional Social Support and Training Applications.

27. The VSS has advised that during 2015/16 a total of 286 support visits to groups were undertaken by officers.

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 VSS has advised that they continued to develop and progress monitoring and evaluation processes:

Complementary Therapies - MYMOP (Measure Your Medical Outcome Profile)

30. As of 31 March 2016 there are 24 VSP-funded organisations delivering complementary therapies. The VSS has advised that the first data return related to therapies provided from 1 January 2016 until the submission date 26 February 2016; with 23 returns received. Of those received 17 were completed data returns and 6 status updates. The status updates were provided by the organisations that had not yet completed the course of treatments for clients by the time of the first submission date. The VSS has advised that one group has not yet provided a return and reminders have been issued. The VSS has advised that the next step is to review the MYMOP data submissions from groups and provide feedback to the groups relating to data quality and provide support and guidance where appropriate.

Counselling - CORE Net

31. This self-reporting questionnaire, designed to be administered by practitioners before, during and on completion of therapy measures covers four dimensions: subjective well-being; problems/symptoms; life functioning; risk/harm.

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.

32. The VSS delivered training during this reporting period between 1 March–3 March in Belfast and Enniskillen. The first session invited practitioners with current experience of CORE Net through the Belfast HUB. The session provided an opportunity to review what worked well in practice and identify gaps where further training and support would be beneficial. The feedback informed the following 2 days training for the remaining organisations delivering counselling services. Following the training CORE IMS will complete a survey with organisations that will be registered with CORE Net. The aim of the survey will be to gauge user (therapist) numbers per organisation, user confidence and to identify what further steps would be required for them to increase their confidence in using CORE Net. The VSS has advised this will be used to identify where additional training and support should be directed.

33. As of 31 March 2016, the Service has advised of the following next steps with groups regarding formalising monitoring an evaluation implementation:

Disability Aids	- Focus group to be completed with Caseworkers once the scheme has been completed.
MYMOP	- Early data will be reviewed for data quality purposes with training and support provided where appropriate.
CORE Net	- Hosting issues being resolved before implementation plan is devised; - Reviewing additional training requirements.
Focus Groups	- Developing a format that will assist officers in the facilitation of focus groups and ensuring safeguards are in place for participants; - Potential for training to be offered to staff and volunteers within funded groups to enable them to manage their own focus groups.
Survey Monkey	- This has been placed on hold pending the completion of the VSPWG M&E subgroup meetings.

34. The Commission recognises the Service’s efforts to engage with VSP-funded groups regarding monitoring and evaluation. The need for robust evidence-based information is central to the demonstrating improvement in the lives of victims and survivors. It will also assist with the Commission’s desire to ensure that the sector is sustainable. The Commission looks forward to a new process being formalised and rolled out and the availability of data to demonstrate the impact of services being delivered.

Workforce Training Plan

35. The Service continues to deliver a workforce training and development plan for those working within the sector.

36. Following an 8 week Mindfulness course which took place in Belfast in late 2015, the Service commissioned the delivery the course in the North West region and this began on 2 February. The Service also commissioned a 4 day training course on Trauma Focussed CBT, delivered by Oxford Health, from 11 to 14 January.

Revision of Standards

37. 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. In July 2015 a working group, with the Greater Belfast area Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Group, was established to facilitate the Commission with the first consultation exercise. A draft document has been presented to the Commissioner for comment and it is planned that further work will commence in the next reporting period. This work will also be central in assisting with the PEACE IV application process.

Victims and Survivors Practitioners Working Groups

38. This reporting period witnessed the full operation of the Service's three groups; covering the Greater Belfast area, the North West and the Southern area of Northern Ireland.

39. During this period the Greater Belfast area met on 28 January, the North West area met on 27 January and 23 March and the Southern area group met on the 29 January and 24 March.

40. The three groups now have work programmes in place; facilitated through subgroups. The North West subgroup agreed to take forward identifying gaps in services in relation to family work and transgenerational trauma support with a focus on carers. This group met 11 March to progress. The Greater Belfast area subgroup met on 7 March to take forward their identified area of work focusing on resilience. This work was used to inform the research undertaken by the Commission in order to inform the Peace IV application. The Southern area subgroup agreed to take forward their identified area of work to focus on evidencing the benefits of social support. This group held their first meeting in February 2016 and met again 11 March 2016.

41. The Commission and the Department attended the inaugural meetings of the two new regional groups and have committed to regularly attending the three groups from May 2016.

Information and Communication

42. The Commission has noted that positive and proactive interaction with the sector and individuals continued during this reporting period.

Telephone calls and Unscheduled Client Visits

43. 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
March	2,210	455
February	1,578	310
January	1,727	287

44. The Service has advised that the Client Services Team's focus during this reporting period, particularly in March, concentrated on providing assistance in relation to how

individuals can utilise their 2015/16 awards and issuing guidance on queries in relation to the opening of schemes in 2016/17.

Website

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

	March 2016	February 2016	January 2016
Individual visitors	1,605	1,321	992
New visitors	56%	53%	64%
Average number of pages	3	3	3
Bounce rate	48%	39%	55%

46. Delivery of the Service's improved website was completed during this reporting period.

Freedom of Information & Data Protection

47. The Service has reported the following:

Subject access requests

The Commission has been informed that there were 5 subject access requests for this reporting period (1 in January, 2 in February and 2 in March).

Freedom of Information requests

The Service has advised that there were 2 Freedom of Information requests for this period (both in January).

Breaches

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

Commission and Service Engagement

Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

48. 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

49. In September 2015 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

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

Service's amendments the Commission reviewed its policy and was presented for Board approval in November 2015. The Commissioner recommended a number of further amendments. The Commission's revised policy was approved on 27 January 2016 and shared with the Service and Department on 28 January 2016.

VSS Board

50. During this reporting period the Commission and the VSS Chair held face-to-face meetings twice in January and 4 times in February. It should be noted that there was also frequent interaction through telephone and email communications during this period.

Trilateral Meetings

51. The Commission can report that trilateral meetings between the Commission, the Department and the Service continued during this reporting period. Meetings for this period took place on 18 January, 23 February and 22 March 2016.

Collaborative Design

52. 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.

53. In this reporting period the Commission and Service attended two Collaborative Design meetings (14 January and 16 March).

54. During this reporting period the Department held the third series of engagement events in conjunction with CVS and the VSS. These took place on the 17, 18 and 19 February 2016 in Antrim, Cookstown and Londonderry. The aim of the seminars was to provide the sector with an update on the programme, including details of the evaluation of the pilot on personalised budgets, caseworkers and assessment process, funding programmes for 2016/17, including the PEACE IV Programme, and proposed next steps for the incoming year. Further interaction with the sector is planned for 2016/17.

PEACE IV

55. 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.

56. 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 Cooperational Programme on 30 November 2015. The support is for €17.6m.

57. The VSS has committed significant time and resource to the management of this programme during this reporting period. Interaction between the Service, Department and Commission has been frequent and ongoing throughout this reporting period due to the intensity of the application process and necessity for collaborative working. 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. In addition, the Commission also logs complaints from individuals not wishing to make a formal complaint.
59. For this reporting period, the Service received two formal complaints and the Commission one complaint:

	VSS	CVS
1-31 March	0	0
1-29 February	1	1
1-31 January	1	0

60. As noted in the last Quarterly Review Report, the Commission does not have the power to adjudicate on complaints or 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. The Service's Complaints Policy and Procedures and the Memorandum of Understanding between the VSS and CVS have been amended accordingly.

Commission Research

61. During this reporting period the Commission continued to manage a number of externally procured research projects and research scoping exercises which informed the work of the Commission, the Forum and the Service. The following research studies were either completed or progressed during this reporting period:

Review of the Victims and Survivors Strategy Project

62. PACEC were awarded the contract to undertake this 6 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.
63. Between January and March 2016 the project completed a number of important parts of the consultation process including significant feedback received during the Commission's two-day conference on 9-10 March 2016. The Conference provided an important opportunity to consult with 190 delegates from across the victims and survivors community, the statutory sector as individual victims and survivors and members of the Victims and Survivors Forum. Also during this period, the Commission developed an online survey as part of the consultation process for the research project. It is anticipated that the survey will be open through April and May 2016 and will be advertised as widely as possible. This will include mailing a letter to over 4,000 individuals who have contacted the VSS relating to the INP.

The Children and Young People Engagement Project Report

64. The purpose of the Children and Young People Engagement Project was to produce an independent report on behalf of the Victims and Survivors Forum informing how the Commission and Forum engage the views and opinions of children and young people on conflict-related issues in the future. The Final Report received by the Commission

at the end of March 2016 contains 12 recommendations across a number of related areas including funding, engagement mechanisms supporting future work with children and young people in terms of the organisations to work with and how to specifically consult on conflict-legacy issues.

Advocacy Scoping Research Exercise and Resilience Scoping Research Exercise

65. During the this period, the Commission undertook two scoping research exercises that were intended to support the work of the VSS in completing their application for funding through the upcoming PEACE IV Programme. Firstly, the purpose of the Advocacy Scoping Research Exercise was to review existing advocacy service provision within the victims and survivors sector and inform future service development. The final report made a number of suggestions to inform future provision of advocacy service provision and support in the area of historical investigation and information recovery. Secondly, the Commission undertook an independent scoping research exercise with the purpose of supporting the development of the resilience component of the PEACE IV Programme application process. The scoping exercise which has subsequently been utilised by the Service in the completion of the PEACE IV Stage 1 application identified gaps and opportunities for future funding of resilience activities in the victims sector.

Conclusions

66. The Commission is committed to continuing to the tripartite relationship whereby the three organisations work together in a collaborative fashion 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 once replenished.

67. It is acknowledged that 2015/16 has been a period of assessing and defining future service delivery. The Department's Collaborative Design process had commenced; the outstanding recommendations from the Independent Assessment are being taken forward through the Collaborative Design process; piloting personalised budgets and caseworkers had commenced and received positive feedback from individuals; and progress has been made regarding developing monitoring and evaluation systems for VSP-funded groups.

68. The Commission would note that Service-related complaints decreased steadily throughout 2015/16. This is the case for complaints received directly by the VSS and feedback to the Commission. The Commission attributes this to proactive communication directly with individuals, targeted and bespoke letters to individuals and regular information to VSP-funded organisations.

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 and throughout 2015/16. 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 robust information being made available in 2016/17.

70. There does remain key challenges and priorities moving into 2016/17. In relation to services, the sustainability of the sector remains a key priority for the Commission. It is evident that demand is rising. This is widely acknowledged by all working in the sector. 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 during 2016/17 and to the remainder of the Strategy.
71. In reviewing this report's content the Commission believes the needs of victims and survivors can be addressed collaboratively to ensure that all partners deliver the best for victims and survivors, enabling effective support services for those accessing support.