

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME
TUESDAY, 13 OCTOBER 2009**

Councillors Aitken (Chair), Davies and Egan

LC1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

LC2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

None.

LC3. LATE ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

LC4. DRAFT SCOPE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was noted that Joanne McCartney, the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) link member for Haringey, had suggested that the issue of quality be added to the terms of reference and agreed that this be incorporated. It was noted that the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) had overall responsibility for victims and witnesses. A recent joint inspectorate report had shown an improvement in satisfaction with services but also made a number of recommendations including one that the LCJB take ownership of victim and witness issues. It was currently unclear as to whether the London board or the local group for Haringey would be taking this forward. Other recommendations covered the need for front line police officers to better identify vulnerable witnesses, referrals to Victim Support, court waiting times and the safety of witnesses.

It was noted that Victim Support and Hearthstone had both been invited to give evidence to the second meeting of the review, on 2 November. It was agreed that Victim Support would be asked to provide a profile of victims that come to their attention, including the age range.

It was noted that there would be a need to obtain evidence from the Borough Commander in his role as Chair of the local group of the LCJB, the Court Service and the Crown Prosecution Service. This would need to be done through an additional meeting being added into the programme. The Court Service only covered the magistrates court so it would be necessary to investigate whether there was any local jurisdiction of what took place in the Crown Court.

It terms of obtaining the views of service users, it was noted that it was likely to be challenging for Victim Support to persuade victims to participate in a focus group. However, it was felt more likely that volunteers working with victims would be willing to assist. Victim Support agreed to explore both these options. In addition, Members also felt that there might be some constituents who might wish to share their experiences and contribute.

It was noted that the witness satisfaction figures for Haringey, although above the London average, were marginally below the target figure for London and felt that this should be raised with relevant service providers and commissioners.

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It was agreed that Haringey CPCG would be invited provide a co-opted Member to the Panel. It was noted that this did not preclude other CPCG members attending and participating in meetings if they so wished.

AGREED

1. That Haringey CPCG be formally invited to nominate a representative to be co-opted onto the Panel.
2. That Victim Support be requested to provide a profile of victims of crime within the Borough that come to their attention, including information on the age range.
3. That the scope and terms of reference for the review, as amended, be recommended to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

LC5. SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF CRIME - AN OVERVIEW

Claire Kowalska, the Community Safety Manager, provided a strategic overview of local services and how they were co-ordinated, funded and provided.

The scrutiny review on this issue was both welcome and timely. It was known that;

- Many victims missed out on services for a variety of reasons, including under reporting of crime and funding issues
- Some residents were more likely to become victims than others. Those living in the east of the Borough, who were also more likely to be from a black and minority ethnic community, were much more likely to become a victim. Whilst there was a roughly equal split between male and female victims of burglary, men were more likely to be victims of robbery whilst women were more likely to be victims of domestic violence.
- Services were not always well co-ordinated despite there being a number of local strategic partnership groups and a board who had a role in this area, e.g. the ASB partnership board and its registered social landlord (RSL) sub group. However, the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) had overall responsibility for increasing the satisfaction levels of victims and witnesses therefore ought to be the most significant body locally.

Ms Kowlaska outlined the range of current provision. Victim Support was a national charity and a key local partner that provided a range of services for victims and witnesses. It received £72,000 per annum from area based grant, including £39,000 from the Children's and Young People's Service. In addition, it received a certain amount of funding from its central organisation. However, local funding was vulnerable and uncertain and a review was currently being undertaken by the central organisation. It was very reliant on volunteers. The bulk of its referrals came from the police, who were required to refer in all criminal cases. However, there was

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currently no duty to do in sub criminal cases of anti social behaviour. It was noted that the government had now stated its intention to address this issue.

The Hearthstone Centre was currently seeing 1600 per year with demand expected to increase to 2,000 by the end of the year. Most clients were female but there was an increasing number of male victims who tended to go to Victim Support instead. The service received funding from a wide range of sources including £50,000 from Supporting People plus contributions from the Council, GoL and Ministry of Justice. There was now a specialist domestic violence court session with specially trained magistrates.

The Police were jointly responsible, with the CPS, for the witness care unit (WCU). In addition, they also had a victim focus desk and provided support via the Youth Offending Service (YOS). It was noted that there was a key national performance indicator relating to the satisfaction levels of local people with local efforts to deal with anti social behaviour. In addition, there Police now had a single national performance target, which was increasing public confidence by 15% by 2012.

The Anti Social Behaviour Action Team (ASBAT) dealt with persistent cases of anti social behaviour. They currently dealt with around 100 cases per month and had a high success rate (92%). The team included Council and police staff. There had been funding issues in the past and there were still limits to its capacity. A new victim and witness support worker was being recruited, funded by a Home Office grant of £15,000 this year and £20,000 next year.

It was noted that the ASBAT was currently only able to deal with the most serious and persistent cases. However, there was an issue that needed to be addressed concerning what happened to cases that fell beneath this threshold. Recent cases of escalation highlighted the importance of inconsiderate behaviour being taken seriously at all levels.

Metropolitan Care and Repair had a particular role in target hardening the properties of the homes considered to be vulnerable, such as people who had been repeat victims and older people.

There appeared to be a number of issues that needed addressing in relation to victims including:

- Training for housing providers, such as Homes for Haringey and RSLs, in order to enable them to provide stronger support.
- The need to obtain more information about the role of the voluntary sector in this area
- Explicit inclusion of support to victims to be embedded in partnership strategies and action plans
- Better victim data to be provided in the annual strategic assessment
- The role of the LCJB to be clarified.

It was noted that RSLs did not commission any particular services relating to ASB but had their own systems for dealing with it. The ASBAT manager had suggested that they collaborate to commission services from the ASBAT but this offer had not been taken up so far.

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It was suggested that there might be a perception that Hearthstone services were only provided for women. This could explain the higher numbers of male victims of domestic violence presenting to Victim Support (currently 21% of their referrals from the police are from men). The centre appeared to be staffed only by women which might be a further barrier.

It was noted that introductory tenancies were in the process of being implemented and this would have a role in helping reduce ASB. In addition, a family intervention project (FIP) was being developed in Haringey. This involved work being undertaken with disruptive families with the aim of improving their behaviour. Members also felt that the support needs of neighbourhoods where families who had a history of ASB were relocated needed to be considered.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) were used frequently as an alternative to ASBOs and had proven to be successful. Parenting support had also been provided via the ASBAT and proven to be very successful.

Members of the Panel felt that restorative justice (RJ) should also be considered as part of the review. An example of this approach was the use of restorative conferences where victims and perpetrators discuss and agree on the consequences of offences together, usually facilitated by a trained police officer. It depended on individual willingness and on the type of crime. Although many cases had been successful with victims keen to participate, this was not universal. Research did not sing with one voice on this issue.

It was noted that efforts had been made by Victim Support to develop a restorative justice project in Haringey and that the YOS had been interested in participating in this. However, it had not been successful due to lack of funding. There was good evidence to show that RJ was more successful than more punitive measures.

Members also felt that stop and search and that the reaction of front line police officers to reports of crime could have negative affects on the level of reporting of crime.

The Panel thanked Ms Kowalska for her assistance.

AGREED:

That the issue of the use restorative justice be added to the scope of the review.

Cllr Ron Aitken
Chair