



**Meeting:** Safer Communities Executive Board

**Date:** 18 February 2010

**Report Title:** Scrutiny Review – Support to Victims of Crime

**Report From:** Councillor Ron Aitken

**Purpose**

To provide Board members with an overview of the findings of the scrutiny review on support to victims of crime.

**Background**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established an in depth scrutiny review on support to victims of crime. This has been undertaken by a small panel of non executive Councillors who have interviewed representatives from a wide range of local partners and organisations, as well as considering a range of written evidence. The Panel have now come to their conclusions and made a range of recommendations, which this report briefly outlines. A final report will be drafted for approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 March. Following this, the report will be considered by the Council's Cabinet, who will commission a joint response to it on behalf of local partners and collated by the Community Safety team.

**Key issues for consideration**

Board Members are requested to note the findings of the review.

**Legal/Financial Implications**

**Financial Implications**

This report does not give rise to any immediate financial implications. However, it should be noted that where possible all reviews will have a Value for Money aspect.

**Legal Implications**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has powers to scrutinise decisions taken in the discharge of the Council's "executive" and "non-executive" functions and to make reports and recommendations to Cabinet and Full Council. This includes making reports and recommendations on matters

relating to health services and other matters affecting the Borough or its inhabitants. The annual work programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee is a matter of local choice.

### **Recommendations**

That the report be noted.

### **For more information contact:**

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## **1. Report**

- 1.1. The Panel noted that there are a very wide range of services that provide support for victims and witnesses. Indeed, the number of different agencies and organisations that can potentially be involved can be a source of confusion, which is aggravated by the similarity in names of certain of the bodies involved e.g. the Witness Care Unit and the Witness Service. In addition, there appears to be some areas of overlap. The majority of this has occurred as a consequence of successive government initiatives to address the issue.
- 1.2. The Panel was of the view that there was a need for greater clarity on strategic responsibilities. A number of individuals that the review heard from felt that there was a need for better co-ordination and establishing clear governance structures as well as ownership of the issue would assist in addressing this. Once established, this should provide the opportunity to look strategically at current provision and address any areas of overlap and duplication as well as developing a joint local plan for improving services.
- 1.3. The lead responsibility for taking the lead on victim and witness issues lies with the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) rather than SCEB. Whilst many of the agencies on SCEB are also on the LCJB, there are some key ones that are not formally represented. There are also a number of areas of overlapping responsibilities as well as some where there is an inter dependency. The Home Office encourages closer collaboration between LCJBs and CDRPs and the Panel feels that this should be explored.
- 1.4. The Panel was concerned that it appears that not all vulnerable and intimidated witnesses are currently being identified in a timely manner and that they are sometimes arriving at the Magistrates Court without support agencies and the Court having prior notice of their needs. There would appear to be training and communication

issues that need to be addressed in response to this. Better liaison between the WCUs and the Witness Service would partly help to rectify this.

- 1.5. The Panel were concerned that the Witness Service appear to currently be located in accommodation at the Magistrates Court that does not meet their needs and it feels that partners should explore alternative options.
- 1.6. Victim Support are receiving a number of referrals which are recorded by Police as “no crime” and which they say they are unable to deal with. In addition, they say that victims may not always be aware that they have been referred by the Police. The Panel feels that better links between the Police and Victim Support would help to ensure that any issues can be addressed at an early stage. In addition, a common understanding should be developed over referrals and when they may or may not be appropriate. Finally, a visit to Victim Support would be of benefit to probationers in the Police as part of their training.
- 1.7. The Panel welcomed the fact that there is now a victim support worker in the ASBAT but funding for this is time limited. Long term decisions need to be taken about the long term future and sustainability of the ASBAT as the service is currently reliant on time limited grants.
- 1.8. The Panel noted that there is a perception that domestic violence services are only for women. However, statistics show that there are an increasing number of male victims. They may be deterred from coming forward and seeking help by the fact that services are almost entirely staffed by women. The Panel feels that services should set a target for the employment of male staff that reflects the percentage of victims who are male.
- 1.9. The issue of the need for CCTV in the vicinity of the Magistrates Court to deter disorder, particularly when the youth courts is sitting, was raised. The cameras cost £25,000 plus £2,500 per annum to maintain. Resources would have to be identified for this but the Panel is of the view that this should be given serious consideration when decisions are being made on the future installation of cameras.
- 1.10. The Panel noted that some Victim Support volunteers can be traumatised by the work that they undertake, particularly those dealing with the more serious crimes. There is currently no provision for therapeutic support for them. Victim Support monitor and support them but cannot offer access to emotional support. Exposure to trauma can potentially lead to volunteers being unable to continue their work. In addition, their long term welfare also needs to be considered. The Panel therefore feels that partners

should explore the possibility of the provision of appropriate psychological support if and when required for volunteers.

- 1.11. The Panel wishes to thank all of those who came along to Panel meetings and gave evidence for their help.