

## **Police and Crime Panel Meeting 7 October 2016**

### **Update Report on Victim Care Services**

This report provides an update on victim care services in Devon and Cornwall, in particular on progress in evaluating the new arrangements which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

#### **1. Background and Update**

In April 2015 Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales took on direct responsibility for the provision of the majority of victims care services within their area<sup>1</sup>.

In Devon and Cornwall a comprehensive victim needs analysis was carried out to build a clear understanding of the needs of victims within the area. Detailed engagement and a landscape review was carried out to understand the existing victim care landscape, in particular the range of services already providing help to victims of crime within the area. Ultimately the previous Police and Crime Commissioner, Tony Hogg, took a decision to move beyond traditional approaches to the commissioning of support for victims of crime and to develop a new approach, working with partner agencies, community groups and the third sector to provide choice and tailored support for victims, recognising that needs can vary significantly depending on the victim.

The new victim care arrangements in Devon and Cornwall went live on 1 April 2015. A new Victim Care Unit (VCU) was established within the force to make contact with all victims of crime and an innovative new Victim Care Network (VCN) was set up to provide victims with access to a broad network of organisations who could provide support to help people to cope and to recover from the impact of crime. Close to 70 service providers were recruited into the VCN.

The VCU is staffed by a team of 10 victim care officers and four specialist victim care advocates (VCA) that provide outreach intensive support for the most complex cases. The VCU team is supplemented by a seconded mental health senior practitioner from Devon Partnership Trust who can provide enhanced support for victims who have existing mental health issues and can also undertake assessments for those who may have an emerging mental health issues related to the impact of crime.

The VCU staff are fully trained in guidance skills and review all the victim needs assessment's (VNAS) completed by the attending police officer or staff in the contact

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<sup>1</sup> A small number of victim care services, including homicide support services, continued to be provided on a national basis.

management and control unit (CMCU). VCU staff will make contact with victims of crime and can, with the consent of the victim, refer them securely to an appropriate provider within the VCN.

The VCN brings together a range of local organisations that can cover a range of specialist crime areas and protected characteristics. Their profile in the community means that victims can have other needs met that impact on their ability to cope and recover. Regular networking days are held for members of the VCN which provide an opportunity to share information between agencies and develop multi-agency approaches to victim care

As part of the reforms a new public facing website (my VCU)<sup>2</sup> was launched for use by all victims and those supporting them. Victims can search the site by need, crime type, group type or geography to identify possible providers.

Support is also available for victims who do not wish to report a crime or engage with the criminal justice system. In such instances victims are able to access support from network providers who act as gateways for non reported crime. In addition Victim Support have been contracted to provide an independent help line to help victims of non-reported crime – and can refer them to specialist network members for assistance.

#### *Volunteering in victim care services*

As a result of an identified gap in victim care for those who have been the victim of fraud a number of specialist fraud volunteers have been recruited to work alongside the specialist fraud victim care advocate based in the VCU. The recruitment process resulted in 22 volunteers being selected for further training in January to March 2016, including a number of volunteers with specific skills and experience in dealing with fraud and cyber crime.

Volunteering remains a key part of the victim care services vision for Devon and Cornwall and the existing network of fraud volunteers have now extended their remit to undertake visits to victims of all crime.

## **2. Progress Update on Independent Evaluation of the new Devon and Cornwall Victim Care Arrangements**

As part of the development of the new victim care arrangements, a commitment was made to carrying out an independent evaluation following implementation and Dr Jacki Tapley, from the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth was appointed to carry out the evaluation.

The evaluation process commenced in January 2016 and is due to report before the end of 2016. The evaluation process is close to completion and Dr Tapley has provided an interim summary of her key findings for the Police and Crime Panel's information at this stage.

The evaluation methodology is comprehensive and includes the following:

- Attendance/observation of two VCU Network Days
- Meetings with management team and attendance at VCU Performance Meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.victimcaredevonandcornwall.org.uk/>

- Visits to the VCU, including shadowing of VCU team members and attendance at VCU team meetings and VCU performance reviews
- Interviews with VCU Advocates, VCU officers and senior police officer
- Online Questionnaire of VCU Network organizations.
- Analysis of VCU Victim feedback survey and performance database.
- Focus groups with Devon and Cornwall Police Officers
- Focus groups with victims.

### ***Preliminary feedback from University of Plymouth of the findings of the evaluation***

#### ***Dr Jacqui Tapley, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies***

*Preliminary findings indicate that the work of the VCU provides a valuable and timely service for victims of crime in Devon and Cornwall. It enables victims of crime to be contacted within two days of reporting an offence and offered timely advice and support. In particular, it acts as a triage service to enable resources to be targeted more efficiently. Not all victims will want or need a referral to a specific support service, but a telephone call from the VCU asking how they are and whether they would like advice or support is welcome by the majority. It also provides them with an assurance that support services are available and that they can still access them at a later date should they require it. For some victims, just a chat with a VCU officer can provide sufficient information and assurance, whilst for others it provides a clear and timely pathway to access the most appropriate support service.*

*The VCU performs a crucial role for the police by undertaking some of the police responsibilities outlined in the Victims Code of Practice (Ministry of Justice, 2013). These include an assessment of the victims' needs to help identify what support the victim may require; and a victim's entitlement to have their details passed to a support agency within two days of the crime being reported. Preliminary findings indicate that further work needs to be undertaken to raise police officers' awareness of the VCU and the role that the VCU plays. This would help to further improve the quality of the initial Victims Needs Assessment undertaken by responding police officers and the information relied upon by the VCU when contacting victims.*

*A preliminary analysis of the VCU Network Online Questionnaire demonstrates an overwhelming support for belonging to the MyVCU Network. The responses received have highlighted the following benefits:*

- *The VCU provides a valuable service for victims across the region, a seamless referral pathway to ensure clients' needs are met.*
- *Belonging to the Network enables greater up-to-date knowledge of existing services and increases awareness of the services available.*
- *Membership provides an opportunity to network with other agencies and to share knowledge, understanding, experience and best practice.*

*It is not yet clear what impact membership has had on referral numbers to the support agencies. Some organisations have indicated an increase, whilst others state no impact, or that referrals have actually decreased. Further analysis of the referral process is*

*required. However, of significant importance, is that some agencies are seeing a small shift in the profiles of victims they are supporting, indicating that referrals from the VCU has enabled harder to reach groups to access support services. This has included male victims, victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and has also revealed higher rates of victimisation amongst people with physical and learning disabilities.*

*The majority of VCN organisations also indicated the benefits of attending the Networking Days, which help to facilitate partnership working, peer support and the sharing of values and commitment. One respondent highlighted how uplifting the Networking Days were, as it was good to see how much good work was being done. This demonstrates the important role of peer support and partnership working, particularly at a time when increasing competition for funding during the last decade has had a negative effect upon partnership working, due to agencies having to compete against each other for funding. The exchange of information, the topics covered by speakers and the updates on the VCU, the My VCU website and database training were all found to be very useful.*

*The next stage of the research will focus on gaining the views of other stakeholders of the VCU, including the police, but most importantly, through analysis of the VCU's own Victim Feedback Survey as well as through focus groups.*

*The final report, which will be completed by the end of 2016, will identify the strengths of the VCU, the areas for further improvement and provide broader recommendations for improving the services provided victims of crime across Devon and Cornwall.*

### **3. Next steps**

It is proposed that a further update is provided to the Police in Crime Panel in early 2017 following receipt of the Evaluation Report. The draft Police and Crime Plan report submitted to the Police and Crime Panel for consideration confirms the Commissioner's intention to support and enhance the current approach to victim care and to take forward the findings of the Evaluation Report.

#### **Contact for further information**

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