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**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL
27 OCTOBER 2015**

**SUBJECT: VICTIM SUPPORT: PROVISION OF VICTIMS SERVICES IN
SUFFOLK (VICTIM ASSESSMENT AND REFERRAL CENTRE)**

SUMMARY:

This report is the first to the Accountability and Performance Panel from Victim Support concerning the support provided to victims of crime through the Victim Referral and Assessment Service.

RECOMMENDATION:

The PCC is asked to note progress with the service.

DETAIL OF THE SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On April 1st 2015, Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales took over commissioning of local victim assessment and referral services from the Ministry of Justice. In Suffolk the OPCC commissioned Victim Support to provide this Service.
- 1.2 Crime referrals are received and assessed at a regional centre and then sent on through our highly secure Case Management System, in accordance with agreed protocols and data processing arrangements.
- 1.3 Our staff members in Suffolk receive referrals for victims who have accepted our offer of service and manage their cases through to completion.
- 1.4 Where appropriate, trained volunteers are used to provide emotional and practical support to help victims cope and recover from the impact of the crime they have suffered.
- 1.5 All victims of crime are entitled to a service under these new arrangements and under the provisions of the Victim Code of Practice 2013 (VCOP).
- 1.6 Service provision is free and completely confidential to victims unless a safeguarding issue is evident, in which case appropriate action is taken in conjunction with the police, social services etc.
- 1.7 Victims of crime can access our service regardless of whether they have reported the crime to the police.
- 1.8 Through a monthly and quarterly reporting structure Victim Support updates and informs the OPCC about performance and issues concerning the service and the expenditure against the service delivery – please see reports accompanying this submission.
- 1.9 We are working with the OPCC to improve our reporting procedure and are looking at how we can provide more narrative and evidence of our services through case studies.
- 1.10 The service that victims can receive includes:
 - A thorough assessment of needs arising from an offence. If a victim of crime takes up our offer for support, we will go through a comprehensive series of questions with them to evaluate the impact the crime has had on them. We will ask questions about the how they have been coping since the crime and what support they need to help them cope and recover. We will use the information provided to establish how best they can be supported, either by Victim Support or by another agency if that would be more appropriate.
 - Emotional support given by carefully selected and trained volunteers, giving them someone to talk things through with, someone who will listen and understand
 - Practical support which could be anything from providing a personal alarm, help with replacing stolen credit cards or pension books through to completion of an application for criminal injuries compensation if they are eligible
 - Advocating for victims e.g. to make representations on their behalf to local authority housing services and other housing providers.

- Sign posting or direct referral to another party or agency that is better suited to meet victims' needs. Agencies include social services, MARAC, Rape Crisis, Age Concern, Suffolk Family Carers, Survivors in Transition, Suffolk Youth Offending Service, and Anglia Care Trust, Fresh Start New Beginnings, ISCRE and others.
- Information about the criminal justice process, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts system
- Links to the courts-based Witness Service should victims be required to attend court
- Commissioned services e.g. we can supply victims with personal alarms, window locks and other security items to improve their feelings of safety after a crime.
- In support of this the OPCC recently provided us with funds derived through the Prisoners Earnings Act to help meet the costs of providing commissioned services.

1.11 The VCOP details enhanced levels of service that victims are entitled to receive if they fall under particular categories:

- Victims of the most serious crimes i.e. murder, sexual offences and the most serious assaults
- Victims who have been persistently targeted i.e. people who have been victims on two or multiple occasions
- Victims who have been intimidated or who are vulnerable i.e. people who have been targeted to dissuade them from reporting crime and/or people who may be more at risk because of their age, gender, disability, sexuality etc.

2 KEY ISSUES AND PROGRESS:

2.1 Since the service began in Suffolk in April this year Victim Support has:

- Received 23,333 crime referrals – including 49 self-referrals and 34 referrals from partner agencies
- Made 3,403 successful telephone calls to victims of crime
- Sent 2,573 letters, emails or SMS messages to victims
- Conducted 1,716 assessments to determine a victim's needs
- Identified 2,455 victims as being 'vulnerable'
- Identified 21 victims as repeat or persistently targeted victims
- Identified 181 victims of hate crime
- Identified 6,142 victims as being entitled to an enhanced service offer of which -
 - 852 were contacted within 24 hours
 - 284 were contacted between 24 and 48 hours
 - 392 were contacted after 48 hours
- Assigned 361 cases to our volunteers to offer support to victims of crime which resulted in 235 face to face meetings with victims of crime

- Provided 737 hours of volunteer support time to help victims of crime cope and recover
- 2.2 The first six months of 2015/16 has seen an increase of referrals to Victim Support of 62%.
- 2.3 However, as the charity now accepts all crime types as referrals from the police, the increase in cases created as a result of the referrals has increased by 232% and for victims entitled to an enhanced service due to crime type or vulnerability, intimidated or persistently targeted the increase is 203%
- 2.4 Against this, the number of staff available to make the initial contact at the Victim Assessment and Referral Centre (VARC) has reduced by 37% and the time available due to reduced opening hours has reduced by 32%.
- 2.5 Additionally, the new service is to make only two attempted calls over a 24 hour period as opposed to last year, three attempted calls within a 48 hour period.
- 2.6 Overall this means that the resources and time available to service a vastly increased caseload is significantly reduced.
- 2.7 Despite this the average number of victims contacted within 24 hours has increased by 198% and for 24 to 48 hours, an increase of 65% has been seen.
- 2.8 Through our Service User Surveys conducted with victims during Q2 (July to September) we can report the following:
- 96% were satisfied or very satisfied with our service
 - 91% found our service easy to access
 - 85% reported their wellbeing and health had improved after our service
 - 79% reported feeling safer as a result of our service
 - 92% reported that our service helped them manage everyday aspects of life
 - 83% reported feeling better informed as a result of our service
 - 81% reported that our service helped them in their dealings with the police
 - 92% reported that our service helped them with their confidence
- 2.9 Over the next 6 months we will endeavour to sustain and improve our service delivery. We will continue to explore our contact methodology options and seek to improve how we offer our services e.g. we hope soon to be able to automate contact with appropriate victims by using SMS messaging, to ensure our staff are able to contact as many victims of crime as practicable.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

- 3.1 There are no particular financial concerns at the time of reporting. Operating costs for the first 6 months of this financial year are detailed in a document accompanying this update (Appendix B).
- 3.2 We are concerned at the costs associated with sending letters to victims, given that on average there is very low take up of a service offer using this medium (1 – 2%). This is a waste of resources in our view and we will be reviewing this aspect of service delivery in the near future

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS:

- 4.1 The main upcoming issue of concern will be the adoption of the EU Directive for Victims Services which will place an increased demand on our service. We will be working with the OPCC to review how that demand will be managed and to explore the management of future service delivery.