

COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th OCTOBER 2010

VICTIMS CHAMPION REPORT

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an overview to the Scrutiny Committee on key priority areas of the Victims Champion.
- 1.2 To promote discussion, encourage support and understanding of the role of the Victims Champion.

2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2009 the Home Secretary committed funding of 2.8 million to establish Victims Champions in 85 priority areas across England and Wales. The aim of the Victims Champion role is to promote the needs of anti-social behaviour victims and coordinate local services to help ensure that victims receive the support and information they want and need.
- 2.2 The Victims Champion role was part of a package of measures introduced by the Home Office programme "Anti Social Behaviour: Tackling, Not Tolerating" and influenced by the recommendations of the Sara Payne Victims Champion report.
- 2.3 In response the Safer Sunderland Partnership has recruited a champion to co-ordinate local services across the city to ensure victims receive the support and information they want and need. The role will ensure the views of victims are at the heart of relevant strategies and action planning processes.
- 2.4 In February 2010, Kirsty Swann was seconded to the Safer Communities Team two days per week as Victims Champion. Kirsty has been a legal adviser for the last nine years in various Magistrates' Courts in Northumbria. Her knowledge of the Criminal Justice system and the protections it currently offers victims has given her valuable insight to the role of Victims Champion.

3. Key Priorities

- 3.1 In March 2010, Louise Casey, Victims Commissioner for the Home Office announced the key priorities for the Victims' Champions to fulfil during the following year.
- 3.2 Priority areas:
 - Help more victims of anti-social behaviour
 - Prioritise those that most need help get it (vulnerable groups)

- Promote ASB services to the public
- Add value to existing anti-social behaviour services

4. Help more Victims of anti-social behaviour

- 4.1 Since starting in the role in February 2010 the Victims Champion has met with all the main council departments, registered social landlords, victims charities and Northumbria Police who deal on the frontline with victims of ASB. This was to ascertain a strategic overview of the current services and support on offer for victims and how the services could improve and help more victims of ASB. After completing the initial assessment of services it was identified there was a need to set up the ASB Task Force to implement the National Home office risk assessment matrix for ASB.
- 4.2 Although the Victims Champion does not carry a direct caseload, the role involves working closely with the new ASB Victim Support Worker (Aaron Slater) based in the ASB team at Sunderland City Council. They have agreed with the ASB Team and Victim Support a level of prioritisation of cases, implementation of the risk assessment matrix and a quality of service tailored to meet individual need on a case by case basis. Aaron commenced the role in September, initially for a 12 month period, however the Victims Champion has secured funding from Northumbria Police Grant Pool to extend this post for a further 6 months.

5. Prioritising the most vulnerable victims of ASB

- 5.1 After assessing the current services on offer to victims in Sunderland the Victims Champion identified that although there are a number of good practice examples in relation to referral processes to enable victims and witnesses to access support, there was no common definition of vulnerable and no agreed referral process. The Victims Champion drawing on the wealth of commitment from local ASB partners set up the ASB task force in June 2010 to implement the National Home office Risk Assessment Matrix for ASB and set up a referral process for high risk vulnerable victims.
- 5.2 The Victims Champion chairs the ASB task force and membership includes operational managers from the ASB Team, Environmental services, Youth Offending Service, Gentoo, Cheviot Homes & Victim Support. Senior Representatives from Northumbria Police also attend the group which indicates a high level of commitment from Sunderland Area Command.
- 5.3 The remit of the group is to:
- Implement the national home office risk assessment matrix into working practices when dealing with victims of ASB.
 - Establish a unified referral process at each level of vulnerability
 - Consider the MARAC process applied in domestic violence cases and assess whether a similar process could be applied to ASB.

- Training of frontline staff to implement this process.

5.4 The task force has met on three occasions so far and has reached agreement in the following:

- Due to limited financial resources any system set up must be implemented and sustained using existing resources.
- Each department and agency must decide internally at what stage the Risk assessment matrix is used but the minimum requirement would be that it is used with every repeat victim of ASB within a 3 month period. This is the level of service that Northumbria police has committed to.
- Any victim identified as high risk by an agency or department must take further action to reduce the risk. This can be achieved by communication with another agency/department or if it affects multi-agencies then the case can be referred into Local Multi Agency Problem Solving meeting either at the next local meeting or by arrangement of an extraordinary LMAPS meeting.
- A training need has been identified for frontline staff to understand the referral processes of Adult and Children Safeguarding and Adult Services. A training day for staff on the Risk Assessment Matrix and the referral processes will take place in early 2011. Funding has been secured from the Northumbria Police Grant Pool to organise this training.
- There is a need to create a customer survey to monitor and continually evaluate the service provided to victims to ensure agencies are meeting the needs of the victims.

5.5 The ASB task force is a task and finish group and once the systems are agreed and working in practice the group will be disbanded. Some agencies including Northumbria Police have already started using the risk assessment matrix. The task force has already had a first example of how the referral process for a high risk victim can work. In September the Youth Offending Service supported a victim of anti-social behaviour in relation to a crime of racial abuse and after using the risk assessment matrix they identified the victim as very high risk. The Youth Offending Service manager notified the Safer Communities Team and the Inspector for the Local LMAP's and an extra-ordinary LMAPS meeting was convened a couple of days later. The outcome for this victim is a support package addressing prevention of further incidents, monitoring and support for the victim. Present at the meeting were nine different agencies sharing information to reduce the risk of further incidents affecting this victim.

6. Promoting ASB services to the public

6.1 In March 2010 the ASB minimum standards were distributed to every household in Sunderland. This leaflet outlined the standards of service that can be expected when reporting an incident of ASB to any agency within the Safer Sunderland Partnership. It also provided a list of what is considered anti-social behaviour and the phone numbers to report an incident. The Victims Champion is currently considering ways in which we can monitor

whether the Safer Sunderland Partnership is meeting these minimum standards.

- 6.2 In early April 2010 the Sunderland Echo did a feature on the Victims Champion role and her priorities for the forthcoming year. This also included details of the ASB services available in Sunderland. It is intended there will be a further press release before Christmas outlining the progress of the Victims Champion and promotion of the victim support officer in the ASB team.

7. Add value to existing services

- 7.1 The Victims Champion is conscious that any improvements to services must be achieved and sustained using existing resources due to the likely reduction in funding to public services in the forthcoming years.
- 7.2 The implementation of the risk assessment matrix to departments and agencies within the Safer Sunderland Partnership will improve the quality of service offered to victims of ASB and it will identify those victims who require the most support and a referral process to access that support.
- 7.3 The Victims Champion is also working closely with the Neighbourhood Helpline Operations Managers to obtain qualitative data on repeat incidents of ASB reported to the helpline. This is in order to gain a socio-economic and demographic view of victims of ASB in Sunderland. This could be used to better inform strategic planning of ASB services and allow The Safer Sunderland Partnership to deliver more targeted preventative services and reassurance measures.

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

- 8.1 The Victims Champion will continue to focus on the key priorities of her role. The main focus in the forthcoming months will be completion of the ASB task force and the roll-out of the implementation of the risk assessment matrix.

9. Recommendations

- 9.1 Members are asked to note the key elements of the Victims Champion priorities and support the role in the forthcoming months.