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| VICTIM SERVICES |
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| SCRUTINY EXECUTIVE  BOARD |
| 2023 / 2024  PURPOSE AND RECOMMENDATION  The purpose of this report is for monitoring.  There are no recommendations made requiring a decision.  INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND  The victim services department sits within criminal justice, consisting of police staff and partner agencies. Recognising the benefit of a collaborative approach, individual service areas work together to provide person centred and holistic intervention that enables victims to achieve their best evidence and recover from the impacts of crime.  The department is managed by the Head of Victim Services who also oversees the commissioning contracts. The lead also plays a significant role in the collaborative work with the Local Criminal Justice Board and the national task forces.    Victim Care Unit (VCU): Victim Care Officers (VCO’s) are responsible for contacting victims of crime, with the exception of RASSO, modern day slavery and crime involving a death. VCO’s are responsible for the following:   * Issuing the victim crime letter, including the crime reference number, OIC contact details, VCO contact details. * Issuing an information pack that advises victims of their rights under the Victims Code of Practice (VCOP), how to apply for CICA and any support that is available. * Attempting contact with victims in the agreed service levels and where successful complete a thorough needs assessment and subsequent referral to the most appropriate agency. * Offer victims regular updates as required under the VCOP and where maintain the contact schedule as agreed. * Reassess victims needs as they move through the criminal justice process. * Work collaboratively with officers and partners to ensure victims receive the best possible service.   Witness Care Unit: Witness Care Officers (WCO) aim to achieve positive outcomes, minimise attrition and ensure victims and witnesses have their needs met to achieve best evidence. They become the single point of contact for victims, witnesses and relevant support workers post charge and oversee the provision for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and His Majesties Courts and Tribunal service (HMCTS). WCO’s are responsible for:   * Managing the case from the point of first hearing on the WMS system that ‘piggy backs’ CMS (CPS system). * Contacting victims and witnesses to offer any necessary support they may need, including referrals to the Witness Service for pre-trial visits. * Ensuring victims and witnesses have all the necessary information they need to attend court and give their best evidence. * Provide victims with their key stage updates as required under VCOP. * Ensure witnesses receive the best possible service as set out in the Witness Charter. * Work closely with officers and partners to ensure victims have their rights met under the code.   Special Measures Advisor (SMA): The SMA commenced as a national pilot to support the call for action across England and Wales to improve the offer and applications of special measures. The SMA runs a report in advance for VAWDASV ‘not guilty anticipated plea’ cases to ensure they have been offered the necessary measures. If not, contact is made to complete a specific assessment to determine the most appropriate measure. A subsequent MG2 will be sent across to the CPS also detailing any restraining order requests.  Survivor Engagement Co-ordinator (SEC): This innovative role was created in 2019 and the first of its kind across the country. The SEC engages with survivors of sexual and domestic offences, using their lived experience and feedback to improve our response to these crimes. The SEC leads on all our engagement work, including leading the Victim Reference Group and Survivor Network. The SEC works with all service area’s and within the governance structure to support meaningful strategic change.  **Connect Gwent**: This multi-agency victim support service aims to provide a range of services to people impacted by crime to support them cope and recover. Connect Gwent is made up of externally commissioned support services. Commissioned support services are funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) via the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Victim Services Grant.  Connect Gwent receives referrals from multiple sources, such as self-referrals, schools, and other partner agencies; their main source coming from policing.  The multi-agency service provides access to the most relevant and appropriate support according to their needs. Support may be provided by a single agency within Connect Gwent or by agencies working together in a coordinated way.  External commissioned services within Connect Gwent are:  **Age Cymru Gwent** – An Older Person’s Support Worker who provides specialist support to victims over the age of 50.  **Aneurin Bevan University Health Board** – A Mental Health Nurse who provides specialist mental health and wellbeing support, including supported access to community mental health services.  **Umbrella Cymru** – Provides specialist support to people relating to their gender or sexual identity.   * Umbrella Cymru also currently provide the Interim Children and Young People Victim Service which provides specialist support to children and young people impacted by crime.   **Victim Support**   * **Victim Support and Engagement Team** – provides ongoing support to all those affected by crime * **Domestic Abuse Case Worker -** providesspecialist support to victims of domestic abuse   VICTIM CARE UNIT PERFORMANCE  Referrals  Every 24 working hours all occurrences with an aggrieved attached is referred into the unit. The current service model works within the Victims Code of Practice by assessing whether the victim should be receiving a standard or enhanced service, acting as an additional assessment to the ICP01.  In enhanced cases an attempt to contact the victim is made within two working days, and in standard cases within five days. While this is our own service level agreement it works in parity with other elements of the Victims Code of Practice.    Contacting Victims of Crime  The current model ensures that all victims of crime received contact from us to offer the support and advocacy required through the criminal justice process and ensure they are aware of their rights under the code.  If we are unsuccessful in speaking to the victim over the telephone, we make every attempt to still provide them with this information should it be safe to do so. This will include sending the victim information packs, whether that be in the post or electronically. Should they not engage with us they will still have the information required under VCOP and how they can contact us for further help and support.  There is a slight anomaly in the ‘victim information pack data’ for October and November 2023, this is due to the resourcing difficulties faced in Q1 where we developed a backlog of cases; the approach was streamlined for efficiency which included pulling the occurrences into a spreadsheet to work from manually with the NICHE team importing the necessary templates in bulk accounting for such high numbers during the autumn months.  When successful contact is made, a detailed needs assessment should be completed with the victim to enable a tailored support plan and appropriate referrals to partners/ safeguarding pathways where required. The needs assessments focus around the areas of growth/deficiency in the victim’s life outside of crime to ensure an effective approach to help them cope and recover, minimise the risk of repeat victimisation, and remain engaged in the criminal justice process. It is pleasing to see that the figures for ‘successful calls’ and ‘needs assessments completed’ remain relatively equal. While 100% would be preferred, it is unfortunate that some victims will refuse to partake and terminate the call.    Referrals for Support  There were 1402 referrals sent to partner agencies from the VCU. This may seem significantly lower than the 5091 needs assessments that were completed however, the purpose of the needs assessment is to determine the requirement for support. Many victims may not need the in-depth emotional and practical support our partners offer and regular updates and criminal justice advocacy from the VCU is the only intervention required.  Out of 1402 referrals, 492 were referred into Connect Gwent using our tailored assessment form. The tables below breakdown some of the data within the needs assessments to help us understand in more detail those accessing the services.  Unable to Contact  To safely contact victims of crime the VCO’s rely on the necessary detail being present on NICHE at the time of referral. All cases are referred across to the VCU within 24 working hours so there are times when contact is made with the victim before an officer has spoken to them, e.g. awaiting a diary car appointment or we are awaiting a DAST review for domestic abuse cases. These cases are then monitored daily by the VCU until the VCO can initiate contact.  As the data below illustrates, the number of cases where contact hasn’t been made has increased.  At the time of writing this report we are trialling contacting victims immediately to ensure support is offered as soon as possible without risking disclosure before speaking to an officer and while managing safeguarding.  Regular Update Schedules  An important function of the VCU is to provide regular updates to victims of crime under right 6 of the code. This allows the VCO to advocate on the victim’s behalf and continually reassess the victims need as their justice journey progresses.  WITNESS CARE PERFORMANCE  Overview  The Witness Care Unit is a core function within the criminal justice process that warns victims and witnesses for court and provide the support and information they require to achieve their best evidence. The Witness Care Officer’s workload is allocated through the ‘Witness Management System’ by our CPS colleagues and heavily impacted by both CPS and HMCTS requirements/daily functions.  Staff within the unit are under considerable strain due to the disarray within the criminal justice system following the pandemic and barrister strikes. The national audit office report over 65,750 cases sat in the backlog across England and Wales with this now being considered ‘business as usual’. The increase in demand for the unit has been mapped out from 2017 and evidences the year-on-year rise in cases, trials and people supported by the team.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | 2017 | 2023 | | Victims/Witnesses Supported | 5059 | 7371 | | Live Cases | 632 | 973 | | Trials | 201 | 403 |   This has been raised through the appropriate governance structure and a business case is under review at the time of writing this report.  Live Cases  The below details the number of live cases within the unit per month. Once a case has its first hearing in the Magistrates court it is referred into the Witness Care Unit to be managed until the end of its criminal justice journey.  Trials  While the Witness Care Officers manage the necessary arrangements in the lead up to the trial, they are also responsible for managing any changes to the warning of witnesses and providing victims with their key stage updates under VCOP as the trial progresses. Below evidences the increase throughout the year.  Post Charge Support  All victims and witnesses within the cases above have their needs assessed by Witness Care and are referred for the necessary support where required and link in with existing partners; the unit also quality assure case file gaps such as the need for special measures, victim personal statements and where appropriate restraining order requests. Again, the date below evidences an increase of over a thousand victims and witnesses being supported.  Attendance Figures  We monitor the attendance figures based on how many victims and witnesses are requested by CPS to be warned for court by Witness Care and how many attend. Despite the continued workload increase it’s pleasing to see such positive results.  SURVIVOR ENGAGEMENT CO-ORDINATOR  **Overview**  The Survivor Engagement Co-ordinator role was created in November 2019 and was the first of its kind in the country. The role is well established in the organisation and its governance structures.  Since its implementation there has been noticeable improvement in both the force culture and response to domestic and sexual offences with the learning being shared nationally through the Criminal Justice Boards and NPCC task force.  The role won the regional VAWG award and has been highly commended by Operation Soteria being recommended nationally as the ‘gold’ model.    The Survivor Engagement Co-ordinator continues to engage with survivors through self-referrals, agency referrals and police referrals and feed these through the governance structure to implement change and ensure the victims voice is at the centre of all we do.    The attachments below provide further detail on themes throughout the year.   |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Quarter One | Quarter Two | Quarter Three | Quarter Four | |  |  |  |  |   Referrals  The below illustrates the number of survivors referred to the SEC and who from. These cases will be a mixture of finalised occurrences and those still ongoing and requiring service recovery.  Work Streams  While all survivors are given the opportunity to provide feedback, the SEC will also initiate projects based on the feedback or in line with other areas of work/priority throughout the organisation.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Workflow** | **SEC Progress** | | **Scrutiny Panels** | Over the last 12 months the SEC has contacted Victims from cases being presented to enhance the process of improving the service in its entirety. This has then been feedback during the meeting and learning or recognition sent to officers and supervisors. | | **Social media** | The VCU, WCU and VRG took part in a social media takeover to highlight VAWDASV and the work being done within the organisation to help support survivors through the criminal justice process and coincided with white ribbon day. | | **RASSO Outcome 16** | Survivor engagement co-ordinator was requested to complete a review of offences prior to the commencement of the RIT team and Operation Soteria within Gwent Police in 2022.  A data review was completed, and victims were given the opportunity to complete a survey regarding the reasons for not engaging in the criminal justice process. This was completed for both Rape and sexual offences.    In 2023 a further review was completed and compared to data over the same time period to scrutinise what improvements have been made since the implementation of the RIT team. It has also given insight into point of withdrawal and has helped the organisations complete HMIC AFIs | | **DA Investigation workshop** | Videos were completed with Survivors to be utilised for training purposes within the organisation. L&D developed a DA investigative workshop which is offered to front line staff using the survivor video and material from the investigation to provide officers with a case study that they can work through during the training. The SEC and survivor also attend the workshop to provide survivor voice and to complete DASH roleplay training. | | **Referral Pathway** | Feedback from the VCU is that a clear referral pathway is needed around DA and SV support to ensure that the correct support is put in place.  Referrals routes in this area can often be confusing as the referral criteria changes in different local authorities as does the service provider.  SEC has developed a referral pathway document, working closely with partner agencies and the VAWDASV to ensure it is up to date.  This will also identify any gaps in provision that can then be fed back to the VAWDASV team. This is updated annually and also includes support options for court. | | **DA Stabbing Case Review** | Following the arrest for a potential stabbing, it was highlighted by the Custody Chief Inspector and Head of Victim Services that the offender had been the victim in several occurrences over a 12-month period.  SEC completed a review of these occurrences to establish the chronology of these events and what learning there could potentially be for the organisation and partners involved.    Since this review, survivor videos have been utilised in a local communities of practice training event by VAWDASV regional team training DA and Substance misuse specialists. | | **DA Victim Information Booklet** | Feedback from survivors and partner agencies highlight the need for clarity around the criminal justice process and the importance of officer contact info for updates. Utilising the Op Soteria Information booklet for Victims, the SEC in consultation with the Victim Reference Group has created an Information booklet for DA Victims to help provide clarity around the criminal justice process.  [Victim Information Guide - DA](http://../Other%20work/Domestic%20Abuse/Victim%20Information%20Guide%20-%20DA.docx) | | **Op Soteria Transitional Plan** | Op Soteria Pillar leads developed a plan which will enable the organisation to see transformational changes with its approach to SSO investigations. Scrutiny of survivor feedback, self-assessment and HMIC themes were applied to create recommendations for Pillar 3 – victim engagement utilising procedural justice. | | **DA Deep Dive** | Agreement with Public Protection Unit (PPU) DCI to review a variety of DA offences that have been closed as outcome 16 from each area to establish any themes or good work within the LPAs. A review was completed of offences finalised in May 2023 and themes and good work shared. This review will be completed annually over the same time period to track themes and positive changed with DA. | | **Police Perpetrated VAWDASV** **(PPVAWDASV)** | A joint project between South Wales and Gwent OPCC to commission and launch a support service for victims (internal and external) of PPVAWDASV. The steering group meet bimonthly to facilitate implementation and referral pathways. Survivor feedback has been obtained in relation to 5 cases where either the perpetrator of the abuse was employed by Gwent Police, or the victim was employed by the organisation.  A summary of this feedback has been shared with the steering group, support service and PSD.  Learning also shared with the respective DCI. |   Victim Reference Group (VRG)  The Survivor Engagement Co-ordinator runs the Victim Reference Group which is a regular meeting of victims who volunteer to consult on our work and also initiate projects of their own based on their lived experience.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Workflow** | **VRG Progress** | | **Sustain the Change – DA matters event – 4th May** | The victim reference group were invited to attend the Sustain the Change event alongside senior officers which focused on the training provided to officers and how senior management can facilitate this within their departments.    Members of the victim reference group were invited and were made to feel incredibly welcome by the officers that attended.  The DA matters trainers utilised their knowledge and experience throughout the event and all members gave positive feedback for the day and how they felt this showed to them how valued they are by the organisation. | | **Domestic Abuse Risk Assessments (DARA) –**  **DASH vs DARA – 12th July** | The aim of the meeting was to understand from the survivors lived experience what it is like to complete a risk assessment and to have a greater understanding of the barriers in completing one.  The survivors were also able to see the current risk assessment and the proposed college of policing assessment in order to compare and to see which one would be better for survivors. This feedback was shared with the Vulnerability training steering group. | | **SWP OPCC – ISVA and SARC recommissioning – 9th August** | The group met with South Wales Police (SWP) OPCC to discuss the remodelling of Sexual Abuse support. Feedback from the group focused on the importance of creative therapies, peer/group work, managing expectations and the continual offer of support.  The group also provided feedback on SARCs, exit plans from support and a holistic approach to support for all family members (especially when victim is a child). | | **Cyfannol – Tech facilitated abuse – 30th August** | The group met with digital awareness leads from Cyfannol to establish if there was a need for specialist training in tech facilitated abuse for support workers in the region.  Discussion with the group identified a gap in support and how far reaching the dynamics of this abuse can be and how important it is to have the correct information to provide survivors and to ensure they are safe when leaving abusive relationships. | | **Domestic Abuse Victim Information Booklet – 18th October** | The aim of the meeting was to understand from the survivors lived experience what would be needed in an information booklet that would be helpful to understand the criminal justice process.  Feedback from survivors suggest a lack of awareness of support, understanding civil options, having contact details for officers, support workers and victim care officers and the investigation and CPS options being explained. | | **Welsh Government – Education and DA awareness – 10th November** | The group met with Welsh Government to discuss the VAWG blueprint for education. | | **DA Champion Event – HQ – 25th January** | The victim reference group were kindly invited to attend the DA Champion event at HQ.  The event was opened by Chief Superintendent Nicky Brain and domestic abuse survivors and colleagues were able to ask former DCC Rachel Williams how we're tackling this abhorrent crime in Gwent and more during her closing. | | **Vanguard workshop – 26th February** | Survivor video was used for Vanguard workshop with Gwent Police, Newport City Council and Aneurin Bevan health board to highlight the importance of understanding DA and the difference settings that a survivor may have the opportunity to disclose.    Members of group were asked the question; What was most important to you when leaving an abusive relationship? And feedback from the group was shared for the workshop. |   SPECIAL MEASURES ADVISOR  Overview  The Special Measures Advisor (SMA) role was implemented during a pilot during the national call for action to improve the offer and uptake of special measures. Other benefits included increasing the use of the newly implemented Remote Evidence Sites for victims of VAWDASV.  The role remains in Victim Services and following an internal review of its capacity has been adapted to include the allocation and monitoring of the Victim Right to Review scheme along with supporting the VCOP dip sampling.  The role will go through a full review along with the rest of the department in the autumn of 2024.  Cases Reviewed  The SMA runs a report for all ‘not guilty anticipated plea cases’ a week prior to the hearing to quality assure the offer of special measures and restraining orders. Where the victim could be entitled to special measures but there hasn’t been an application the SMA will attempt to contact the victims and/or their IDVA/ISVA.  As evidenced in the data below, there are a high number of cases where the victim could benefit from special measures, but an application has not been made.  Victims Contacted  Where there is no MG2 on the case file the SMA will attempt contact with the victim to complete a special measures specific needs assessment that explores each kind of measure in detail to help empower the victim to choose the option most likely to help them achieve best evidence.  The SMA will complete the MG2 and include any restraining order details that may previously have been missing.  It is positive to see that while special measures are being offered and discussed there are victims who are empowered to attend court without them to give their evidence.  Measure’s Chosen  While there are many special measures available the below evidence those commonly chosen and believed the most helpful to the victim.  Live link and the remote evidence site remain the most popular request; highlighting the benefit of these measures and the need to discuss at earlier points of the investigation to avoid victim attrition.  CONNECT GWENT  Connect Gwent multi-agency hub is an integral part of Victim Services and provide life changing support to victims and witnesses of crime. While the model was due to be recommissioned in April 2024 this wasn’t possible, and we thank the existing agencies for agreeing to continue their services for another year.  The Victim Care Officers complete a thorough needs assessment with victims of crime to ensure an appropriate referral for tailored support is made to Connect Gwent, however the agencies also accept self-referrals and referrals from external partners.  Referrals  Connect Gwent received 2581 referrals. Victim Support received the largest number of referrals as to be expected due to the universal service provided. The annual total for mental health referrals to Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) would normally be higher, however, due to long term sickness there was no service provided for six months of the period. This is one of the benefits of changing the model to one service provider in April 2025. Umbrella represents the children and young people support service.  Demographics  The following data provides a demographical breakdown of service users accessing Victim Support, Age Cymru, ABUHB. The data doesn’t represent the children and young person’s service as the provider didn’t collect the data for 23/24.   |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Gender Identity** | | | | | | **Man** | **Woman** | **Non-Binary** | **Not stated** | **Total** | | 765 | 1024 | 2 | 397 | 2188 |      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Age** | | | | | | | | | **12 years and under** | **13 to 17 years** | **18-34 years** | **35-54 years** | **55-74 years** | **45 to 54 years** | **55-74 years** | **Total** |  | | 6 | 35 | 240 | 472 | 439 | 341 | 235 | 2188 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Sexual Orientation** | | | | | | | **Heterosexual / Straight** | **Gay / Lesbian** | **Bisexual** | **Other** | **Not stated** | **Total** | | 769 | 20 | 30 | 6 | 1363 | 2188 |      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Ethnicity** | | | | | | | | **White** | **Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups** | **Asian / Asian British** | **Black / African / Caribbean / Black British** | **Other Ethnic Group** | **Not stated** | **Total** | | 863 | 14 | 29 | 20 | 1 | 1261 | 2188 |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Disability** | | | | | **Has a disability** | **Does not have a disability** | **Not stated** | **Total** | | 351 | 1611 | 226 | 2188 |   Support offer and uptake  Once a referral is received by the agency the expectation is for the provider to attempt contact with the victim as soon as possible. There is no set timescale overall for Connect Gwent as individual agencies have their own contact timescales. Having a consistent service level agreement for all referred into the service is another benefit to the new model in 2025.  The below details the percentage of successful contact with service users and the engagement of support.  Of those who engaged with the services, 89% reported they were ‘better able to cope and recover to move forward with daily life’ as per the MOJ outcome requirements.  Services Delivered  Connect Gwent provide a range of services dependent on the individual needs of the victim.  Below breaks down the types of intervention delivered by each agency.  Both Victim Support and Umbrella have a high number of ‘information and signposting’. While the service should always be dependent on the user’s individual need, the new specification aims to provide more in-depth support in the earlier days following being a victim of crime when we know trauma symptoms are most predominant. There will also be improvements made within the triage function to ensure any signposting is completed when assessing need to ensure the onward referral is the most appropriate.  ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION  It is noted within the report the impact of the increased demand on the Witness Care Unit. At the time of writing this report there is a separate business case being escalated through the governance structure that once implemented should improve performance, however, the benefits won’t be realised until the end of the financial year of 24-25 and we should therefore expect to see performance impacted in next year’s report.  NEXT STEPS  The Victim Services in its entirety is due to be reviewed alongside our colleagues in Criminal Justice.  The recommissioning of Connect Gwent is underway with the tender process starting in September 2024.  FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS  As highlighted in next steps, the recommissioning of Connect Gwent is underway with the tender process starting in September 2024.  PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS  The Special Measures Advisor (SMA) role will go through a full review along with the rest of the department in the autumn of 2024.  LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS  None of note.  EQUALITIES & HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS  This report has been considered against the general duty to promote equality, as stipulated under the Joint Strategic Equality Plan and has been assessed not to discriminate against any particular group.  In preparing this report, consideration has been given to requirements of the Articles contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998.  RISK  At the time of writing this report the risk within the Witness Care Unit is under review by Business Change.  There is no corporate risk or issue for this area.  PUBLIC INTEREST  In producing this report, has consideration been given to ‘public confidence’? Yes  Are the contents of this report, observations and appendices necessary and suitable for the public domain? Yes  If you consider this report to be exempt from the public domain, please state the reasons: N/A  FORCE SCRUTINY  At Formal Chief Officer Team Meeting the Chief Constable scrutinised the report and had no issues to raise.  The report has been scrutinised by the Deputy Chief Constable at Scrutiny executive board with no issues to raise.  REPORT AUTHOR  Elizabeth Lowther – Head of Victim Services  LEAD CHIEF OFFICER  Assistant Chief Constable, ACC Nicola Brain  ANNEXES  No annexes within the report.  GOVERNANCE BOARD AND CHIEF OFFICER APPROVAL  I confirm this report has been discussed and approved at a formal Chief Officers’ meeting.  Meeting chaired by: Chief Constable Hobrough  Meeting date: 15/08/2024  Signature:    Date: 21/08/2024 | |
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