

Victims Taskforce

First Meeting – 12 December 2018

Paper 2 - Engagement with Victims and Families

Introduction

1. This paper invites members to consider a range of options for engagement with victims and their families in order to hear their voices, capture their experiences, and inform the work of the Victims Taskforce.

Background

2. It is essential that the Taskforce hears the voices of victims and their families who have engaged with the justice system.
3. Taskforce membership already includes a range of victim support organisations (VSOs), who can help bring victims' views and experiences into discussions. There is also direct representation from a relative of a victim on the Taskforce itself.
4. Additional mechanisms are required to provide the opportunity for victims to tell their stories and feed their experiences into the Taskforce. These mechanisms should ideally enable engagement with victims across a range of crime types and with people who have experienced difficulties at different stages of the justice pathway. It may also be beneficial for Taskforce members to have opportunities to hear experiences first hand.

Discussion Points

5. Table 1 sets out different options for engagement with victims and their families:
 - **Which of these options will enable the most effective interaction between victims and the Taskforce?**
 - **Are there other options not covered here?**
 - **What should the frequency and duration of engagement be? e.g.**
 - engage with victims at the start of the Taskforce, then reconvene later in the process to test emerging outputs and ideas; or
 - maintain engagement processes throughout the duration of the Taskforce to share outputs from each meeting and seek feedback to inform the next meeting.
 - **What should the focus of engagement be? e.g.**
 - an open discussion to hear the victims story;
 - a structured questionnaire / template to capture victims experiences uniformly;
 - seeking ideas from victims on how the system could be improved
 - testing emerging ideas with victims as the work of the Taskforce progresses

Table 1 – Options for Engagement with Victims and Families			
Option	Detail	Benefits	Risks
A	<p>Use any existing victims forums which are operated by VSOs or CJ agencies to engage with victims. This could also include any current mechanisms to capture feedback from victims e.g. Rape Crisis Scotland shares anonymous feedback from victims with COPFS .</p> <p>Victims experiences could be captured through these routes and fed back to the Taskforce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise existing victim-engagement structures • Taskforce members could be invited to attend these forums • Could enable engagement focussed on particular crime-types e.g. sexual assault, domestic abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only focus on victims who are already engaging with VSOs • Potentially a limited geographical spread across the country
B	<p>Use a future meeting of the Taskforce as an evidence session (similar to those convened by Scottish Parliament Committees) whereby victims / families are invited to attend and share their experiences.</p> <p>Alternatively, this format could be used at each Taskforce meeting, allowing a range of victims to be represented.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would enable members of the Taskforce to ask victims questions directly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will reduce time at Taskforce meetings for further discussion among members or longer meetings will be required • Victims could find the formal environments of the Taskforce intimidating and traumatic, especially when recounting their experiences • The numbers of victims/families who could be accommodated would be relatively small

Option	Detail	Benefits	Risks
C	<p>Ask VSOs to convene victims reference groups / roundtables / workshops and other engagement mechanisms (including in confidence and on a one to one basis). Invite victims / families to attend and give their experiences.</p> <p>Victims experiences could be captured and fed back to the Taskforce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving victims organisations in designing the process would mitigate risks of re-traumatisation • The Taskforce would hear indirectly from a broad cross-section of victims / families, who may feel more able to discuss their experiences in this context • Would help ensure policy and operational changes are informed by a rounded evidence base • A victim representative from each reference group / roundtable could be invited to attend the Taskforce and feedback directly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims may feel uncomfortable sharing their experiences in an open forum • Potential criticism that victims are being excluded from direct engagement with the Taskforce • Testimonies may be less powerful if not heard directly by Taskforce members, (although members could be invited to attend these sessions to hear experiences first hand)
D	<p>Create a sub-group of the Taskforce to gather evidence directly from victims.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to the sub-group being chaired by an independent figure / an academic.</p> <p>Taskforce members from the CJ Agencies could be involved to enable them to hear victims experiences first-hand. Taskforce VSO members could also be involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of evidence gathering sessions could take place across Scotland to enable as many victims as possible to engage. Sessions could be themed e.g. by crime type or to focus on particular parts of the justice system • An online appointment system could be used with a mixture of group and 1:1 sessions offered to victims • The sub-group could consider setting up an online questionnaire and offering webinars / skype calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource intensive • It may not be possible for all sub-group members to attend every evidence session (although Taskforce members could send a representative from their organisation instead)

