

AGENDA ITEM:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

28th JULY 2009

**COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LEISURE
SCRUTINY PANEL**

VICTIMS OF CRIME

FINAL REPORT

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel's assessment and proposals on their scrutiny into "Victims of Crime" in relation to the Panels agreed Terms of Reference.

OVERALL AIM OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 2 The overall aim of the Scrutiny Investigation was to assess the issues associated with Victims of Crime and make appropriate recommendations which address the issues outlined in the Terms of Reference.
- 3 To present the findings of the Scrutiny Investigation to the Executive for their consideration.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

- 4 The Following outlines the **Terms of Reference** for the Scrutiny examination into Victims of Crime which was determined following discussion by the panel at their meeting of 12th November 2008.
- To explore the approach taken by Police in ensuring victims of crime are supported
 - To assess the level of support available from agencies for victims
 - To identify practices, which ensure victims, are supported following a crime.
 - To identify gaps in the provision of services to support victims of crime.

BACKGROUND

5. Unfortunately many people have been a victim of crime and the Home Office is working to get both the level of crime down and to reform the justice system, aiming to put the needs of the victim first. The Home Office aim is to improve the experience victims have when they come into contact with the criminal justice system and to ensure they are treated with respect and dignity.
6. However, it is essential that for such services and support to be available a crime must be reported. It's appreciated that for many crimes it is not easy for a victim to bring this forward. While a victim may agonise over the need to report a crime. Should they decide not to then the criminal is free to continue. The consequences of not reporting a crime is that the victim can remain isolated and the valuable support needed and available for the victim is unable to operate.
7. Should the Victim report the crime they can also make a 'victim personal statement'. A victim personal statement allows the victim to explain more about the impact of the crime on them personally and can be used by the judge or magistrate to help them decide on an appropriate sentence for the offender.
Deciding to provide a victim personal statement is completely voluntary and can be made at any point in the case.
8. The Home Office aims to emphasise that once a crime is reported the victim will be kept informed of developments. This was a key issue for the panel to address as recent press publications had implied that many victims do not receive any follow up information, resulting in the victim feeling isolated, forgotten and are simply a statistic.

9. The Home Office is endeavouring to put into place processes, which support and protect the victim and also ensure the criminal justice system puts the needs of the victim first.

SUPPORTING VICTIMS

10. Being a victim of a crime can be a profound emotional and psychological event. It can lead to debilitating personal insecurity, confusion and uncertainty. Support and advice is critical during this difficult period and there is help available, probably more than many people are aware of. When a crime is reported to the Police they must treat the victim with consideration and they should always ask if they would like to be referred to organisations, such as Victim Support, which are aimed to help victims.
11. 'Victims Support' is an independent national charity where the staff and volunteers are trained to provide emotional support and practical assistance, including:
 - providing someone to talk to in complete confidence
 - real advice on victims' rights
 - useful information on police and court procedures
 - basic advice about compensation and insurance
 - information about other sources of help, Such as counselling
12. Anyone affected by crime can contact Victim Support for help, regardless of whether they've reported the crime to the police or how long ago the crime took place.
13. In addition to the Victim Support services above there is also,
 - The Witness Service – to support you during a court case
 - The Community Legal Service – to assist with legal problems
 - Citizens Advice – to advise about suing the offender for damages.
14. As referenced, the Home Office is improving the services for victims by making changes that will put victims at the heart of the criminal justice system. Victims will be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, with the intention that more offenders will be prosecuted and sentenced appropriately.
15. Some of the improvements being made to the way victims are supported include:

Victims' rights - Reforming the justice system so that the needs and rights of victims and witnesses are placed at the heart of what is done. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime sets out the services a victim can expect to receive from each of the criminal justice agencies, such as the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. For the first time these agencies are required by law to provide details of the minimum standards of service that they will provide to you.

16. The Code, launched in 2006, will also ensure victims are kept up-to-date on the progress of their case. They will be told when someone is arrested for the crime, charged, bailed and sentenced. It also details the special services available for vulnerable and intimidated victims.

Some of the key requirements of the Code include:

- a right to information about the crime within specified time scales, including the right to be notified of any arrests and court cases
- a dedicated family liaison police officer to be assigned to bereaved relatives
- clear information from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) on eligibility for compensation
- all victims to be told about Victim Support and either referred on to them or offered their service
- an enhanced service for vulnerable or intimidated victims
- the flexibility for victims to opt in or out of services to ensure they receive the level of service they want

The agencies bound by the Code of Practice are:

- all police forces for police areas in England and Wales, the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Her Majesty's Court Service
- joint police/Crown Prosecution Service Witness Care Units
- Parole Board
- Prison Service
- Local Probation Boards
- Youth Offending Teams
- Criminal Compensation Authority
- Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel
- Criminal Cases Review Commission

ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

17. Anti-social behaviour is any activity that impacts on other people in a negative way. Despite a substantial drop in the incidence of crime over the last decade, anti-social behaviour remains a serious issue with tens of thousands of ASB complaints made to authorities each day.

The government's Respect campaign encourages people to work together to create a society in which all can respect one another and live peacefully.

The Respect action plan details how the government will encourage respect in communities, including stamping out anti-social behaviour, by:

- supporting or challenging anti-social households
- tackling truancy and anti-social behaviour in schools
- providing activities for younger people

- strengthening local communities
- stronger measures to tackle anti-social behaviour

PANELS SCRUTINY EXAMINATION

18. The panel gave serious consideration when establishing their Terms of Reference for this scrutiny examination. Following this the panel identified their lines of enquiry they intended to pursue and these are outlined as follows.

POLICE

19. The panel considered the first area of enquiry should be with the Police, as it is understood that generally the first contact a victim, of crime or anti social behaviour, would have is with the Police. Consequently, the panel believes that enquiries with the Police regarding the procedure from point of contact through alerting of agencies to ensuring victims awareness would provide a good foundation to the scrutiny.
20. Middlesbrough is understood to be the busiest district within Cleveland County area and consequently decisions regarding Police feedback to victims are influenced by a range of factors including the nature of the crime and the work demands currently placed upon the Police officer. Consequently, the panel considered it appropriate that a senior Police officer attend this meeting of the panel to outline the practices adopted and also the issues and difficulties encountered in ensuring the Code of Practice is complied with.
21. The Police outlined to the panel the practices adopted and the issues and difficulties encountered in ensuring that the Code of Practice was complied with. Cleveland Police are trying to reduce crime significantly in Middlesbrough and also looking at the way in which crime was recorded. According to the latest unconfirmed figures, the number of crimes committed during November 2008 had reduced by 12.2% compared with the same period the previous year as this was the latest information when addressing the panel. The detection rate during November was 37.2% and over the past year crime had reduced by 16.5% which equated to 2306 less victims than the previous year. The detection rate was 36.1% for the year overall.
22. The Police have a public service desk at headquarters, which received all calls to the Police. A Crime Bureau recorded crimes as they were notified and potential lines of enquiry in relation to each crime were scrutinised. Details were then sent to the Central Management Unit (CMU) in each district and cases were then allocated to individual Officers. All victims of dwelling house burglaries were visited by Crime Scene Officers and Officers from the Crime Prevention Team. Follow-up visits were made when necessary. In partnership with the Police, West Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Trust had developed an initiative to provide assistance with fitting security lighting, new locks and gates for vulnerable people and the panel recognised this can contribute to easing the minds of victims away from potential re-offending.

23. The Police confirmed they worked with Victim Support and ensured that details of all crimes were sent to the Service. All Police Officers were expected to ask victims whether they required assistance from Victim Support. It was confirmed that some victims of crime, for example multi-national companies who were the victims of shoplifting, would probably not require help from Victim Support. It was stressed that it was the individual who decided whether or not to accept the offer of assistance from Victim Support and the Police could not force individuals to use this service. In the case of more vulnerable people, including the elderly, the Police would do everything they could to ensure that victims accessed the support they needed.
24. For victims suffering anti-social behaviour, witness intimidation or criminal damage, the Police could install personal attack alarms in their houses or CCTV. It was highlighted that the Police did not always receive enough information about anti-social behaviour to allocate sufficient resources. The public often contacted their Ward Councillors rather than the Police and this would dilute the number of complaints about incidents made direct to the Police. There was also a misconception that personal details would be divulged by the Police, which was untrue.
25. Approximately 50% of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in place across Cleveland were issued to perpetrators in the Middlesbrough area and swift action was taken in response to any breaches of these Orders.

VICTIM SUPPORT

26. The panel invited representatives from the Victim Support and Witness Programme to attend the panel and present detail on their engagement with victims. The organisation has merged with a national charity in 2008 and now offers additional practical help to victims by means of a commissioned service. The Service was delivered by volunteers and provides emotional support, information, including referrals to other services, advocacy and also practical help such as form filling and insurance claims. Victim Support was the only organisation recognised by the Criminal Injury Board and there is no charge for their service in helping victims to complete forms etc. Funding is a concern, as victim support is primarily funded by the Home Office, with contributions from Hartlepool and Stockton councils. The Service also raised around 20% of its budget from fund raising activities.
27. At present, the service is open from 8.0 AM to 8.0 PM and comprises of a manager, 35 volunteers and 4 care officers across the Tees valley. Accessing the service is frequently by telephone and all Police stations have the number in addition to general advertising used. The service has a web site and markets its facilities through posters placed at all Police Stations, libraries and Doctors' surgeries. Practical help includes one off projects dependent upon individual need. Tasks including fitting house alarms, providing personal alarms, or changing security locks to ensure that victims of domestic abuse or burglary felt safe. The service also provides a swift responsive service to

emergency situations, including the provision of food and basic living essentials for victims of domestic violence or provision of transport to hospital for victims of serious assault.

28. The victim support service works with other agencies and social landlords including My Sisters Place to help victims. The service has found that some victims require counselling and the service will provide support until the counselling actually commences. On occasion the services offered are extended to the family due to the trauma that may have been experienced by the victim of the crime. The service is compiling a list of independent venues that could be used to engage with victims and make them feel secure. Equally, the service is always looking at different ways of supporting people. Local interpreters had been employed to help with language barriers and to assist with the effectiveness of the service; victim support has developed a close working relationship with the Council's Community Protection Service.
29. With regard to anti-social behaviour, referrals were usually received from the Police at the point when anti-social behaviour became a crime. However it was noted that a vast amount of anti-social behaviour went unreported as victims feared reprisals. If a victim could be encouraged to speak up and go to Court this would help encourage other members of the community to report incidents.

WARDEN SERVICE

30. The panel had taken evidence from both the Police and Victim Support, during which representatives from both organisations made reference to the Warden Service and also how the Wardens can be a first point of contact.
31. The panel received evidence from representatives of the Warden Service of their practices and experiences in encountering and dealing with Victims of Crime. The Warden Service is a highly visible service and has a dedicated presence in all Council wards. Consequently the service encounters anti social behaviour where their intervention is to divert the energy into more socially acceptable activities. Wardens occasionally contact the police and also support a victim when a crime etc has occurred and the victim is feeling vulnerable. In such circumstances the warden will call the victim the following day in an endeavour to support and assess if they need additional support is required.
32. Support is provided to victims through advice and guidance and to reassure people that they don't have to deal with the issue alone. This includes linking with other agencies when necessary and ensuring the victim has access to these other services. On occasion the warden has also assisted with the provision of additional security facilities to reduce the victim's fear of crime.
33. Although the warden assists the victim the panel found that there was no formal process for wardens to receive feedback from the Police on the reports they had submitted. Even though the wardens, who have been trained by the

Police, frequently convey information and detail to the Police through a computerised system.

34. The warden service placed an emphasis on prevention and thereby reducing the number of people who are unfortunate to become a victim of crime. Presently, information indicates that there is a 30% reduction in overall crime over two years. The wardens aim to build community spirit and the value of good neighbours, which provides a good environment to support those who are victims.
35. The panel was informed that on occasion the wardens were aware that some people would not report a crime due to the fear of reprisals. However, their experiences would indicate that while young people have a preference to communicate with the warden, older people are more likely to contact the police. Consequently, the Police are working with schools to build a good relationship between the Police and young people.
36. The panel considered that there are clear benefits for the Wardens to meet with the Victim Support Service and learn more about what the service provides. In support of this the panel was informed that the Council is in the process of producing an A to Z of services later this year which may assist other organisations with contact points.
37. At this time the panel were informed that new posts of Neighbourhood Crime Justice Co-ordinators had been created, which were funded by the Home Office. These co-ordinators are to make sure justice was seen by local communities to be done and that victims are supported.

COURT SERVICE

38. The Panel decided it would have representatives from the Court service to attend and outline the issues for safeguarding victims and also witnesses who attend court. The panel recognised that there is the potential for intimidation and subsequent reprisals and the safety of victims and witnesses could be a concern.
39. The panel was informed by representatives from the court that under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, an enhanced services could be provided to vulnerable or intimidated witnesses as defined by the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. A witness was eligible for an enhanced service under the Code as a vulnerable victim if they were under the age of 17 at the time of the offence. Or have suffered from a mental disorder within the meaning of the Mental Health Act 1983, had a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning, had a physical disability or suffered from a physical disorder.
40. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) liaised with the Police and any vulnerable witnesses were notified to the CPS. The Witness Court Unit and

the Witness Service were informed and an application made to the Court for an enhanced service as appropriate. If required, Magistrates would decide whether an enhanced service would be provided.

41. Should a case be sent to trial the Witness Service would write to all witnesses and offer them a Court visit. The witnesses would be shown around the Court in an attempt to put them at ease. Should a witnesses be uncomfortable with the arrangement they can provide evidence from behind a screen or over a video link which still provides the opportunity for cross examination.
42. The court also offered interpreters and intermediaries to witnesses to ease the fear for those giving evidence as the experience can be quite stressful, Court Ushers, Clerks and Magistrates were made aware of witnesses needs and concerns on the day and special attention was given to those considered as vulnerable witnesses.
43. It was explained to the panel that the courts have a dedicated Witness Suite. This is a large room for prosecution witnesses and a smaller room available for defence witnesses. However, the panel found that these rooms were next to each other, which was not considered to be ideal. However as the Magistrates court was an old building, efforts were made within the constraints of the building and the funding available to provide separate facilities for witnesses.
44. The Witness Suite was moved about a year ago as it was considered it was not ideal as IT Services were accessed from the landing where defence witnesses would congregate and could see into the room. The reasoning for the move was to meet the needs of vulnerable prosecution witnesses. This action demonstrates the efforts the court is taking to ease the concerns of witnesses and provide a better environment to wait in before giving evidence.
45. Efforts to safeguard a witness's identity are such as clearing the Court before they entered and left. Witnesses could give their evidence from behind screens where their names and addresses would be withheld. However, in respect of anti-social behaviour there are special hearsay provisions in legislation to allow for evidence of incidents that had taken place to be provided to the Court without the identities of the victims being divulged.
46. The Council had arrangements in place for visiting victims of anti-social behaviour and the Community Protection Service had strong links with the Neighbourhood Police and My Sister's Place. It was recognised that it was often difficult for victims of crime to come forward and ask for help for fear of re-victimisation.
47. The panel is aware that the Crown Court is a newer building and while it has similar facilities to the Magistrates Court to support victims the cases heard are generally more serious and consequently the pressures on victims and witnesses can be equally severe if not more so. Therefore the panel decided that it would visit both the Magistrates and Crown courts to see the facilities provided.

48. **Magistrates Court Site Visit** – The panel found that witnesses could access the court by one of three ways. These were, via the main entrance or through a separate entrance to the Youth Court or via a concealed garage. However, once in the court the panel was shown that the room identified for conversion to a waiting room for defence was in a separate area to that for prosecution. As presently, the waiting area is used by both prosecution and defence witnesses, which has caused problems in the past.
49. The panel found that Video links were available to five of the Courts and the Panel received a demonstration of the link in operation. Also people on remand could use the video link from prison rather than appear in Court.
50. **Crown Court Site Visit** – The court has 11 Courts in total, 6 District Judges' Chambers and a Civil Court. The panel found to access this that all vulnerable or intimidated witnesses could enter the Court by a concealed entrance where they are met and guided to the Witness Suite. Also pre-court visits were offered to all witnesses. The pre court visit is used to derive information from the witness's needs and efforts are made to ensure the witness is guide by the same usher on both pre visits and court hearing.
51. The Crown court also had video links for witnesses and the witness suite had three rooms and a permanent staff presence. However, the panel found that there were some distinct advantages over the magistrates Court as the defence waiting area was in a different part of the building to the prosecution witness area.

YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

52. The panel requested the attendance of the South Tees Youth Offending Service as the panel wanted to gain an understanding of how young people were affected and cared for as victims of crime. In response the panel was informed that the primary aim of the service was to prevent offending and re-offending by young people aged 10 to 17 years. This is done by assessing the factors which influenced offending by young people, understanding the risks they posed and developing a package of interventions which addressed these factors and protected the young person from further harm and involvement in crime.
53. Young people were responsible for committing around 45% of recorded crime in Middlesbrough. One of the key objectives of the Youth Offending Service was to address the needs of the victims of crime and engage them in a restorative process and encourage the young person to make good any wrongs caused. The services restorative Justice team contacted victims of youth crime within five days of the Court outcome. Restorative Justice was an approach to crime that sought to repair harm and had three primary aims: victim satisfaction, preventing further offending and promoting community reassurance.

54. The Youth offending service receives information from the Police relating to the victims. This information is sent electronically which contributes to a swift response by the service. The Initial contact with a victim is by letter which details the sentence the young person had received, an offer of an appointment to meet and a brief explanation of the purpose of the meeting. During the meeting the Victim Liaison Officer will record details of how the victim was affected by the offence and what could be done to repair the harm. If appropriate an offer can be made for a face-to-face meeting, known as direct reparation. This enables the victim to tell the offender how they had been affected by the offence and receive answers to any questions they have. During the meeting agreement could be reached on how the offender could help to repair the harm caused. As well as trying to repair the harm, it was an opportunity to empower victims and to let the offender see how they had been affected by the crime. Direct reparation was intended solely to support the victim and it is totally the victims decision for this to proceed or not, although it would also hopefully reduce re-offending by the young person. If the young person who had committed the offence had received a Referral Order, the victim could attend the Referral Order Panel meeting; otherwise a referral was made to Unite Mediation for victim-offender mediation. Offenders often viewed their activities as harmless and did not realise the effect they had on the victim.
55. The panel was informed that the service contributed to the seven priorities of the Youth Crime Action Plan, which challenged young people to engage in reparation activity and to participate in restorative programmes. The operation was also conveyed to the panel indicating that the service worked with colleagues in Children's Services and with Police to deliver Stay Safe Interventions using Child Protection legislation to remove young people who were at risk on the streets to a place of safety.
56. With regard to reducing the vulnerability of young people from becoming victims of crime, the Stay Safe Project allowed Police to use child protection legislation to remove a child from the streets if they were a danger to themselves or others. One of the main problems faced by the Service was engaging victims without re-victimising them. It was noted that the quality of information received from the Police had improved and also the letter sent to the victim by the service.
57. It was explained to the panel that victims sometimes felt offenders were being rewarded rather than punished for their crimes. This perception was understandable and an important part of the communication with the victim was to explain the Order in detail. Every young person who came into the system was thoroughly assessed and had an Intervention Plan. The Plan would always contain a leisure element but the young person would only be able to access this if they were complying with all the elements of the Plan. It was further highlighted that many young people could not afford to pay for leisure activities and needed to be engaged in such positive activities, otherwise they could re-offend. It was also important for the community to see where young offenders were giving something back to the community, such as picking up litter, painting fences or working in community centres.

SAFER MIDDLESBROUGH PARTNERSHIP

58. The panel was aware of the Justice Seen Justice Done initiative which is a national campaign and therefore requested the attendance of the Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Co-ordinator. The panel was informed that the initiative aimed to put the law abiding public first in policing and justice. This was being delivered by the Safer Middlesbrough Partnership through the Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Co-ordinator.
59. The campaign aimed to increase public confidence in how crime was tackled and justice was delivered through three main objectives which were:
- Raising awareness and understanding of the service the public were entitled to from the Police and other agencies.
 - Showing the public that the Police, Criminal Justice System and the Government were on their side and that there were tough consequences for criminals.
 - Making sure that the problems the public were concerned about, such as anti-social behaviour and disorder, were tackled and the public informed.
60. Priorities for the next year included further support for victims or witnesses to make sure they got the best possible experience. There would be a single point of contact for the public to get a monthly update about what actions had been taken for issues such as anti-social behaviour. The single point of contact would be via the Community Councils and the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Victim Support, Witness Support and the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team were all involved in ensuring victims were properly supported. The Home Office was keen to ensure that all agencies were working in partnership and a report entitled 'Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime' has been produced.
61. The panel was informed that the Policing Pledge had been marketed nationally and in Middlesbrough had been promoted through road shows. The pledge presented the Police commitment, which included a key element of keeping victims of crime updated on the progress of investigations. In addition to the Police pledge, a Citizens Panel had been established to enable members of the public to decide what the community payback should be. This provided an opportunity for Victims of crime to make Community Impact Statements to ensure that all the different agencies were aware of the problems in individual wards.
62. The panel was also informed that the Neighbourhood Safety Team had specific staff who would work closely with Victim Support and deal solely with victims and witnesses of anti-social behaviour. All victims and witnesses would be visited and offered a full range of support services. The Neighbourhood Safety Officers would deal directly with the perpetrators. This

would avoid the same Officers being involved both with the victim and the perpetrator.

63. The Justice Seen Justice Done initiative supported improvements to the witness suite at Magistrates Court, including provision of separate waiting areas for prosecution and defence witnesses. In addition provision of target hardening of properties of vulnerable and repeat victims through Victim Support and Neighbourhood Management had been developed to ensure victims and witnesses in Middlesbrough received the best possible experience when involved in the Criminal Justice System.

FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

64. The Panel addressed the Terms of Reference during their lines of enquiry and an outline of their findings are as follows: -

- **To explore the approach taken by Police in ensuring victims of crime are supported**

65. Comment - The panel appreciated that Middlesbrough is the busiest district in the Cleveland area and that this affects the demands and availability of the Police service to keep victims apprised of all developments. However, the panel were equally informed that reported crime was reducing in Middlesbrough and that the detection rate increasing. The panel would therefore conclude that the number of victims receiving feedback should be increasing.

66. Although the panel appreciates that there are a range of demands placed on individual police officers which can impact on their availability. The panel is equally aware of the Policing Pledge and the need to engage with the public and maintain public confidence is to ensure all promises to feed back are delivered.

67. The Panel did find that the Police work with other agencies to ensure the support for victims is provided while placing an emphasis on vulnerable and elderly people

- **To assess the level of support available from agencies for victims**

68. Comment – The panel found that there are a number of agencies where an aspect of their service was to provide advice or direct victims to the agencies where support can be provided. Some of these agencies are referenced in this report and the panel found that these agencies were compassionate about the plight of the victim. However, the panel found that the service where their priority was to support victims was understandably Victim Support. In this regard the panel found that the service provided a range of facilities and took

a sympathetic and professional approach to supporting victims. The panel does believe that this service requires greater promotion to provide improved awareness.

- **To identify practices, which ensure victims, are supported following a crime.**

69 Comment – The panel found that with regard to reported crime the first point of contact is generally the Police, although on occasion this may be the Warden Service. With the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the local policing pledge the panel found there was a duty on the service to ensure victims are provided with the appropriate support. While the panel recognises that due to the operational demands presently on the Police in Middlesbrough that it is not always possible to ensure all victims are fully appraised of the situation affecting them. However, the panel does find that the range of services provided from the Police, Victim Support and through the Court process are fully aware of the plight a victim has and the need to ensure they receive the support required and their needs are catered for. This recognition is also prevalent for witnesses attending court where anxiety or apprehension may be prevalent.

- **To identify gaps in the provision of services to support victims of crime.**

70 Comment - The panel found that there are a number of services providing support and that the support addresses the needs of victims. However, the panel did find that the communication between these agencies could be improved to ensure the appropriate agency is alerted to the needs of the individual victim. Additionally, the panel considers that greater publicity is required of the services directed to support victims of crime as not all victims will either report crime or contact the police, yet they can still be traumatised by the event. The panel considers the awareness of confidential support services to be crucial in the general support for victims.

CONCLUSION

71 The Panel found from this examination that there are some positive issues. A clear message is that the crime levels in Middlesbrough are reducing and the detection rate increasing. Running with this is the Home Office approach in reforming the justice system so that the needs and rights of victims and witnesses are placed at the heart of what is done. To endorse this, the introduction of a Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the production of a policing pledge are all clear indications of the intention to place the needs of the victim first. The panel also consider that the recent initiative of Justice Seen Justice Done illustrates the continued approach of recognising the needs of the Victim is paramount.

- 72 While the panel recognises the above as positive moves it is equally aware from the evidence conveyed that victims of crime or Anti Social Behaviour can be profoundly affected emotionally and psychologically. The consequences of which can in some case be long lasting causing personal insecurity, confusion and uncertainty. In this respect the panel considered it essential that appropriate support is provided from various agencies.
- 73 The panel appreciates that the Police are not always the first point of contact and indeed some victims do not make such contact due to a fear of reprisals and intimidation. While some victims may convey the situation to a Street Warden or indeed look for support directly. The panel found this is most likely in cases of Anti Social Behaviour or where the victim is aware of who the perpetrator is and fearful of reprisals. The panel also found that innocent witnesses who are required to attend court could find the situation very traumatic as once again these innocent people are fearful of subsequent reprisals. Consequently, the panel was encouraged to find that the various agencies involved are endeavouring to address these issues in a sympathetic and professional way and that the support they provide is placing the needs of the victim first. The panel does consider that the safety of victims and witnesses is a major issue and that it can not be underestimated when wanting to improve public confidence in the system.
- 74 The panel did find that the general awareness of one of the major support services "Victim support" was not as great as it should be. Therefore access to this service is generally from referrals and that improved promotion of this service should be given. The panel also found that the communication between agencies when dealing with a victim could be improved. This involves greater awareness between agencies of what individual agencies provide and improved communication between them.
- 75 Upon commencement of this Scrutiny the panel was informed of national press coverage that many victims had reported they do not receive any follow up information and that they felt isolated, forgotten and viewed as simply a statistic. The panel appreciated that Middlesbrough was a busy policing district and that there are continual demands placed upon the Police. However, with the emphasis of placing the victims needs as a priority and the importance placed on this by the Home Office the panel considers there is a need to ensure all victims are aware of the developments in their case.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 76 The panel appreciates that the Council has little direct control over many of the aspects associated with improving victim support. However, the Council does have influence and the panel does consider the local authority should ensure appropriate care and support is available for victims of crime. The following presents the panels recommendations

- A That the Council engage with Victim Support and looks at methods to increase public awareness of the Victim Support organisation through increased publicity.
- B That the Council's Executive Sub Committee for Grants to the Voluntary Sector be approached with regard to the possibility of providing support funding for the Victim Support service.
- C That in compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and supported by the Policing Pledge that the Police report back to all victims and that their performance is reported to the Executive Member for Community Protection.
- D That the Magistrates Court ensure the facilities identified for the separation of defence and prosecution witnesses within the court are operational as soon as possible.
- E That the Police ensure the Victim Support service is aware of any developments, which may affect the services, they are providing to a victim. Also that the Police establish a formal process for reporting back to Wardens on the reports submitted to them by Wardens.
- F That a meeting be established between street wardens and victim support to build both links and an understanding of the facilities both provide to support victims.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 77 The Panel is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our enquiry. We would like to place on record our appreciation for the co-operation we have received from the following: -

G Bush	Middlesbrough Police (Acting Chief Inspector)
S Sellers	Middlesbrough Police (Detective Chief Inspector)
B Valance	Victim Support
N Robson	Victim Support
D Brierley	Warden manager
B Jones	Street Warden
C Langstaff	Street Warden
A Price	Magistrates Court (Deputy justices Clerk)
P Clarke	Magistrates Court
P Harrison	Youth Offending Service Middlesbrough
S Mathews	Youth Offending Service Middlesbrough
R Brown	Safer Middlesbrough Partnership

COUNCILLOR PERVAZ KHAN

CHAIR of COMMUNITY SAFETY & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

June 2009

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

78 The following background papers were consulted or referenced to during this Scrutiny and in the compilation of this report:

- (a) HOME OFFICE – Victims of Crime
- (b) Minutes of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panels of
1st December 08, 14th January, 4th February, 25th February 18th March,
8th February and 29th April 2009