



VICTIMNEEDS ASSESSMENT

11567 April 2014



Police and Crime
Commissioner
North Yorkshire



the
buZZZ
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WHY HAS THIS WORK BEEN UNDERTAKEN?

The Police and Crime Commissioner is responsible for overseeing the performance of the police force in their local area on behalf of the public and working with the wider community of agencies and organisations to develop and implement strategies to reduce crime. In North Yorkshire the vision of the Commissioner is encompassed by the phrase 'be safe, feel safe' which provides a focus for all activity.

While our aim is to fight crime and drive down crime rates, we have to acknowledge crime is part of our society and unfortunately every day we see additional victims of crime. Therefore part of our mission for the people of North Yorkshire is to provide support services which more quickly and effectively support victims of crime to cope with the immediate impacts and recover from the harm experienced.

From April 2015, support services for victims will be commissioned at a local level for the first time. This decision is driven by central government but is implemented and commissioned by your Police and Crime Commissioner.

We are taking the commissioning of these support service very seriously, because it is a fundamental part of delivering on our 'be safe, feel safe' promise. That is why, rather than simply commissioning new services or carrying on with the current services we felt it was right to involve people in North Yorkshire who have experienced crime in identifying current gaps in services and what a 'good' support service should be like.

So we are planning our commissioning of a new support services around a carefully thought out piece of research which saw us talk to existing providers of support services; victims of crime with experience of the current service and an extensive survey of victims of crime to be sure we had a complete picture.

The main findings are shared in this report, written by the company we worked with – a local market research agency called The Buzzz who are based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

This work will now form the basis of the services we aim to develop and deliver – so take a look at what we have discovered and if you have a view or a comment to make, please get in touch with your Police and Crime Commissioner, Julia Mulligan whose contact details can be found at the end of this document.

WHAT WE HAVE FOUND

As residents of North Yorkshire we find ourselves in a relatively safe part of the country, where crime rates are low, but where crime and anti-social behaviour remain a part of everyday life. This project looked at crime (from theft through to violent crime, sexual assault and domestic abuse), anti-social behaviour and road traffic accidents. The findings build a picture against which support services for victims can be designed.

- Crime when it happens is most often completely unexpected – it catches people unprepared and unaware.
- When crime happens – all victims of crime instinctively know to ring the police.
- They do this because they need someone to take control of the situation they are in as quickly as possible and that is what they expect the police to do. In most cases that is exactly what our police do.
- But victims are not sure what happens next. They are often scared or angry or both and don't necessarily think about what will happen next. The natural thing to do is to try and keep in touch with the police officer who has come to help them. However this is not easy to do – the officers duty rota changes or they are busy with other cases and it can be frustrating trying to get back in touch.
- So a clear and obvious handover from the officer to a support service is required at an appropriate time.
- Such a transition will only work if the victim receives clear communication and support in terms of what is happening with their case, what time period they should expect the next contact or update to be received.



Angela had been with her partner for over 10 years. In the past few years his behaviour began to change, and initially she contacted her GP believing her husband was suffering from a breakdown. She felt that her GP did not help as they suggested it was probably stress related. However his behaviour became more threatening and as a last resort, as she did not know what to do next, she rang the local police station.

She stated '*luck was on her side*' and for the next six hours she talked to a female officer who offered Angela both emotional and practical support, putting her in touch with women's groups for ongoing assistance.

Until visiting the police station Angela did not realise that she was the victim of domestic abuse. She praised the police for being compassionate, non-judgmental, and putting her in contact with support services which have helped her change her life around.

- The level of support varies significantly both by type of crime and by the circumstances of the victim. While type of crime is a good indicator of the type and extent of response required, it is critical that an effective assessment of the needs of the individual victim is made.
- Such a needs assessment may be needed more than once during the process, to ensure that response and support is provided in line with changing needs.



Mr. and Mrs. Smith have lived in North Yorkshire all their lives and have a large and close family living in the area. Having retired they were happy taking short breaks away, leaving their home and garden in the hands of their close family.

However all that changed when away overseas they received a phone call from their daughter stating that their home had been ransacked, vandalised and precious items stolen. Their life was changed forever. Mr. Smith stated 'these burglars have destroyed my peace of mind, they have taken my memories'. Since this time the Smiths have not left their home overnight.

The local police kept the Smiths in the 'loop' providing both practical crime prevention support and assistance for insurance purposes. More importantly the Smiths praised the emotional support received from the police: visiting them in person, being available on the phone, returning calls, keeping them informed about the progress of the case, up to date with the court procedure and prosecution and eventually assisting in returning some precious family heirlooms.



Laura is in her 50's and lives with her family in Housing Association accommodation. She has been suffering with anti social neighbours for almost six years now – noise, vandalism, harassment and threatening behaviour. She used to have a great PCSO contact at the Police who would look in on her every now and again and she often saw him in the area, this was very reassuring to her. Her new PCSO is OK but doesn't know her history, she doesn't see him so much. Victim Support have been great, very helpful both emotionally and practically. They have been working with the Police, the Council and the Housing Association to resolve her problems. Despite this the problem hasn't gone away although it does improve from time to time.

She tries to report everything but sometimes feels she is not a priority, particularly when dealing with someone new or someone who doesn't know her case history. She understands that she needs to collect evidence however she's been given two diaries to update, one from the Police and one from the Housing Association. She feels that she is having to manage all these different agencies and it's taking over her life.

- Current support services can be better – many victims of crime supported this view. Specifically improvements are required in the following broad areas:
 - Victims want to know what should happen next and when they can expect that to happen, even if that is only a general indication. Currently too many victims were left wondering where they were in the process; what progress had been made by the police or how close they were to prosecution of the offender.
 - Victims want practical information and help to be provided by support services – “give me a recommended locksmith or window repair service; tell me what I need to make an insurance claim; tell me where I can get help when I need to talk”.
 - “Communication needs to be simple and easy to understand”.
 - “When necessary give me a single point of contact or a way to deal with any enquiry I may have”.
 - “Show me how I can get faster access to more specialised support when I need it”.



Steve was violently assaulted during daylight hours by someone who had mistakenly assumed that he had reported them to the police and social services. He sustained a number of serious injuries in the assault and had to receive hospital treatment. Even a year after the event and following a criminal trial he is nervous about being seen in his local area as the person who assaulted him is still living there.

If I could pass on one thing from the whole experience which might help other people in the same situation as I was in, then that would be to complete a Victim Personal Statement. For me that was a chance to explain how the assault had affected me – it was in my own words and while I had to really think about what I was going to say, knowing it could be read out in court, I found the whole process really helpful. It made me come to terms with what had happened and how it had actually affected my life. I felt that the person who assaulted me should know that – it may not have made any difference to him as a human being but it was the only chance I would get to let him know how I felt about things.

- Victims of Crime will assess any service against how they feel and what support they might need at the time, but also against a customer service culture which is driven by updates; timely confirmations and promises of delivery and deadlines.
- As a result we found that younger victims are more demanding. Older victims may expect less but may need more.
- At later stages in the process; victims of crime who are needed as witnesses in criminal hearings require the support to continue and particularly a simple interpretation of the more formal language and procedures used.
- While victims expect the support they receive to have a beginning and an end, they should be allowed to re-access that support at a later date if required.

Our over-riding aim is that the support services we commission are aligned with the specific needs of local victims.



‘I was in a traumatic state’. Jane was the victim of rape and after reporting it, didn’t press charges. She tried to forget the incident and moved away from the area where it occurred; she has not been back since.

However after two difficult years, she contacted a women’s group who put her in contact with her local Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). She was still feeling alone, scared and traumatised. SARC provided the softer, gentle approach, treating her as a victim, talking her through the initial statement and identifying the process associated with the crime.

Jane was clear to state that had a SARC been available at the time of her assault she felt she would have received the support she needed when she was at her most vulnerable.

SUMMARISING VICTIMS NEEDS

- **TAKE CONTROL:** *tell me what will happen / could happen*
- **KEEP ME INFORMED:** *when I need to know*
- **HELP ME UNDERSTAND:** *what is happening and how it may affect me / my family*
- **SUPPORT ME:** *give me the means to act for myself or additional help when that proves too difficult or I feel vulnerable*
- **TALK TO ME:** *in a way I can understand*
- **PROVIDE SPECIALIST SUPPORT:** *or access to it when I need it*
- **PROVIDE ME:** *with the means to get my life back to how it was*

Our research suggests in North Yorkshire local support services for victims should include the following:

- A clear and early handover / break point from Police to the Referral and specific Support Service
- An initial assessment of Victims Needs
- Provision of information practical help and advice for Victims to get immediate assistance themselves, which may include things like;
 - Checklist for insurance claims
 - Approved list of contractors for changing locks, replacing windows; assessing vehicle damage
 - Information on where to access other help as needed or organisations offering support
 - Single point of contact with details of how best to access them
- Referral to specialist support as determined by initial assessment or secondary assessment
- Indication of timescales between updates or progress
- Communication using the victims preferred method of contact: SMS; Email; telephone or letter

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