



National strategy statement 2005–2008

April 2005

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Introduction

Victim Support is the national organisation for crime victims, witnesses, their families and friends. Through our federation of local charities we provide services and promote the rights of people affected by crime. We offer a range of services, whether or not a crime has been reported. These are delivered locally by staff and volunteers who are trained to help people cope with the effects of crime. We are an independent voluntary organisation working alongside the criminal justice system, government, and other organisations nationally and in local communities.

Victim Support provides information, practical help and emotional support to people who have experienced a crime, and to their families and friends. Our services are based on the principle of community involvement – for many people, the expression of concern by a fellow citizen can be very helpful in repairing the harm done by crime. We try to make sure that our volunteers reflect the diversity of the communities in which they work and that our services are equally accessible to all.

All criminal courts in England and Wales now have a Witness Service, which is an integral part of Victim Support. The Witness Service is also developing in Northern Ireland. Trained staff and volunteers help victims, witnesses and their families and friends at court by familiarising them with the court before the hearing, supporting on the day, giving information about court procedures, and arranging further help after court.

In this strategy statement, most references to Victim Support refer to both our community and court-based services.

Our services to victims and witnesses

We believe that victims and witnesses have the right to the highest standards of service, and that our services must be readily available and accessible in every community. We believe in working closely with other organisations, both statutory and voluntary. We do this so that we can constantly improve our services, and to help victims and witnesses gain a service from other agencies if they are better placed to meet the need.

We have national standards and the work of local Victim Support charities is monitored and inspected to make sure that the standards are met.

The current context

Since Victim Support was established in 1974, we have developed a range of high quality services, and we have built up a range of knowledge and expertise that we have used to campaign for a better deal for victims and witnesses. The Government has responded with legislation, with their own strategy for helping victims and witnesses, and with a *Code of practice* for England and Wales, which sets out the responsibilities of the statutory agencies and Victim Support in relation to victims of crime. The *Code of practice* will require that

certain standards are met by criminal justice agencies in their contact with victims and witnesses. These welcome developments are changing the environment in which Victim Support works, and are reflected in this strategy statement which will define our vision and our work in this new and changing context.

This strategy statement sets out our vision and aims for the three years, 2005 to 2008.

Our vision

For victims and witnesses

By 2008, the needs and rights of victims, witnesses, their families and their friends will be (better) recognised and understood by the government, statutory agencies and the general public.

They will be recognised not just for their role in the criminal justice process, but more importantly in their own right, whether or not they have reported the crime.

Through this recognition, better provision will be in place to help all people affected by crime cope with their experience.

There will be real choice available for victims and witnesses who want support, and services will be accessible to every member of each community who has service needs as a victim of crime or as a witness.

For Victim Support

By 2008, we will have confirmed our position at the centre of service provision for victims and witnesses, even when we might not always be the service provider directly.

Victim Support will be known and our services will be understood in every community.

We will clearly communicate the way in which we add value to local communities. We will achieve this through a clear statement of our purpose and values, by being known for the professionalism of our services, and through having strong relationships with other providers of quality services.

We will have established a more diverse and reliable funding base to sustain our work and set in place new, 21st century methods of providing our services.

Our strategy is built on five key themes which reflect our values.

- enhancing professional standards
- valuing people
- ensuring our independence
- being a learning organisation
- developing our partnerships.

I. Enhancing professional standards

Our services to victims and witnesses, both specialist and generic, are mainly delivered by volunteers, who are managed by paid staff. The people who support victims and witnesses are members of the local community who give their time freely and who are independent of the criminal justice system. By carefully recruiting, training and supervising our volunteers, we help them achieve the highest professional standards in their work with victims and witnesses, while retaining the principles of voluntary work. Professional standards in the governance of our services are also important. Trustees (directors in Northern Ireland), who also give their time freely, collectively ensure that the vision and purpose of Victim Support is achieved. They are drawn from the local community, recruited for the skills and expertise they bring, and include representatives from other local organisations.

To build on our existing professional standards, we will:

- a. continue to develop standards for all our work and ensure that these are met
- b. make sure that our services are based on sound evidence of 'what works' in supporting victims and witnesses and that the levels of personal contact we achieve with victims and witnesses are appropriate to their needs
- c. develop our use of performance measures to help us improve our services and our accountability, and to demonstrate the value of our work. This will involve developing our use of IT facilities to collect accurate performance information.
- d. demonstrate that our services are responsive to the needs of all people, particularly those who are vulnerable to discrimination. We will do this by committing time and resources to ensuring that our service is inclusive, and by fuller monitoring of service users.
- e. strengthen the governance of our services by clarifying the distinction between governance and management and the respective roles of trustees and staff
- f. make sure that our services are properly accountable to the local communities they serve
- g. review the effectiveness of local organisational structures and identify models of good practice that combine local accountability with effective governance
- h. improve the efficiency, speed and transparency of consultation and decision-making in Victim Support to be proactive and responsive to the changing environment in which we work
- i. strengthen mechanisms for managing conflicts within the organisation
- j. ensure that all our personnel are competent to perform their roles effectively and that they are accountable
- k. consolidate our procedures for risk audit and management for example in relation to data security and business continuity.

2 Valuing people

People are at the centre of everything we do. Working with the diversity of the communities we serve is central to our ability to provide an effective, accessible service. We need to continue to make sure that all our personnel, staff, volunteers and trustees, are fully representative of the community and have the competencies required for their role. This is so that our work is relevant to all our service users and stakeholders, and so that we will retain our credibility. This involves more than just hoping people will want to work with us or use our services. It involves taking positive action to engage with people who at present do not come to Victim Support. This includes service users and potential staff, volunteers and trustees. We want a working environment which involves its people and operates consistent and transparent people management practices that apply at every level.

To do this, we will:

- a. implement our *Diversity statement* and refine our equal opportunities policies. This will involve taking action to achieve a profile of our volunteers and staff, and of our trustees in particular, that reflect the communities from which they are drawn.
- b. continue to develop the work of our Diversity Forum and equip it with resources to strengthen its contribution to the production and implementation of diversity action plans at a national and local level
- c. improve our equal opportunities monitoring process and ensure best practice in the way our personnel are recruited, inducted and trained
- d. increase the range and scope of learning opportunities for volunteers, staff and trustees
- e. update our personnel management and development tools
- f. strive to implement realistic pay, conditions and benefits, recognising that trustees must aim to make sure that there are sufficient funds, from public or private sources, to set salaries to a level sufficient to attract and retain the best staff
- g. broaden the composition of trustee boards using effective recruitment methods and clear trustee competencies
- h. develop a leadership programme for our senior managers, and implement a career and professional development programme for other staff, trustees and volunteers
- i. equip all our personnel with the IT skills needed for their roles
- j. provide greater opportunities for victims and witnesses to contribute their ideas, insights and experiences to our work, if they wish to do so
- k. support and empower all personnel to become more effective ambassadors for Victim Support to help raise our profile and credibility with every community.

3 Ensuring our independence

Victim Support is an independent voluntary organisation. While we work closely with national and local government, and the criminal justice system, our independence gives us the freedom to say and do whatever we think is necessary to benefit victims and witnesses. At the same time, we increasingly need to be able to demonstrate our competence in order to secure resources. Some of the actions listed in the section on enhancing professional standards, such as developing better performance measures, will improve our ability to do this. But we also need to strengthen our independence by:

- a. promoting Victim Support and our work with both victims and witnesses more effectively and with greater resources to make our identity and services more clearly known and understood. This includes clarifying that we provide a range of both generic and specialist services.
- b. marketing ourselves more effectively as an independent charity in order to help victims who have not reported the crime to have confidence in our independence and to attract potential funders to support us
- c. celebrating through our publicity what we have achieved in providing a service to diverse communities while acknowledging the work we still have to do
- d. confirming our status as a charity in relation to any developments proposed by the government or by the local criminal justice boards
- e. making sure that we benefit from the *Government Compact* with the voluntary and community sector by working with colleagues in the sector to promote and develop the *Compact*
- f. investing more in our national and local fundraising
- g. developing our work with local authority partnerships, particularly those that offer potential for sustainable income generation
- h. recruiting more fundraisers and fundraising volunteers
- i. developing more fundraising materials for local use to pay particularly for services for which statutory funding is not available. This includes most service provision outside the criminal justice process.
- j. taking steps to improve our efficiency, use our resources responsibly and minimise costs, for example by pursuing automatic data transfer and central purchasing of goods and services.

4. Being a learning organisation

Victim Support is recognised as a world leader in developing innovative services to victims and witnesses and in campaigning for victims' and witnesses' rights. But social changes demand that we constantly seek new ways of helping victims and witnesses. For example, recruitment of volunteers may become harder in some areas as people become more 'cash rich and time poor'. Meanwhile, the Government is increasingly placing the criminal justice system at the centre of services to victims. We recognise that the criminal justice system can only provide help to the very small minority of victims whose cases proceed to court and that our own services must extend more widely.

We will:

- a. continue to improve our performance as a learning organisation that is flexible, innovative and able to adapt, by reviewing our services and structures regularly and taking action where needed
- b. improve our ability, through research and the involvement of service-users in planning, to establish 'what works' in supporting victims and witnesses
- c. extend our campaigning and policy work beyond criminal justice towards social policy. This is so that we can press for improvements in the extent to which social policy recognises the impact of crime on victims, and provides for their needs.
- d. find new ways of attracting volunteers to Victim Support. This will include offering different styles of volunteering that are more flexible in terms of time commitment, and providing opportunities for people who are employed full-time to use volunteering with Victim Support as a means of developing their careers.
- e. review and prioritise our service delivery in the light of information about service needs and the resources available to meet them
- f. establish innovative ways of providing support which are responsive to the changing lifestyles of the people we support
- g. work closely with other organisations to develop innovative practice in supporting victims and witnesses. By innovating, we will also enhance our public profile because innovation generates media interest.

5. Developing our partnerships

We will confirm Victim Support as the lead organisation for victims and witnesses whose role includes mobilising community resources. This means that we will not always provide a service ourselves, where another local organisation is better placed to meet victims' and witnesses' service needs. We also need to strengthen our involvement with statutory partnerships such as local criminal justice boards. Through this, we can continue to have a real influence on local, as well as national, policy towards victims and witnesses at a time when Government is taking a more active role in setting priorities for work with victims and witnesses. We will focus on improving our involvement in partnerships by:

- a. making sure that, where our resources allow it, we are involved in local and national partnerships concerning services to victims and witnesses, such as domestic violence and hate crime forums
- b. continuing to work closely with our colleagues in Victim Support Scotland to ensure consistent services and policies throughout the UK
- c. introducing opportunities and developing provisions for associate membership, so that other organisations working with victims and witnesses can be more closely associated with Victim Support. This is a powerful demonstration of commitment to partnership that will enable us to support our partners while helping them to monitor their standards of service delivery.
- d. defining our role and the services we will offer and being active in local criminal justice boards, local strategic partnerships, and crime and disorder reduction partnerships so that Victim Support has a central role in their work and we are well placed to take up any funding opportunities
- e. working with local criminal justice boards to inform their work in identifying organisations that provide appropriate services to victims and witnesses
- f. seeking to work with a range of national organisations on joint campaigns for the rights of victims and witnesses
- g. doing preparatory work with selected local and national voluntary organisations to enable us to join together as consortia for the provision of services that are subject to competitive tender
- h. continuing to co-operate with partner organisations in Europe and beyond for the purposes of promoting the rights of victims internationally and also the development of services in our own and other countries.