
MAJOR INCIDENTS

BACKGROUND

What is a Major Incident?

A Major Incident is an incident of terrorism or a large scale (criminal/non-criminal) event requiring a humanitarian response.

In the event of a Major Incident, Victim Support (VS) may receive requests from Category 1 and 2 responders¹ to provide humanitarian support to victims and witnesses and may receive self-referrals. VS's role concerns major incidents that are 'crimed' however some major incidents, such as the Covid 19 pandemic, may also have an effect on victimisation and therefore require a specific response.

What is the response to a major incident?

Statutory services including the police, ambulance service, hospitals and local authorities provide a myriad of services to ensure those affected receive emergency treatment and feel safe.

Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) were introduced in 2004 in the Civil Contingencies Act to provide the means for those involved in emergency preparedness to collaborate at a local level.²³ Category 1 responders, through the LRF, have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate in a multiagency environment.⁴ They must consider and discuss with relevant voluntary organisations, the capabilities that those organisations within their area have to offer, and whether those capabilities should be built into response recovery plans.⁵

During an emergency the LRF forms a Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) classed as a Gold Command Group whose purpose is to liaise with other tiers of government during an emergency and to lead the response and recovery activities. It is recommended by the Cabinet Office that a Recovery Co-ordinating Group (RCG) is set up on the first day of the emergency and run in parallel with the SCG.⁶

¹ Category 1 responders: Local Authorities, police forces including the British Transport Police, Fire services, ambulance services, HM coastguard, NHS hospital trusts, NHS foundation trusts, NHS England and Public Health England, port health authorities, Environmental Agency and National Resources Wales. Category 2 responders:

² Under Regulations 3, 4(2)(b) and 4(3) the LRF, based on each Police Area (with the exception of London, where one area covers both Metropolitan and City Police Areas), shall be the principal mechanism for multi-agency co-operation.

³ There are 42 LRFs and 33 London Borough Resilience Forums as well as a London Resilience Forum.

⁴ Cabinet Office. (2013). *The role of Local Resiliency Forums: A reference document*. London: Cabinet Office.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62277/The_role_of_Local_Resilience_Forum_-_A_reference_document_v2_July_2013.pdf

⁵ Cabinet Office (2011) Emergency Preparedness statutory guidance document; The Role of the Voluntary Sector.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61037/Chapter-14-role-of-voluntary-sector-amends-10112011.pdf

⁶ Cabinet Office. (2013). *The role of Local Resiliency Forums: A reference document*. London: Cabinet Office.

Where an emergency has national implications or involves a number of government departments, then a lead government department will be appointed to oversee response and recovery. If the event is a major national emergency, then the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) may be activated to oversee the strategic issues.^{7,8} The Victims of Terrorism Unit within the Home Office provides a key role in coordinating the response and learnings for terror attacks.

From 1 April 2017 responsibility and funding for the provision of humanitarian support to victims and witnesses of ‘crimed’ major incidents, such as terrorism, was devolved from the Ministry of Justice to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). There are also organisations that provide Community First Responders when there is a Major Incident, for example St John Ambulance and British Red Cross.

Voluntary organisations and community and religious organisations provide much needed support, information and advice to help cope with the aftermath of major incidents. These stakeholders work in both the immediate response and the recovery to help ensure people get the assistance they need. In 2020 the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership (VCS EP) was established to improve coordination at national and local levels before, during and after emergencies. Bringing together local and national expertise from the sector, the partnership aims to help people prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, so that they can rebuild their lives. It also has an influencing role and gives a voice to those at risk of or affected by disasters and emergencies in the UK, so that they are at the heart of any response.

How are people affected and what support does Victim Support provide?

Major Incidents can cause death and physical injuries, practical difficulties such as transport and contacting loved ones, psychological harm, particularly where there are fatalities or serious injuries, and financial problems if they are unable to work due to injuries or family members needing to provide care for those injured or traumatised.⁹ It is vital that services are able to respond to a wide range of effects, which can be life-changing, and adapt to changing needs over time,¹⁰ including:

- Emotional or psychological - Feeling of intense distress when reminded of the incident; outbursts of anger;¹¹ trauma; issues with flashbacks; trouble sleeping;¹² counselling for PTSD.¹³
- Physical - Assistance with accessing equipment such as wheelchairs; adjustments to their homes.
- Financial - Funeral costs; accessing financial assistance and benefits.
- Social - Identifying support networks; reintegration; support with relationships; advice to family and friends may be needed.
- Practical - Find out about loved ones and missing people; issues with media intrusion; assistance with understanding their legal rights and having legal representation at an inquest;¹⁴ assistance with official documentation, insurance claims; liaising with

⁷ Cabinet Office. (2013). *The role of Local Resiliency Forums: A reference document*. London: Cabinet Office.

⁸ The Cabinet Office is the lead government department for Central Response and supports central government departments in working together effectively when responding to an emergency.

⁹ Almeida, R. and Moroz, A (2017) *Responding to Terror Attacks*. Victim Support: London.

¹⁰ Almeida, R. and Moroz, A (2017) *Responding to Terror Attacks*. Victim Support: London.

¹¹ Almeida, R. and Moroz, A (2017) *Responding to Terror Attacks*. Victim Support: London.

¹² Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

¹³ National Institute for Health and Excellence guidelines

¹⁴ <https://www.inquest.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=47e60cf4-cc23-477b-9ca0-c960eb826d24>

employers/education; appropriate provision such as safe, family-friendly temporary accommodation and culturally appropriate food and clothing.

- Safety or security - Fear and ongoing feeling of insecurity.

Support provided needs to be able to meet these complex needs in the immediate, medium and long-term. It also needs to be culturally appropriate and accessible.

Victim Support (VS) is the leading independent charity in England and Wales for people who have been affected by crime and traumatic incidents, including terrorism. Our specialist teams provide free, confidential and personalised support to help victims recover from the physical and psychological effects of crime and trauma. VS's free Supportline provides a very valuable service to those affected by 'crimed' major incidents who need immediate assistance, no matter where they live and when they need it.

Over recent years, we have responded to many major incidents including the following:

- The July 7 (2005) terror attacks
- The Tottenham riots in 2011
- The Tunisia terrorist attack in 2015
- The Croydon Tram Crash in 2016
- The Westminster terror attack (March 2017)
- The Manchester terror attack (May 2017)
- The London Bridge terror attack (3 June 2017)
- The Grenfell Tower fire (14 June 2017)
- The Finsbury Park terror attack (19 June 2017)
- The Parsons Green tube attack (15 September 2017)
- The Manchester Victoria attack (31 December 2018)
- The Sri Lanka Terror attacks (April 2019)
- The Manchester Arndale Centre stabbings (October 2019)
- The London Bridge attack at Fishmongers' Hall (November 2019)
- The Streatham knife attack (February 2020)
- The Reading knife attack (June 2020)

OVERVIEW OF TOPICS

- Role and capability of Local Resilience Forums
- Engagement of Local Resilience Forums with Voluntary and Charity Sector
- Joint working between LRFs and PCCs and across Government departments when major incidents are 'crimed'
- Confusion of where to go for help
- Recognising witnesses
- Independent support and justice for those affected by major incidents
- Access to mental health services and waiting times
- Preparedness of victim services

ROLE AND CAPABILITY OF LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUMS

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

There is significant variation in the capability and preparedness of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) for major incidents. As well as the level of resource provided to the LRF from the local authority. The relationship between Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and the local authority will also be a local factor that will affect the response and leadership provided.

Some of the reviews following major incidents since 2017 highlight improvements for LRFs, which should help inform minimum standards and expectations.¹⁵ For example the Kerlake report recommends that ‘All Local Resilience Fora should review their planning assumptions and expectations in relation to multi-agency communications during major incidents. Emphasis should be placed on identifying potential single points of failure in communication networks (i.e. technological and command) and building in resilience and/or alternative contingencies to avoid such failures’.¹⁶

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

The Government published new National Standards for LRFs in August 2020. The standards set out expectations of good and leading practice for Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), which build on and complement statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act but do not introduce new duties.¹⁷ The standards therefore can enable LRFs to understand what practice they should be aiming to achieve, though this practice is not enforced.

Victim Support’s position

New duties should be placed on LRFs to produce civil contingency plans to a minimum standard

We welcome efforts by the Cabinet Office to encourage the sharing of good practice and guidance to LRFs. However, due to the importance of LRFs being able to respond to a major incident it is vital that the duties on LRFs to produce civil contingency plans are strengthened and that minimum levels of preparedness are set. Civil contingency plans should also include medium and longer term planning of how those affected will be supported and the community recover and include the involvement of victim services for major incidents that are crimes.

We also call for a Government review and update of the Civil Contingencies Act to ensure it is up to date and fit for purpose.

ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUMS WITH VOLUNTARY AND CHARITY SECTOR

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

The VCS has an important role in providing support to those affected by Major Incidents. LRFs report challenges in coordination or integration of the VCS into official command structures.¹⁸ How LRFs engage with the VCS in the planning of their response will affect the experiences of those affected. The major incidents during 2017 highlighted the importance of effective communication during an emergency with organisations that are providing valuable support directly to those affected.¹⁹ Including the VCS in the response should be one of the immediate

¹⁵ The lack of leadership shown in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy from the local authority has been highlighted as a key issue in the effectiveness of the support provided to those affected, including the coordination of the VSC, and trust in statutory agencies in Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

¹⁶ Kerlake (2018) *The Kerlake Report: An independent review into the preparedness for, and emergency response to, the Manchester Arena attack on 22nd May 2017* (see 5.212)
https://www.kerlakeareanareview.co.uk/media/1022/kerlake_arena_review_printed_final.pdf

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/913502/NRS_for_LRFs_V3.0_Aug2020.pdf

¹⁸ Cabinet Office (2017) *Resilience Capabilities Survey 2017 - Working with the voluntary sector*.

¹⁹ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

priorities and not left to be undertaken a week or so after the incident, for example the Kensington and Chelsea Social Council meeting one week after the Grenfell Tower fire.²⁰

There is variation in the level of engagement of LRFs with the voluntary and charity sector (VCS) in membership, structure and inclusiveness. The 2017 Resilience Capabilities Survey found that 67 per cent of LRFs have VCS working groups, 24% cover VCS matters in a different working group and 10% (4 LRFs) do not have either. The Survey also highlights differences in the level of inclusion of voluntary sector organisations. 64% of LRFs report that voluntary sector organisations are tasked to deliver in support of the business plan whilst they only have a consultative role in 31% of LRFs.²¹ This will affect the ability of the VCS to respond collaboratively in different areas, including being able to provide effective support and disseminate communication.

To ensure engagement between LRFs and the VCS is effective a number of issues need addressing:

- Representation
The VCS is diverse. The Resilience Capabilities Survey found LRFs struggle to keep an up to date understanding of the sector, including capabilities, and build strong links.²² There are inherent problems with having a single representative of the whole VCS, especially where this role is not well resourced. The usefulness of this role in responding to the major incidents in 2017 is unclear.
- Capacity
The Government's Emergency Preparedness guide acknowledges that 'few voluntary sector bodies are established for the sole purpose of responding to emergencies. Most will have a partial interest tangential to their main business' and therefore may only respond to a major incident in certain circumstances.²³ In addition many may not have capacity to support preparedness work.^{24,25} However, how some LRFs are run still require considerable commitment from VCS organisations. For example, meetings are often not tailored to facilitate access and engagement for organisations whose remit is specific or limited.
- Clarity
The emergency response system, including Gold Command, also is not very clear to the public or organisations that respond who do not attend LRFs. This can lead to confusion on the ground on who is in charge and how to facilitate access to information, or share intelligence between those working closely with those affected and statutory agencies.

The VCS EP was formed with the aim of improving the coordination of national and local response efforts during emergencies and providing a single access point between government and the voluntary and community sector. The newly established VCS EP provides an opportunity for LRFs to connect to a range of VCS organisations that are facilitated in the coordination of their response to major incidents.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

²⁰ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

²¹ Cabinet Office (2017) Resilience Capabilities Survey 2017 - Working with the voluntary sector.

²² Cabinet Office (2017) Resilience Capabilities Survey 2017 - Working with the voluntary sector.

²³ Cabinet Office (2011) Emergency Preparedness statutory guidance document; The Role of the Voluntary Sector.

²⁴ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

²⁵ Cabinet Office (2017) Resilience Capabilities Survey 2017 - Working with the voluntary sector.

Following concerns raised on the coordination of the VCS following Major Incidents in 2017, Government departments have encouraged the VCS to review their response and improve links between small and large VCS organisations, preparation for future incidents and communication. This has led to the establishment of the VCS EP, which has received £4.8m in Government funding to develop a network to improve future responses. A number of Government departments are partners of the VCS EP and have assisted in engagement with LRFs.

Some of the leading practice outlined in the National Standards for LRFs includes engaging collaboratively with the voluntary sector and increasing accessibility. For example, having a process for on-going consultation and collaboration with community and voluntary networks and publishing emergency plans ‘which exist in a form that allows them to be accessible to the public’.²⁶ However LRFs are not required to implement leading practice.

Victim Support’s position

All LRFs should have a diverse VCS working group with sufficient authority within the LRF planning and SCG response to share feed in capabilities and insight into those affected

The work of the VCS should be considered an essential part of the response and recovery from a major incident. It is not sufficient for LRFs to only engage or include the VCS through having a representative. Having a VCS working group in addition to a VCS representative can help increase inclusion of the sector, but the group must have sufficient authority within the LRF structure to provide a meaningful link during planning and the response. For example, issues identified by the VCS through providing support to those affected should shape actions taken by the SCG and RCG. In addition, LRFs should also build links with the VCS EP into their command structures to support coordination with the sector.

It is vital that a cooperative relationship is established between SCGs and Gold Command and the VCS, including small organisations, when a major incident occurs so that intelligence can be shared on the experiences, gaps and issues being experienced by those affected. This will aid decision-making within SCGs and ensure that action is taken to either reduce harm or fill gaps in support or services being provided. There are a number of ways that this could be facilitated, including meetings and digital platforms and utilisation of the VCS EP.

All LRFs should consider how accessible they are to VCS involvement and make steps to improve inclusivity

LRFs should also reflect on how they currently engage with the VCS including expectations of attending LRF meetings during peacetime in terms of resource and relevance to organisations. We would welcome a review into how LRFs can better engage with the local VCS, both those in the emergency response space, where relationships are often already established, and in the wider voluntary sector. This is likely to require new approaches to engaging with a different mix of organisations.

Accessible information about the role of LRFs, SCGs and RCGs should be developed and made publically available, in consultation with VCS organisations, to provide clarity on what they do and how VCS responding to an emergency can engage within these structures

It is important that efforts are made by LRFs to increase understanding of their role and to undertake outreach to different parts of the voluntary sector both in peacetime and following an incident to help ensure that it is clear how to link into communications if they respond to an

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incident. This should include simple explanations of the emergency response processes and procedures.

Government departments should continue to support LRF engagement with the VCS EP

The VCS EP provides a vital role in aiding the coordination of the sector when a major incident occurs and has a number of mechanisms to help identify and meet unmet need during a crisis. As this is a new partnership further links need to be embedded within official structures to help facilitate engagement between LRFs/SCGs and the VCS EP, this will require support from the government. It is also vital that government departments respond to concerns raised by the VCS EP and works collaboratively to address issues affecting the response to major incidents for the benefit of those affected in future.

JOINT WORKING AND CLARITY BETWEEN LRFs AND PCCs AND ACROSS GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS WHEN MAJOR INCIDENTS ARE CRIMED

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

There is an overlap between civil contingency responsibilities of local authorities and victim support responsibilities of PCCs when major incidents are 'crimed'. For major incidents that have criminal investigations, or terror attacks which are always a crime, it is vital that LRFs/SCGs work closely with PCCs. This is particularly important around support for victims and survivors. PCCs are responsible for commissioning support services for victims and survivors of crime including 'crimed' major incidents, such as terror attacks. The additional processes, agencies and services involved in these incidents need to be reflected in civil contingency plans so they can be utilised.

There are a number of major incidents where support from victim services is beneficial but where it is not fully clear that it is a crime, and where there may be issues with acknowledging or suggesting a crime has taken place before there has been a charge. This primarily relates to major incidents which are suspected to be caused by corporate manslaughter but where the justice system is likely to take some time to confirm that a crime has taken place, such as Croydon Tram Crash and Shoreham Airfield Crash. Early communication between LRFs/SCGs and PCCs is vital when criminal charges relating to a major incident are being considered. Victim support services should be updated by the PCC when those affected by a major incident are likely to become eligible for support so they can prepare accordingly.

The overlap between responsibilities when major incidents are a crime extends to Government. There are many Government departments involved in major incident response: Cabinet Office (Civil Contingencies Unit), DCMS, MHCLG, Home Office (Victims of Terrorism Unit) and the Ministry of Justice. This has created some confusion in engagement with Government by the VCS in the response and subsequent information sharing.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

The VCS EP has facilitated discussions between the sector and many Government departments. Engagement should continue to ensure that communication is coordinated at a national as well as local level.

For terrorist attacks there is also the Victim of Terrorism Unit (VTU) which facilitates cross-government working. The VTU's overarching objective is to ensure effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated support to victims of terrorism at a system level. This has included communication with each LRF to support local responses.

The National Standards for LRFs (August, 2020) do not include Police and Crime Commissioners or victim support services.

Victim Support's position

Civil contingency plans should include the role of victim services in providing support to those affected when major incidents are 'crimed'

Civil contingency plans are important in helping coordinate the many agencies and organisations involved. As certain major incidents, such as acts of terrorism, are crimes the additional processes, agencies and services, such as the Victims Code of Practice, should be reflected in these plans. It is also important that the referral mechanism established between the police and victim services for crimes are supported not undermined in instances of major incidents, and that communication to those affected of how to access support available is consistent.

The National Standards for LRFs should also include victim support services. The new standards should be a key opportunity to ensure a joined up response:

- The standard for Community Resilience Development should mention PCC commissioned victim services as part of engaging with organisations that 'might offer support to their communities and to responders before, during or after an emergency'
- The Interoperability standard should have parts on joining up with victim support services for 'crimed' major incidents to reflect the overlapping statutory responsibilities of the LRF and PCC to those affected
- The Strategic Coordinating Group: Preparation and Activation standard should include OPCC as one of the agencies to be included in coordination arrangements.

Update the Civil Contingencies Act and statutory guidance to reflect role of PCCs and support arrangements for 'crimed' major incidents

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 Act predates the introduction of PCCs, and their statutory duty to commission support services for victims of crime in their local area. The Act must be updated and Schedule 1 of the Act should be amended to include PCCs as Category 1 responders, specifying their duty to provide support services for victims of major incidents that have been 'crimed'.

To ensure that every LRF and PCC will work collaboratively in response to a major incident where there are criminal investigations or charges the Government should make it a requirement for PCCs to be on the LRF Board. PCCs should explain and promote the role of victim services to the board.

Relevant statutory guidance such as the *Emergency Preparedness Guidance (2012)*, and *The Role of Local Resilience Forums (2013)*, should be updated to reflect the changes in the victims' services commissioning landscape that have taken place. Guidance should clarify that local planning documents specify the support arrangements for victims in the event of a 'crimed' major incident, making reference to commissioned victims' services, including the local PCC commissioned services and nationally commissioned services such as the Homicide Service.

LRFs and PCCs should communicate regularly when criminal charges relating to a major incident are being considered. In addition, PCCs should update the victim support service when it is likely that those affected may become eligible for support

It is vital that as much as possible the police force work closely with victim services to notify them as early as possible whether or not an incident is likely to be 'crimed' so they can

prepare. This should reduce confusion about the support available amongst those affected and responding.

CONFUSION OF WHERE TO GO TO FOR HELP

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

In the immediate days and weeks following a major incident, the provision of timely, co-ordinated and reliable information to those directly affected, and their families, is critical. A haphazard emergency response can increase the anxiety and trauma of those affected.²⁷

Many of those affected by the major incidents in 2017 raised issues about not knowing who to turn to for help in aftermath. There was a high volume of organisations that responded to the Manchester terror attack and Grenfell Tower Fire, as well as individuals who wanted to be helpful.²⁸ Messages about who to go to for support varied across Government, statutory bodies and the VCS.

Some people sought help from established emergency and victim organisations and others sought help from community-based organisations who were not known to the crisis response sector prior to the incident. These events showed that people affected by a crisis want help from accessible and trusted organisations within the VCS.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

Government websites provide a summary of support available.

The VTU has developed resources containing targeted information that can be used to communicate key sources of practical, emotional and financial support for victims and survivors of terrorism.

The National Standards for LRFs includes in good practice for emergency planning that LRFs should have 'plans with clear and agreed arrangements for communication with all stakeholders and the public across the full range of media'. They should also have a 'process for identifying, mapping and regularly assessing the resilience of community and voluntary networks at highest risk to inform priorities for targeted communications and interventions'. However LRFs are not required to follow good practice.

Victim Support's position

Clear proactive communication should be coordinated across statutory agencies, government and the VCS following a major incident to raise awareness of how to access support
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It is important that those affected are given clear and consistent messages about where they can access appropriate and professional support. Clear communication during a crisis is a shared responsibility for statutory agencies, government and the VCS.

The media and official websites should be consistent and up to date. LRFs, PCCs and government departments need to provide consistent information about support available and provide sufficient resource to reach those affected. Proactive marketing activity should be undertaken to reach those who do not have police contact and to help address any confusion of who people should go to if they need assistance. This may require the appointment by the local authority or PCC of a dedicated communications officer. This activity should be included in all LRF local plans and budgets, and the mapping of pathways of support as part of ensuring

²⁷ <https://www.inquest.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=47e60cf4-cc23-477b-9ca0-c960eb826d24>

²⁸ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

people affected by an incident can easily find who can assist them. Although we welcome inclusion of clear communication with the public as good practice in the National Standards for LRFs, providing information to those affected by an emergency should be considered a key priority and allocated sufficient resource by every LRF/SCG. It is also vital that communication between LRFs/SCGs and PCCs are joined up, which should be reflected in the National Standards for LRFs.

The VCS EP has an important role in improving communication and support across organisations when a crisis occurs. Despite official systems and national organisations being prepared to respond to major incidents, some people will go to who or where they know they are safe and welcome.²⁹ Where organisations who are not connected to the emergency response sector are relied upon by those affected, it is important that they are able to communicate with, and access expertise from, the wider VCS. Effective mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that small organisations are supported and communicated with following a major incident. Steps have been taken by the VCS EP to address this gap, which should continue and be facilitated by the VCS and statutory agencies.

RECOGNISING WITNESSES

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

It is not just survivors who have been physically injured who can suffer significant psychological consequences but those who witness an attack as well. However, VS's research has found that 'witnesses' are not always considered to be victims by all of the agencies and organisations involved in supporting them despite the psychological effects experienced.³⁰ There was criticism following previous attacks that some individuals who were affected less 'seriously' (i.e. not bereaved or seriously injured, but nevertheless a victim of the attack) did not receive the information they needed and were not reached by authorities in their local area. There have also been delays and complications in victim support services receiving referrals for witnesses.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

There has been increased government recognition of the affect major incidents have on witnesses as well as victims. For example, the VTU recognise witnesses as victims of terrorism.

As of April 2019, the scope of the Homicide Service in London was expanded to include support for those who witness homicide. This support is available for witnesses of all homicides, including those that take place as a result of a major incident.

Victim Support's position

Witnesses of traumatic 'crimed' major incidents should be treated as survivors and able to access the same level of service and rights as victims of crime.

Due to the known effects of witnessing traumatic major incidents, it is important that those who are ordinarily classified as 'witnesses', who were in close proximity to the incident or at the scene shortly after are considered and treated as survivors, and are able to access adequate support services.

²⁹ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

³⁰ Barker, A. and Dinisman, T. (2016) *Meeting the needs of survivors and families bereaved through terror attacks*. London: Victim Support.

INDEPENDENT SUPPORT AND JUSTICE FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY CRIMED MAJOR INCIDENTS

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

There are specific challenges where a state agency is suspected and later investigated as being complicit in the incident, such as the Grenfell Tower fire. Major incidents where the state is implied to have failed are likely to be subject to long inquests which are likely to affect their ability to move on until they feel confident that the truth has been established.³¹

VCS organisations providing support to those affected by these types of incidents need to be prepared to raise grievances of those affected, as well as facilitating them to do so if they are able, to help ensure their voice is heard.³²

It is important that the Government commission an independent inquiry when a state agency is implied in criminal investigations around major incidents. The Independent Public Advocate should also play a key part in ensuring that justice is accessible for those affected by major incidents where there are implications of state failings.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

The Government have commissioned independent inquiries for previous major incidents where a state agency is suspected and later investigated as being complicit. For example, the Hillsborough disaster and Grenfell Tower Fire.

In 2018 the Government consulted on introducing an Independent Public Advocate post to act for bereaved families after a public disaster and support them at inquests and inquiries. This new post may have a role in the aftermath of a major incident where there may have been a crime related to the acts of a state agency, for example, Hillsborough disaster. However the Government has yet to respond to the consultation and establish the role.

Victim Support's position

Independent services must always be available for families bereaved by, and survivors of, 'crimed' major incidents
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It is vital that victims of these incidents feel they are able to access independent support, including legal advice and representation, and trust the investigative processes that follow a contentious state related death.

Victims and survivors should be able to access support services that are independent of statutory agencies when a major incident may be linked to failings by a state agency. A YouGov poll found that 71% of adults said it was important for victims to receive help and support from a service that is independent of the police. Independent services increase the likelihood of accessing support, as those affected are less likely to engage with services that they believe are statutory.

The Government should publish its response to the Independent Public Advocate consultation
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There needs to be clarity on the future of government plans for the Independent Public Advocate before future disasters occur where bereaved families require support at inquiries and inquests.

³¹ <https://www.inquest.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=47e60cf4-cc23-477b-9ca0-c960eb826d24>

³² Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

People affected by traumatic major incidents may require trauma first aid in the immediate aftermath of the event. This can be valuable in helping them in the immediate aftermath when they would not yet be eligible for mental health services and before the emergence of mental health issues such as PTSD. This intervention is not available to everyone.

There are issues in accessing psychological therapies for those who develop mental health issues as a result of the incident. Waiting lists for children and adult services can be very long and application processes for some NHS Outreach and Screen services are complicated.

In addition, concerns have been raised about the quality and consistency of support provided.³³ There can be challenges in maintaining consistency of consultants when further treatment is required once the recipient is discharged from hospital.

As a result of challenges with NHS psychological therapies, some survivors of traumatic major incidents have turned to private therapy, where this was an option, or decided not to access this help at all.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

The Government accepted recommendations in The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health (2017) to improve outcomes in mental health by 2020/21. The NHS Long Term Plan (2019) contains further commitments to improve mental health services. This includes providing an additional 380,000 adults per year with access to adult psychological therapies by 2023/24. The plan also includes the introduction of new services to support patients going through a mental health crisis.³⁴

Referral pathways into NHS trauma services, CAMHS, IAPTS have been explored since the terror attacks of 2017 collaboratively between the Ministry of Justice, Victims of Terrorism Unit (Home Office) and NHS England.

Victim Support's position

The Government should drive improvements to mental health services, including CAMHS, for those affected by traumatic major incidents
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NHS England and NHS Wales should ensure that those who have been directly affected by a traumatic major incident are not adversely affected by long waiting times to receive psychological therapies. An effort should be made to provide them with emotional support to help them cope in the interim, in line with NICE guidelines. In addition, NHS services should also ensure consistent and equal access to treatment of PTSD to guarantee that no one is adversely affected by where they live, either with regard to waiting times or availability.

It is vital that work undertaken collaboratively between the government departments and NHS England and NHS Wales to create referral pathways into NHS trauma services, CAMHS, IAPTS following traumatic major incidents is sustained.

³³ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

³⁴ NHS Long Term Plan (2019) <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-plan/>

PREPAREDNESS OF VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

Overview of the issue and how it affects victims and survivors

Many concerns have been raised about a different level of support or service provided to survivors of 'crimed' major incidents depending on where you live and the scale of the incident. Services also need to be linked into the wider response and be culturally appropriate.³⁵

For 'crimed' incidents, resilience is needed within the victim services system to respond effectively to multiple and major events such as terror attacks. Specialist training for staff and volunteers is also extremely important in ensuring those affected are appropriately and effectively supported. Support provision needs to be available long-term.

To reflect the geographical spread of people affected by terrorist attacks, services should be facilitated to work across PCC boundaries. Steps have been taken by the Association of PCCs to try to improve cooperation between PCCs for any future terrorist attacks.

It is vital that those providing support to people affected by major incidents have access to employee assistance programmes and clinical supervision.

Overview of Government plans or Parliamentary activity

The Ministry of Justice amended wording in their grant agreements with PCCs in April 2018 to make it clear that victim services should provide support to victims of terror attacks.

The Government have worked with the Association of PCCs to create a good practice guide for responding to terror attacks and explored agreements to enable support across police force area boundaries.

In January 2020 the government announced that it would review the support available to victims of terrorism.³⁶

Victim Support's position

Victim support services across England and Wales should be able to provide interventions that meet the variety of specific needs of those affected by major incidents

Major incidents, such as terror attacks, impact people in many ways. It is important that support services are able to provide a wide range of interventions that are culturally appropriate and accessible to all. They also should make preparations for major incidents and specialist training and supervision for frontline staff.

*For more information please contact the Victim Support Policy and Public Affairs Team:
policyteam@victimsupport.org.uk*

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³⁵ Plastow, J. (2018) *Mind the Gap; A Review of the Voluntary Sector Response to the Grenfell Tragedy*. London: Muslim Aid

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tougher-sentencing-and-monitoring-in-government-overhaul-of-terrorism-response>