

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Community Relations, Human Rights and Victims Division
Block E5.1, Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast BT4 3SR

Tel: 028 9052 3167 Fax: 028 9052 8275

Dear Colleague

18 January 2001

CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY ON VICTIMS

It was agreed at the last meeting of the Interdepartmental Working Group that this Unit would develop a draft cross-departmental strategy as soon as possible. This document is attached for your consideration.

The draft sets a framework for the strategy but I realise it needs further work and I would therefore be grateful for any comments, particularly where gaps are felt to exist. Section 11 of the draft strategy outlines next steps but in summary I need comments to be with me by **Friday 26 January** to allow the draft to go to the Junior Ministers in advance of our next meeting on 15 February.

If there are any aspects of the draft you wish to discuss in advance of that, please contact me or Graham Thompson (x28353). Thanks for your help and I look forward to receiving your comments.

Yours sincerely

Fergus Devitt

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CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY ON VICTIMS - DISCUSSION PAPER

BACKGROUND

The draft Programme for Government contains the following action:

“By April 2001, put in place a cross-departmental strategy for ensuring that the needs of victims are met through effective, high quality help and services. This will be facilitated by an inter-departmental working group on victims”.

The Inter-departmental Working Group (IWG) has already been established and is chaired by the OFMDFM Ministers with responsibility for victims.

The cross-departmental strategy will be heavily influenced by the terms of reference for the IWG and will therefore refer to the raising of awareness of victims' issues, an encouragement of a sympathetic and understanding approach, the delivery of targeted services, a co-ordinated approach across service providers (within and outside of government), an examination of funding issues and a review of relevant procedures and policies.

RELEVANT FACTORS

A cross-departmental strategy will need to take into account a number of factors including:

- What the strategy aims to achieve;
- The timescale involved;
- The part to be played by individual Departments (including OFMDFM) including the possibility of a commitment to Departmental action plans;
- The co-ordination mechanisms to be put in place (including with the NIO and other service providers);
- How victims' needs will be determined and reviewed;
- Finance and statement of resources (including OFMDFM, NIO, Peace II and Departmental contributions);
- Research requirements;
- Monitoring/evaluation arrangements;

- What flexibility will be required within the document; and
- What specific measurements or targets should be included.

ACTION AREAS

From meetings and discussions with victims' groups, it is clear that there are several action areas that will ideally be contained in any strategy, many of which relate to issues surrounding culture, attitude and delivery of services.. The main action areas are:

- Respect, support and recognition by society;
- Access to services and filling gaps in service provision;
- Information ie what is available and where is it available;
- Income/employment
- Security within society ie a feeling of safety;
- Proper provision of victim support services;
- Providers of services ensuring that victims are not seen to blame for the situation in which they find themselves; and
- Education and dealing with the needs of young people.

There are other pressing issues for victims such as compensation, criminal justice matters and the perpetrator taking responsibility for their actions which may be more difficult, or not appropriate, to address in a strategy document, particularly given the nature of what has, and has not, been devolved..

The strategy will additionally need to refer to how individual victims as well as victims groups will benefit from any actions or initiatives as well as being as being flexible enough to cope with changes in constitutional circumstances.

FORMAT

There are a number of possible formats for the strategy but one that may be appropriate would initially set out the context and then go on to describe the strategic approach to be taken over the timeframe chosen eg three to five years. It might then be possible to have specific targets for the first year of that period which would be reviewed and amended as appropriate so that new targets could be inserted in the second year, thus allowing a "rolling" process set within an overall strategic framework.

In order to demonstrate that all Departments are dealing with this issue seriously, it might be appropriate to signal that reference to the needs of victims will be contained in organisations own planning documents. This will hopefully feed into the cross-departmental strategy so that specific targets can be inserted if appropriate.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUP ON VICTIMS

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

- To determine a strategic, policy-led approach to victims' issues across the NI Departments.
- To raise awareness of victims' issues throughout the NI Departments and their Agencies and to encourage a sympathetic and understanding approach when dealing with the concerns of victims.
- To examine what victims' needs are and how these can best be met through targeted services which are supportive of, and sensitive to, the needs of victims.
- To develop a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services to victims through close liaison with other service providers.
- To examine funding issues so that expenditure across NI Departments is co-ordinated in a manner which best meets victims' needs.
- To ensure that, **subject to broader legislative and policy requirements including the equality provision of the Agreement, and the Government of Northern Ireland Act (1998), relevant policies and practices are periodically reviewed to guarantee that victims receive the highest quality of service at all times.**

From : John Johnston

Date : 29 December 2000

To : Margaret Boyle

CROSS DEPARTMENTAL STRATEGY ON VICTIMS – DISCUSSION PAPER

1. Thanks for letting me see this and the suggested draft terms of reference. The paper certainly is very scanty and needs a bit more beefing up.

Terms of reference

2. I am not sure why the terms of reference for the strategy are not just simply those set out at bullet point 1 of paragraph 2.2.2 of the Programme for Government, perhaps with some supporting steers. All the bullet points in the current draft Terms of Reference cannot be of equal value. Indeed there is no end date for doing anything! Perhaps the wording could be amended to something like –

“By April 2001 to put in place a cross-departmental strategy for ensuring the needs of victims are met through effective, high quality help and services.

In setting the policies and practices, the group should determine a strategic customer focused approach to victims issues across the NI departments based on identifying victims needs and how these might be met through services that are –

- targeted and supportive of and sensitive to victims’ needs;
- co-ordinated in delivery and funding in close liaison with other service providers to best meet victims needs; *(nb perhaps a need to clarify what service suppliers means - statutory, voluntary and or private sector (or a combination)?)*
- periodically reviewed, subject to broader legislative and policy requirements including the equality provision of the Agreement and the Government of Northern Ireland Act, to guarantee that victims receive the highest quality of service at all times.”

1. The Terms of reference need to be incorporated in the overall paper either in the body or a specific annex.
2. Turning to the short paper itself –

Background

3. The fourth paragraph states the obvious, but may be politically necessary?

Relevant Factors

4. I am not sure what is meant in line one – is it *the development of the strategy will need to take into account...a number of factors*, or is it *the strategy will need to reflect ...a number of factors*?
5. Bullet point 2 – this loses me –is it the timescale for the development of the strategy or the “life” of the strategy?
6. Bullet point 3 – I am not sure that I would want to see another set of standalone Departmental action plans specifically for victims – like ours any actions should be subsumed within existing plans (as part of the next round of NTSN plans?)
7. Bullet point 4 – I am not sure how you put co-ordination mechanisms in place in a strategy- these need to be developed at service delivery level. You can state principles and put progress reporting mechanisms in place, but perhaps the latter is covered in bullet point 8?
8. Bullet point 7 – suggest adding “ any further” in front of “research requirements” – if there is only 3 months or so left, there won’t be any additional research done that is not already in hand.
9. Bullet point 9 – just don’t understand this at all.

Action Areas

10. Bullet points 1 and 7 - Not sure what the difference is- one may be society and the other service deliverer providers attitudes. Both are culture issues. A service delivery strategy can only tackle the latter, through training etc.;
11. Bullet points 2 and 3 could be reversed logically;
12. Bullet point 6 – delete “proper” – I would not think anyone would want “improper support services” – perhaps it is “effective” or “adequate” support services that is meant

Other pressing issues

13. If this document is to get out in 3 months, the group need to focus on the key issues, prioritising what will be tackled over the 3 to five years in a pragmatic way, rather than trying to address every issue.

Individual victims v victims group benefits

14. This needs clarified or dropped all together. Surely the reason for doing anything is to help people individually. Groups are just a self help means to an end?

Format

15. This is rather rambly and inconclusive – it seems to try to catch up anything not yet mentioned. Why mention other potential formats for the document then not say what they are? Again I am not sure that we want a totally standalone policy/strategy which creates another set of plans, reports etc. Can the whole thing not be weaved into existing structures but be easily lifted out, if need be, to show progress?

16. Happy to discuss.

Focus needs to be given commitment

*To ensure lead
to the.*

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- Finance and statement of resources (including OFMDFM, NIO, Peace II and Departmental contributions);
- Research requirements; *- need on victim needs*
- Monitoring/evaluation arrangements;

Need to be clear

NISRA has been contacted to help establish a baseline.

- What flexibility will be required within the document; and
- What specific measurements or targets should be included. —

*could this be
specific action
plan which
include targets.*

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