

Strategy for Victims and Survivors

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Introduction

1. This Strategy for Victims and Survivors is designed to provide the outline of a coherent and comprehensive approach for taking forward work on a range of issues relating to victims and survivors. It is recognised that the issues are numerous, complex and give rise to very deeply held emotions and feelings. This makes it of the utmost importance that the strategy itself is concise and easily understood. Also, because for many people fear and trauma remain a present day reality it is also crucial that any strategy recognises the importance of victims and survivors feeling that they are safe in a changing environment.
2. This approach is 'victim and survivor centred' and is built around:
 - (a) the Commission for Victims and Survivors¹;
 - (b) a Victims and Survivors Forum; and
 - (c) a new Victims and Survivors Service.
3. The strategy recognises:
 - the pain and suffering which has occurred and that this will not be forgotten;
 - the long-term impact of violence on victims and survivors;
 - that victims and survivors are individuals and therefore there is no single approach which will suit everyone;
 - the need for victims and survivors to be invited to play a part in building a more peaceful future, but that as people who have suffered most they should feel safe, should be treated with dignity and should move at their own pace;

¹ Referred to hereafter as the Commission

- that funding arrangements for work with individual victims and survivors, and victims and survivors groups need to be placed on a more secure footing that is responsive to identified and changing needs;
- the valuable work carried out by victims and survivors groups over the years;
- that the work carried out by victims and survivors groups, Trauma Advisory Panels and other organisations will be built upon;
- that many people have dealt with their individual pain or loss through the support of family, friends, church and faith communities and do not feel that they require additional support.

Individual needs

4. What is important varies greatly from individual to individual. Many face the consequences of trauma and / or physical disability. There remains a demand for support services including counselling, befriending and a variety of therapies while for many people simply getting information about available services is a problem.
5. Some victims and survivors wish to find out more about the circumstances surrounding the death of a relative. Many suffer financial hardship, social isolation, exclusion and a variety of other problems arising from loss or injury. There are those who wish to have their individual stories heard, documented, archived, shared and appropriately acknowledged. Public acknowledgement including memorials and other forms of public recognition of loss is also important to many people.

Broader community needs and reconciliation

6. Alongside and related to the personal needs of individuals are the needs of local communities which have a collective experience of suffering.

There are also broader issues to do with building for the future in the context of peace, truth, justice and reconciliation. It must be recognised that reconciliation and steps towards building a better future take on a particular dimension in the context of work with those people who have suffered loss or injury.

7. Some local communities have suffered substantially more than others. Many of those who have lost friends or relatives or who have suffered as a result of injury, either to themselves or another, feel a strong sense of grievance towards the individual or organisation they consider responsible. Therefore it is important to build confidence and security within local communities so that they can move at their own pace as regards building for the future.
8. Supporting the need for truth, acknowledgement and meeting the needs of those injured and bereaved will contribute to building confidence and cementing peace in areas disproportionately affected by conflict and in the wider community.

Overall aims and principles

9. Policy in relation to victims and survivors has previously suffered from not having clear direction and measurable outcomes. Other difficulties encountered relate to the short term nature of funding which has hindered planning by voluntary groups involved in this area of work. In order to assess its effectiveness this strategy sets out a clear timeframe with a clear statement of overall aims and principles linked to stable funding arrangements.

Aims

10. The overall aims of the strategy are to:

- put in place comprehensive arrangements to ensure that the voice of victims and survivors is represented and acted upon at a governmental and policy level;
- secure through the provision of an appropriate range of support services and other initiatives a measurable improvement in the wellbeing of victims and survivors;
- assist victims and survivors, where this is consistent with their wishes and wellbeing, to play a central role, as part of wider society in addressing the legacy of the past; and
- assist victims and survivors to contribute to building a shared and better future.

Principles

11. The overarching principles of the strategy are to :-

- be victim and survivor centred and driven;
- address the practical and other needs of victims and survivors in a coordinated manner;
- ensure that services for victims and survivors are provided in response to assessed need, adhere to published standards and are designed to have clear outcomes;
- establish arrangements to ensure, through the work of the Commission and the Victims and Survivors Forum that the practical and other needs of victims and survivors are kept under review and that services are responsive to changing needs;
- promote collaborative working between statutory and voluntary organisations, community groups and others, where practicable;

- reduce the level of trauma for victims and survivors;
- build the trust and confidence of victims and survivors and assist them, where this is consistent with their wishes and wellbeing, to participate on a sustained basis in the building of a shared and better future;
- ensure that while recognising their particular needs, victims and survivors work does not become isolated and that people should not be defined solely as a victim or survivor but as people with the same needs and aspirations as the wider population;
- ensure, so far as is practicable, that victims and survivors work is integrated with and can influence other government policies and initiatives;
- ensure that victims and survivors play an active role in the development of ways to deal with the past and other transitional mechanisms affecting their journey towards recovery and well being;
- assist victims and survivors, where this is consistent with their wishes and wellbeing, to participate as part of wider society in addressing the legacy of the past.

A new approach for victims and survivors work

12. Action is required in three key areas:-

- (a) a comprehensive needs assessment to inform the development of services (linked to the provision of long-term funding and support services for victims/survivors);
- (b) dealing with the 'past'; and

(c) building for the future.

There is a high level of interrelationship between all three areas and work needs to be taken forward in a coordinated manner which recognises this interrelationship.

Arrangements to address the three key areas of victims and survivors work

13. Work will be taken forward by:-

- the Commission;
- the Victims and Survivors Forum; and
- a new Victims and Survivors Service which will be responsible for providing support for individuals and groups and which will distribute funding in response to assessed and agreed need.

14. The roles and relationship between the Commission, the Victims and Survivors Forum and the new Victims and Survivors Service are summarised in the **Annex** to this paper. In broad terms the Government will set the policy for victims and survivors and will ultimately be responsible and accountable for the resourcing of the sector; the Commission will be the primary source of advice to government on victims and survivors issues. It will be responsible for the strategic assessment of need; it will ensure that the correct structures are in place to meet these needs and identify any gaps in provision. The Victims and Survivors Service will be the delivery vehicle and will provide resources and commission services to meet the needs of victims. The Commission will oversee and provide guidance to the Forum in relation to the three key areas of victims and survivors work highlighted at paragraph 12 above. This is intended to ensure that the Forum retains a clear focus and is productive. The Forum will act as an advisory body to the Commission.

15. The assessment of need to be carried out by the Commission in liaison with the Forum will be used by the new Victims and Survivors Service² to allocate resources and commission services including from victims and survivors groups and others. Once established the Victims and Survivors Service will also be available to provide practical support to individual victims and survivors and will itself provide a source of information on need.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors

16. The Commission is designed to³:

- promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;
- keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;
- keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for victims and survivors by the new Victims and Survivors Service and services provided by statutory, community and voluntary groups;
- advise the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any body or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
- take reasonable steps to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are sought concerning the exercise of the Commission's functions;
- make arrangements for a Victims and Survivors Forum.

17. The Commission has a number of powers, including conducting or commissioning research and issuing guidance on best practice in

² Described at paragraphs 24-29 below.

³ The functions of the Commission relate to those set out in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

relation to any matter concerning the interests of victims and survivors. The Commission will also be there to provide information about available services to victims and survivors. The Commission will act in accordance with a work programme agreed with the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Victims and Survivors Forum

18. It is essential that the views of victims and survivors are based at the very heart of the agenda. In order to achieve this the Commission is required by the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to make arrangements for a forum for consultation and discussion for victims and survivors.
19. The Forum should:
 - be representative of victims and survivors;
 - include representation from statutory, voluntary and community organisations involved in work with victims and survivors.
20. The Victims and Survivors Forum may discuss any matter connected with victims and survivors, but should act in accordance with principles laid down by the Commission as to the conduct of its business. To be productive and to enable it to contribute to the Commission's work programme the Commission should agree with the Forum the issues to be taken forward in relation to the three key areas of work set out in paragraph 12 above.
21. It will be the responsibility of the Commission to ensure that the Forum contributes to its programme and to obtain the agreement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the work to be carried out. This will include obtaining the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's agreement to the costs of the work programme.

22. The Forum will work as a group in supporting the Commission in developing a comprehensive assessment of needs of victims and survivors. The recommendations of the Commissioners in relation to the comprehensive needs assessment will be key in identifying a basis for funding to be distributed through the Victims and Survivors Service.
23. The Forum will also have the role of examining the issues surrounding the definition of “victim” and to make recommendations.

Victims and Survivors Service

24. There will be a new Victims and Survivors Service established by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This Service will be the focal point for funding work with victims and survivors and will replace a number of existing funding schemes. These include the core funding and development grant schemes currently operated on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister by the Community Relations Council. These schemes provide resources to victims and survivors groups and other voluntary organisations working with victims and survivors. The new Service will also have the role of providing funding to individual victims and survivors.
25. Organisations seeking funding will be required to relate their proposed activities to a comprehensive needs assessment⁴ and have regard to the need to comply with agreed standards and outcome measures for services.
26. In considering any applications by victims and survivors groups the Victims and Survivors Service will be able to consider applications from single identity groups. This is in keeping with the principle that some

⁴Referred to under paragraphs 30 – 31 below

victims and survivors only feel comfortable with people from within their own community.

27. The Victims and Survivors Service will use appropriately qualified staff to:

- process applications against a clearly published set of criteria;
- speak directly with individual victims and survivors and groups to identify with them what needs they have;
- direct individual victims and survivors and victims and survivors groups towards other services and to relevant grants;
- keep relevant information that will be useful for the Commission and OFMDFM in needs analysis.

28. The new Victims and Survivors Service will be independent of government with regard to its day to day operations. It will allocate funding in a transparent and open way in accordance with clear and published criteria. As the new Service will replace the schemes currently funded by OFMDFM in relation to the provision of support to individual victims and survivors and groups involved in this area of work it is anticipated that the administration costs will be offset by resources currently deployed on administration under existing arrangements.

29. OFMDFM will consult with the Victims Commission, the Victims and Survivors Forum and relevant Departments on plans for the Victims and Survivors Service.

Comprehensive needs assessment

30. A comprehensive needs assessment is essential in order that the Commission can effectively comment upon the effectiveness of services for victims and survivors and represent the needs of victims and

survivors to government in a coherent fashion. The Commission will issue guidance to the Forum on how it intends to develop a comprehensive needs assessment and how the Forum will contribute to this assessment. Responsibility to bring forward a needs assessment rests with the Commission. The Commission may also wish to initiate further research work in relation to specific areas of need such as the impact of the conflict on children and young people, elderly people and issues specific to men and women and the injured.

31. The comprehensive needs assessment will be used to create a sound basis for funding the work of victims and survivors groups and other non-statutory organisations providing services in this area. It is recognised that there has been considerable competition, duplication of effort and financial instability within the sector which is substantially due to lack of clarity about what is actually needed to support victims and survivors. As already noted, the process of needs assessment will be carried out with the assistance of the Forum and this needs assessment will be used to underpin the work of the new Victims and Survivors Service.
33. A key element of the work of the Commission and the Forum will be to ensure that victims and survivors and the services provided for them do not become isolated, but are increasingly integrated with services provided for the population as a whole generally. The Commission will be expected to make representations to government regarding the wider range of services for the general population and their responsiveness to the needs of victims and survivors. In this regard it will be particularly important that the Commission monitors closely the impact of the implementation of the Bamford review on victims and survivors.
34. While the new Victims and Survivors Service will be dedicated to meeting the needs of victims and survivors over the period of this strategy, the intention is that the needs of victims and survivors will increasingly be met

as part of the general provision of services. Subsequently over time there will be a reduction on the need for some services specifically provided for victims and survivors.

Standards for services

35. Services must be of the highest standard and draw on existing, local, national and international best practice in particular those services involving counselling and befriending. Some work has already been carried out by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to such standards and the Commission will be responsible for issuing good practice guidance in relation to standards for services. We will build on this work and identify further areas of co-operation.

Outcomes

36. Measures of effectiveness are essential to the delivery of services. In the context of victims and survivors work the establishment of outcome measures is difficult, but is nevertheless essential. In line with one of the overall aims of the strategy to secure a measureable improvement in the wellbeing of victims and survivors, the Commission will be responsible for providing good practice guidance on the establishment of outcome measures. This is particularly important in relation to the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. The Victims and Survivors Service will have clear objectives and measured outcomes.

The 'Past'

37. The Commission (in liaison with the Forum) will be tasked with developing advice to government and contribute to the broader consideration of ways to deal with the 'past' as an essential element of transition. Key issues will include recommendations on truth recovery and justice, story-telling, acknowledgement, memorials, inquiries and the

work on historic cases. It is important for specific objectives to be achievable within defined timescales.

Building for the future

38. It is important that the work of the Forum, while recognising the suffering of the past, does not become locked in the past. This aspect of the work of the Forum is primarily concerned with the contribution which victims and survivors can make in playing a part in building a shared and better future.
39. How the experience of those who have suffered can help individuals and local communities move forward is recognised as important to any healing process. In addressing current needs and examining the past the Forum must be aware that how it deals with those matters will have important implications for the future. An important area to be addressed is likely to be the inter-generational impact of the troubles on children and young people and the need to promote cross-community work with children and young people. In this regard the Commission should establish links to the work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.
40. It is recognised that an over emphasis on reconciliation between communities in the context of victims and survivors work can be misplaced. The view supported in this strategy is that reconciliation is a key component of work with victims and survivors, but must take account of the broad range of feelings and sensitivities which exist. Everyone must be allowed to move at his or her own pace and should not be made to feel excluded.

Period of strategy

41. This strategy is designed to last for ten years. The initial stages have commenced with the establishment of the Commission and the Victims and Survivors Forum. In parallel with these developments OFMDFM will make arrangements for the establishment of a Victims and Survivors Service. The Service will address the needs of individuals and groups, commission services and administer funding in response to the comprehensive assessment of need arising from the work of the Commission and Forum. The strategy will be periodically reviewed.

Building the strategy

42. It is recognised that it is essential that there is no shortfall in funding for victims and survivors groups in the interim period until the new arrangements are in place. Accordingly the funding arrangements currently in place in relation to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, the core funding and development grant schemes for victims and survivors groups operated on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will continue with the following changes.

- OFMDFM will work closely with all relevant groups and agencies, the Commission and the Forum to manage the transition to the new Victims and Survivors Service; this will include addressing any needs emerging from the work of the Commission in advance of the comprehensive needs assessment.

43. The timeline for building the strategy is set out below. Thereafter targets will be set in line with future programme(s) of work agreed between the Commission and the First and deputy First Minister.

Outline timetable for developments in building a strategic approach to victims and survivors work

Commission for Victims and Survivors established	June 2008
Victims and Survivors Forum established by Commission	September 2009
Victims and Survivors Service initiates commissioning of services in response to comprehensive needs assessment	As soon as assessment is received and considered
Victims and Survivors Service is established to provide support for groups and individual victims and survivors	June 2010
Continuation of existing core funding scheme operated on behalf of OFMDFM by the Community Relations Council coupled with an enhanced development grant scheme to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – provide greater support for befriending services and carers; – enable victims and survivors groups to make the transition to new funding arrangements and to participate in the Victims and Survivors Forum. – address issue of respite care. 	April 2009 – March 2010 This will continue as the Service is established to ensure no gap in provision to either groups or individuals
Arrangements made by OFMDFM for the development of a service to support GPs in dealing with trauma and identification of additional areas of cooperation	July 2008 – March 2010

Equality Statement

44. In line with commitments in its approved Equality Scheme, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is committed to fully adhering to the principles of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 when reviewing and developing policy.

Assessment of impacts

45. Equality is an important issue for this department. We are determined to address all forms of inequality, and ensure that fairness, inclusion and equality of opportunity is built into all our policies.

Background to Section 75

46. Under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 there is a legal requirement for Public Authorities to consider the possible impact of all their decisions on 9 equality categories and also how to promote equality of opportunity and good relations in all areas of our work.

47. We must consider how to promote equality of opportunity in relation to the following nine equality categories:

- religious belief
- sexual orientation
- political opinion
- gender
- racial group
- disability (those with a disability and those without)
- age
- dependency (those with dependants and those without)
- marital status.

48. We also must consider how to promote good relations in respect of 3 groups:

- religious belief
- political opinion
- racial group.

Background to Screening

49. The screening process is used to identify policies or decisions which may have a significant impact on or consequence for, people including those in any of the 9 equality categories. If, during the screening process it is decided that a policy or decision has significant issues relating to equality, it is then necessary to carry out a more detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

Consideration of mitigating measures or alternative policies

50. The department has completed its Equality Screening process. The screening that has been carried out has been based on a limited set of available data and is not definitive enough to draw conclusions on adverse impacts. We will therefore conduct a full Equality Impact Assessment on this Strategy.

Feedback

51. Please let us know your views on any aspect of this strategy which may have an impact upon any of the 9 equality categories to identify any differential impacts and / or promote equality of opportunity and good relations. We will conduct a separate consultation on the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment.