



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Victims' and Survivors' Service and
Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

23 February 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Tom Elliott (Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Allan Bresland
Mr William Humphrey
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Colin Jack) Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ms Kellie Service)

The Chairperson (Mr Elliott):

I welcome Colin Jack and Kellie Service. We have invited you regarding the comprehensive needs assessment and the victims' and survivors' service. You may give us an update briefing and be available to answer some questions. The session will be recorded by Hansard.

Mr Colin Jack (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

Thank you for the opportunity to bring the Committee up to date on the progress on the victims' and survivors' service. As you mentioned, I will also touch briefly on the comprehensive needs assessment, which is being completed by the Commission for Victims and Survivors and on which the commissioners briefed you last week in some detail. The Department's overall aim is to establish a victims' and survivors' service that will provide support for all victims in a co-ordinated and efficient manner. The service that is established will listen and be responsive to the needs of victims and will work closely with the commission and with the victims and survivors forum.

We are committed to delivering the highest level of support and services to victims, and we are planning that the service will begin operating, with individual assessments of victims' needs being carried out from September 2011. We are working with the sector, not only to reach that deadline but to get the design of the service right.

Considerable progress has been made to date with the design of the service, and I will outline that briefly. I am happy to expand and take questions on that later. We have adopted a project-management approach to taking forward the design of the service. At the start of last year, we drafted a project initiation document, which outlined the structure for moving the project forward and detailed all of the strands of work that needed to be taken forward in establishing the service. That way forward was approved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in April. I am the senior responsible owner for the project, and a project manager leads the project team. We have in place a project plan, which is updated regularly as we make progress.

In May 2010, a steering group was established to provide advice and guidance to us on the design and implementation of the victims' and survivors' service, and that steering group has met monthly. It involves people from the sector and includes a representative from the commission.

We have convened several working groups to support us with work to design the various elements of the service. To date, we have focussed on individual assessment; management information systems; standards that we expect to be applied in delivery of the service; and service delivery. Those working groups are made up of people who have the relevant skills and experience to contribute to the objectives of each group. Some members of the working groups are from the victims' sector.

I will outline the key outcomes from those working groups so far. First, I will deal with individual assessment. The process for conducting individual assessment and an initial assessment form have been agreed. The skills and qualifications required from those who should conduct assessments have been agreed. The client journey through the service has been agreed by the steering group. The model for individual assessment details the skills requirements of the assessors and the number of assessors required, with recommendations on how and where individuals can be assessed.

We have also agreed the basis of the database of victims and survivors for the service. We are in the process of agreeing the outcome indicators for the service moving forward. Using the categories of need that have been agreed with the commission, initial research has been carried out to identify which service and practice standards should be used by the service. That work is ongoing. The model for service delivery has been drafted. Initial work has begun on producing a service delivery vision paper and on identifying the initial steps that are required to achieve that vision.

The steering group has agreed a communications strategy for communicating on progress on the development of the service. A section of the OFMDFM website is dedicated to progress on the service, and is updated monthly. There is a next steps bulletin, which was circulated to all individual victims and survivors on the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund database and to victims' groups. That was issued in December to inform people of progress. We are also planning communications events with the sector in coming months.

The latest draft of the business case on the organisational model for the service has been resubmitted to economists and the steering group. That business case will now progress through the necessary approvals processes in OFMDFM. There is a requirement for approval by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and ministerial approval as well.

In addition to our preparations for the service in 2011, we have also made significant changes to our existing funding schemes for individual victims and victims' groups. That is intended to move them towards a needs-based approach in preparation for establishment of the service. Therefore, although development of the service itself is ongoing, it will continue to deliver support and funding to victims and survivors. In the draft Budget, £50 million has been allocated

to meet the needs of victims and survivors over the next four years. That is, broadly, a continuation of the level of funding, on average, that there has been during the current CSR period. That funding has been £36 million over the three-year period.

At the beginning of the current financial year, Ministers announced a two-year funding programme for groups during the period leading up to the establishment of the victims' and survivors' service. That involves the merger of the previous core and development grant funding schemes to form a new strategic support fund. The first run of applications for that has taken place. A separate development grant scheme will continue to run in parallel with the strategic support fund for groups that do not require help with staffing costs.

The introduction of the strategic support fund has involved groups being required to make a more comprehensive application for their core running and service delivery costs and to draw up agreed work plans that focus on the agreed categories of need that have been identified in the work so far to develop the comprehensive needs assessment. Groups were given the choice to apply for 18-month or 12-month contracts under the strategic support fund. Awards have been made to 16 groups for 18-month contracts. The applications from the groups that have applied for 12-month funding have recently been considered and are pending the groups being notified of the outcome.

In addition, over £1.6 million has been provided to groups under the development grant scheme this year. As well as that, in the current financial year the Department has provided £3.5 million to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund to help provide grant assistance to individual victims and survivors. That is under a revised scheme with a single application process involving means testing in some of the schemes. So we have already made significant progress towards a needs-based approach in the current year, both in relation to the groups and individual victims and survivors.

Since April 2008, around £10 million has gone to individual victims and survivors through the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund by way of grant assistance. What I have said so far is an update on how we are moving towards the development of the service.

I am conscious that the Commission for Victims and Survivors covered the comprehensive needs assessment with the Committee last week. The commission submitted its first interim

report from the comprehensive needs assessment to the Department for consideration in October 2010. The aim of that document is to provide sufficient evidence and information to allow the commission to advise the Department of the services required to meet the current needs of victims and survivors. That reports the first phase of the comprehensive needs assessment. We are expecting a second report next month from the commission, and the final stage of the comprehensive needs assessment in September of this year. Resources have been made available to the commission to enable it to complete that important piece of work, and, for several months now, it has been up to its full projected staffing level, which has helped it considerably to bring the work forward.

The first interim report provides the Department with useful background and current status information on the needs of victims and survivors. We have encouraged the commission to supplement that with desk research by engaging with the sector and individual victims and survivors through primary research. That will inform the new service as to how we can meet the needs of victims and survivors in the future.

We still need more statistical analysis of the numbers of individuals likely to seek access to services from the victims' and survivors' service, and we expect that to come out of phase two of the comprehensive needs assessment that the commission is working on at the moment. We have asked the commission to share findings with us as they emerge, rather than waiting for the full report to be completed. That completes my opening remarks. I hope the Committee will find that update helpful, and I am happy to take any questions.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for that, Colin and Kellie. How long has it been since the strategy that identified the requirement for a victims' service came out?

Mr Jack:

The consultation document on the victims' and survivors' service was published in August 2009. The concept of the service was first mentioned in the draft strategy for victims and survivors, which was published for consultation in August 2008.

The Chairperson:

So it has been talked about since 2008, and, as I recall, that was when the £36 million for victims

and survivors was announced, which, obviously, was significantly required. We still have not got to the stage of being close to the establishment of a victims' service.

Mr Jack:

We are close to the establishment of a victims' service in that we have significant work going forward: we have individual assessment, the process has been designed and the first individuals have gone through that individual assessment process. We have a commitment from Ministers to complete that in September. However, we have significantly changed all the existing funding streams. The process for people to apply for financial assistance has been completely changed in the current year, so that each individual has an assessment of their financial needs.

The funding of groups has changed considerably, because, in the past, groups would have submitted applications and their funding would have been extended on a year-on-year basis. In the past year, all the groups have been required to submit fresh applications, which set out much more clearly what they are doing to meet the individual needs of victims and survivors.

The process of creating the service is an evolutionary one; it is not a big bang approach. We have made considerable progress towards getting the service fully operational.

The Chairperson:

You have admitted that funding arrangements and opportunities have changed significantly since 2008, or even 2009. I appreciate that you cannot create the service with a big-bang approach. However, it is over three and a half years since it was first mooted in the strategy document, which seems to be an awfully long time, and I am sure that it does to those in the sector as well, and still there is no end result. If you are saying that the funding mechanisms and the streaming have changed significantly, are you still convinced that there is an absolute need for the service?

Mr Jack:

The service adds a means of assessing people's needs individually. So, in a sense, what is provided to meet the needs of victims and survivors is financial assistance, which, up to now, has been provided by the memorial fund. There is also a broader range of support, such as therapies, befriending, respite trips and so on, which have been provided partly by the victims and survivors' groups in the voluntary sector and partly by the health and social care sector.

The difference with the service is that individuals are assessed to match the provision to their needs. The provision has been made throughout, but the issue has been that there has not been a process to give people a package that is tailored to their needs. They have gone directly to the groups and to the memorial fund —

The Chairperson:

Does that mean that it must work in conjunction with the comprehensive needs assessment, which is part of the process as well?

Mr Jack:

The comprehensive needs assessment is very important in helping us to design a service and make sure that the provisions that are available, whether through the groups or elsewhere, match the individual needs that will be identified through the needs assessment. The likelihood is that that will not have been the case in the past.

The Chairperson:

Just to be clear, does that mean that groups, for example, will only get that type of funding once they make the case for the individuals who require it?

Mr Jack:

Again, it is going to be an evolutionary approach, because we will only know for sure what the aggregate needs of individual victims and survivors are when they have been through an individual assessment. However, the work being done on the comprehensive needs assessment is attempting to come up with an overall picture of those aggregate needs. Through running the strategic support fund, where the groups have put in fresh applications through the Community Relations Council (CRC), there has been an attempt to match what the groups offer more closely to the emerging evidence from the comprehensive needs assessment.

The Chairperson:

Is there any idea, even among the victims and survivors organisations, including the commission and your Department's victims unit, of how many victims and survivors have physical or mental injuries?

Mr Jack:

The picture is very complex, and it has taken a lot of work by the commission and others to arrive at that picture. One concrete figure that we have is that there are 11,000 victims and survivors on the database that is held by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. So, there are 11,000 victims and survivors who have received support from the fund at various stages.

Other estimates are that 40,000 people have been affected by the conflict. The work that the commission does is aimed at giving us a better picture of that.

The Chairperson:

Even with all the work that has gone on, are there no clear details as to how many people have physical injuries?

Ms Kellie Service (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

There are no concrete details at present. However, that is what we hope the comprehensive needs assessment will achieve. That is the aim of the Department in asking the commission to take forward that research on our behalf. We hope that the second interim report on that will provide more information on actual numbers relating to specific needs, and that will include physical health needs as well. We hope to get that information.

Mrs D Kelly:

Thank you for the briefing. It would be useful to have a written copy of Colin's briefing. I want to ask about a couple of points. I asked a written Assembly question, which was responded to about four weeks ago. The answer said that the victims' service would be up and running in 2012. What has happened in the last four weeks to bring that forward to December 2011?

Mr Jack:

I referred to September, I think. We have not changed from the timescale published in the update that was issued to victims and survivors in December. That said that individual assessments will be introduced during 2011, with interaction with victims' groups in 2012. When I say interaction with victims' groups, that will be on a comprehensive basis. There will be some interaction with the groups in 2011, to ensure that the people going through individual assessment towards the end of the year are able to access the services that are recommended for them through that.

Mrs D Kelly:

I am sorry Chairman; I must be very tired. A victims' service will now be established in September 2011, and not in 2012?

Mr Jack:

The process of individual assessment will begin in 2011.

Ms Service:

A phased approach is being taken to the introduction of the service. That has been agreed for the past year. We cannot introduce the service, with all bells and whistles, on day one. The process that we are working towards is that individual assessments will commence first, and that is in September 2011. A fully operational service will begin in April 2012. That has been our line.

Mrs D Kelly:

So an incremental approach is to be taken?

Mr Jack:

An evolutionary approach.

The Chairperson:

We need revolution here, instead of evolution.

Mrs D Kelly:

We do, three years on. Victims who are going to have their needs assessed will expect that the service will be there to deliver for them. Will the infrastructure be there to deliver for them or will they have to wait until next year? We are raising expectations and dashing hopes.

Mr Jack:

That is why there are several strands to the work of designing the service. I particularly highlight the strand on the standards. It is important that we ensure that the quality of support that victims and survivors are getting from the service is what they need and that it is delivered professionally. We also have the service delivery strand and the individual assessment methodology worked out.

Mrs D Kelly:

How is the work of organisations that are delivering for victims' service quality-assured? I ask particularly in the light of last night's 'Spotlight' programme. What is the audit trail, and how do you ensure that the outcomes for the individual victims and survivors are fit for purpose?

Mr Jack:

I mentioned the strategic support fund, and the fact that the groups have had to reapply for their funding on the basis of moving towards the service. They have had to outline in detail work programmes that are mapped to the categories of need that have been identified through the work on the comprehensive needs assessment.

We are also doing some work on encouraging victims' groups, via Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and Peace III funding, to enhance their capacity, in both governance and standards. The standards working group is also part of the development of the service. The standards that we require will be specified and set out. It is likely that we will need to do capacity building to bring some groups up to those standards. That is part of why it is an evolutionary process. It is more than possible that not all groups would currently be able to deliver care to the standards that will be required by the service.

Mrs D Kelly:

My question was really about auditing, evaluation and monitoring of the organisations. What we are most interested in is getting the service to the individual user. To paraphrase, Colin, what you have said is that it will be a case of organisations ticking boxes to meet your set criteria. I have heard a little bit about building monitoring capacity, but I want to know about independent evaluation and making sure that the money goes to those for whom it is intended.

Mr Jack:

I am aware of last night's programme. I cannot go into individual cases or financial issues that are subject to investigation. However, such cases have highlighted to us and Ministers the need for a comprehensive review of standards of governance across the victims sector. The Community Relations Council undertook work of that nature around 18 months ago. We are undertaking further work to check the systems of OFMDFM, the Community Relations Council and victims' groups to ensure that any lessons to be learned from cases that have come up are learned and that improvements are made as soon as issues are identified.

Mrs D Kelly:

Maybe we could hear a wee bit more about that when it is all gathered together. That would enable us to have robust oversight.

The Chairperson:

Yes. I am sure that we will get another briefing.

Mr Humphrey:

Thanks very much for your presentation, Colin. I have a couple of questions, which are along similar lines to Mrs Kelly's questions. We need clarity on how groups can secure funding. From listening to the contributions today, that lack of clarity may be one of the reasons why people do not come forward. Do they go to the OFMDFM victims unit, the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, the Community Relations Council or the Victims' Commission? There must be absolute clarity on that, and I do not think that there is.

Before funding is given, responsibility has to lie with the Department and the Victims' Commission. I put this point to the commissioners last week. Organisations have to be seen to have the skill set and governance capacity in place before they are awarded money. They have to be fit for purpose and have the management structure, administrative skills and the financial management. That should ensure that they deliver community capacity, that there is coherence within the community, that confidence is built, that competence is improved and, importantly, that a legacy is left and that the money that is delivered from government makes a difference and improves people's lives. That is at the core of all of this, and it is what we all want to see. I would like clarity on that. I am not asking you to give it today, but those aspects are germane to what is going on.

I am always very reluctant to support one-year funding packages. I do not believe that those make a difference, because one year is just not enough. We are elected representatives serving a four-year term. We all know how quickly time goes by and how much you would have wanted to do. It is no reflection on people's work, but it takes time —

The Chairperson:

It does not give any opportunity for planning.

Mr Humphrey:

None at all. Someone will look for other employment six months in if there is no job security or assurance in respect of his or her current employment. I am pleased to hear that three-year funding schemes have been talked about, as opposed to year-on-year rolling funding, which does not actually allow quality people to be recruited and retained. We need to retain people. You will not be able to recruit or, more specifically, retain people with a one-year funding package. Therefore, I am pleased about that. Let me appeal again, however: let us get some clarity on how people obtain funding, so that people out there know how to get it, and also on the definition of a group.

Mr Jack:

On clarity, the strategy, the final version of which was published in published in November 2009, sets out the different roles, moving forward. Because we are in the transitional period between old mechanisms and new ones, I appreciate that there is a need to keep explaining to victims and victims' groups what the arrangements are. At present, the main source of individual financial support for victims and survivors is the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. With regard to victims' groups, the organisation that they need to apply to is the Community Relations Council. The current opportunity for funding has recently passed. Applications have been considered. Significant funding is, potentially, also available under the Peace III programme for groups. They have benefitted significantly from the Peace III programme.

In the future, individuals can go directly to groups for support through befriending, therapies, and various types of, I suppose, social support under the service. The service is intended to be a single front door to support for individual victims and survivors. It will match people up to support; whether that is financial support or other support that groups can offer. Therefore, individuals who go for funding should know that if they go to the victims' and survivors' service, a comprehensive approach to their needs will be provided.

The Chairperson:

It has been said regularly at the Committee, by others and me, that a one-stop shop facility is needed that is a signpost, so that every victim knows exactly where he or she should go for that information.

Mr Jack:

That is a good very way to characterise it: a one-stop shop. There can, sometimes, be confusion in the minds of the public and, perhaps, the media about what the commission's role is. Its role is to hold government and, in due course, the service to account and to champion victims' needs.

Mr Humphrey:

That is a very good point. I return to Kellie's point that there are, potentially, 40,000 victims in Northern Ireland. That needs to be explained again and again as more people come forward. There is a dynamic to that. New groups will be established all the time. Groups will replace groups. That is why we need to keep doing that. I would very much appreciate, and it would be a common-sense approach, if we were to work towards having a one-stop shop. I use that term because, in the Ulster-Scots world, such a thing has been established and it has made matters much simpler than they were in the past. Various central bodies, be they government or community, are in one building. That is the way forward. It would, certainly, deliver greater service continuity to the community.

Mr Spratt:

Thanks, Colin and Kellie, for the presentation. I want to return to individual victims. I have questioned you on that issue previously. I have still not been convinced by what I have heard from commissioners or anybody else who has come to the Committee about individuals who have no association whatsoever with any group, who may well have been innocent passers-by who got caught up in atrocities, and who do not want to be involved with any group. A moment ago, Colin, you said that an individual could go to a group for assessment, and so on.

There are thousands of people out there who do not want to go to groups or be associated with groups in any form whatsoever. I think there is still a failure to reach out to those people individually. I have been consistently saying that in this Committee.

The one-stop shop approach is nice, but there needs to be action to get the message out to those people. I do not know exactly how you do it, but, from listening to commissioners and others, I am not convinced that that is happening. They are talking about surveys and all that airy-fairy stuff, saying that they have figures and that they are doing this, that and the other, but very little of the money has got to the people who really need it.

The other issue was in relation to the accountability of some of those groups. I do not want to ask you questions on this, but I know that there are a number of criminal investigations ongoing at the moment, and thank goodness there are. That needs to happen, but I wonder how robust the accountability measures put in place in relation to the CRC are. Is that going to be a continual process now? It says to me that there is a major problem out there, which everybody skirted around for a while. It is now quite obvious that there is a serious problem, and the individuals who thought that they were getting something from some of those groups should surely now realise that they were actually being used all along. Sadly, I think that that will be the story in a number of other areas as well.

It is about getting the money — the £50 million that we are talking about over the next four-year period — and making sure that it gets to the coalface and the people who need to get it. There are some excellent examples already of money that has been well spent on victims. I know that it is not everybody's cup of tea, but we can look at the money that has been spent on victims related to policing and the way in which that service has been run. If you take all of the connotations of policing out of it, that system is a very good example of how victims can be well looked after. It is a model that could be used right across the board, run by the service or whatever, to provide for the real need.

There are people now in pain. I know people who suffered horrendous injuries — just the ordinary Joe Public — and now, 25 years later, they are in serious pain and difficulties as they get into their older age, but there is no place for them to go at this moment in time, and it is very difficult to direct them. We need to see that well established, and I hope that is where we are getting to.

The Chairperson raised a valid issue about the delay from 2008 until now. Was some of that issue not related to the delay of the commissioners in doing what they were supposed to do? Now they are trying to blame everything on the Department but, in fact, they did not do their jobs and dragged their heels for some time. That is part of the problem. There is no point in putting all of the blame on the Department now when that is the convenient political thing for some individuals to do. I think that the Department has done its best. Let us put some of the blame where it lies: on the delay that was caused by the commissioners in bringing strategies and other things forward. That was no fault of the Department; let us face it.

Mr Jack:

I will go back to the start of those comments in relation to a place for people to go who are not associated with any group. That is one of the things that the service is envisaged as being. It is envisaged as giving people a way into support who may not have had support in the past. We envisage that, once people are signposted by the service — which will be independent of any group — the support will be provided by a range of different providers and will be the support that is regarded as best meeting the needs of individuals. That is very much how we see it. We are planning to introduce it from September. That will not mean that every victim can be assessed on day one because there is, potentially, a very large number of people to be assessed. We still need to work out details about prioritisation, and so on.

Mr Spratt:

Who will the individuals be assessed by? What about the individuals who do not want to be included in groups? You remember what I said about that.

Ms Service:

It is anticipated that the assessors will work for the service. They will be very much independent.

Mr Jack:

That is what we see the service as doing. We take seriously the issues of governance and accountability in groups of victims and survivors. A number of issues have come to our attention in relation to groups which have highlighted to the Department the need, not just to pursue the individual cases and refer them to the appropriate authorities where necessary, but to ensure that in all our systems, and in those that the intermediary funding bodies have, we put right anything we need to at our end, if we need to do that as well. We are committed to doing that.

The Chairperson:

Have members any other points or comments?

Mr Jack:

I will not respond specifically to points on the commission at this stage.

Mr Spratt:

You will accept that it is an issue. There was a delay.

Mr Jack:

There has been some delay in our expectations of the comprehensive needs assessment.

The Chairperson:

Can I ask you about that point? Earlier, you talked about the report in October of last year by the Commission for Victims and Survivors regarding the comprehensive needs assessment. You said that you were expecting another report. Is there any action that needs to be taken between those times?

Mr Jack:

We are expecting two further reports from the commission: one next month in March, and another in September. The commission's initial project plan for the comprehensive needs assessment had envisaged that we would have had our first report in March of last year.

The Chairperson:

My point is whether you have to take any action on that first report, for example.

Mr Jack:

We are taking that report into account in the design of the service. Ministers have given the commission an initial response to their report, but there is a need to provide a more detailed formal response to it. The work on the comprehensive needs assessment is a picture that is being built up. We are depending on the ongoing work to add to our picture, and to the work that is going into designing the service. Responding to each report as it comes in is not particularly what we need to do.

Every time the commission has a further piece of work that is coming out of the comprehensive needs assessment, they need to feed it into the process and into the steering group so that we can be with the different strands of work and so that the comprehensive needs assessment can be informing the work as it develops.

Mr Bresland:

I register an interest because I am registered with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund. However, I am not a member of any other group.

My question is: why are some groups are so successful at getting money? I know some groups out there, and the same 20 or 25 people — I call them the chosen few — get the money. Are checks kept on that?

Mr Jack:

Again, we are trying to tighten up and to more closely scrutinise the work done by all the groups. A significant amount of money has been available for the victims sector from the Exchequer and through EU programmes. I have heard people comment on the activities that groups take forward and the individuals who benefit. That is examined in evaluating work that the groups take forward, and we will seek to learn lessons from that.

Mr Bresland:

Is a check done on who the people on those groups are?

Mr Jack:

I understand that the Community Relations Council and other funding bodies collect information about the activities of, and participants in, groups as part of their routine verification of the work of groups. Those issues are examined as part of the audit process. The work done to establish the individual needs assessment and the service is intended to ensure that individuals are referred according to need. Our system is not such that whoever comes to the groups gets support, because the groups will, in future, be much more specifically funded for services to individuals with identified needs, so we are moving away from a situation in which that type of thing can happen.

Mr Bresland:

OK. Thank you.

The Chairperson:

Colin and Kellie, thanks very much for updating the Committee. I am sure that we will hear from you again.

Mr Jack:

We are happy to update the Committee at any time.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much.