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## Victim Support Wales

4/11/05

### ***Response to the Welsh Assembly consultation on the restructuring of the Police Constabulary in Wales***

Victim Support is the national charity for victims and witnesses. Last year, the five Victim Support charities in Wales supported more than 60,000 victims and 20,000 witnesses. We not only provide practical and emotional support to victims of crime and to witnesses attending court, but we also seek to ensure that the rights of those victims and witnesses are protected in all aspects of criminal justice and social policy.

Victim Support Wales is the umbrella organisation for Victim Support charities in Wales. Victim Support Wales seeks to develop additional capacity to meet the needs of victims and witnesses throughout Wales.

Victim Support in Wales consists of five Areas: Dyfed, Gwent, North Wales, Powys and South Wales. Each is an independent charity and member of the National Association of Victim Support Schemes (NAVSS). Areas are responsible for the delivery of services to victims and witnesses in their area.

Together we promote the development of strong and safe communities, reducing the fear of crime and encouraging confidence in the criminal justice system in Wales. We achieve this by promoting the rights of victims and witnesses and by co-ordinating the delivery of high quality support services to victims and witnesses throughout Wales.

Five years ago, the National Association of Victims Support Schemes, of which the charities in Wales are part, undertook a re-structuring programme, which saw over 500 charities being reduced to 47 larger 'Area' based charities. In Wales over twenty local Victim Support charities, which were roughly based on County Boroughs, were amalgamated into 5 area charities that are co-terminus with their local criminal justice areas. With the sole exception of Dyfed and Powys, that remained separate due to the challenges of managing such a geographically large area. Victim Support's area structure now mirrors that of the current Police Service area structure. One of the main drivers for this reorganisation was the need to have a structure that matched the statutory services that we work so closely with. This has reduced duplication and ensured improved and more effective communication between our organisations.

Any restructuring of the Police Service may result in our organisation having to consider restructuring the charities again, which would certainly have a significant financial and organisational cost. Currently we would be hard pressed to meet those costs.

Many Victim Support charities, receive significant Local Authority funding which they depend on to supplement the Home Office grant to deliver our current service. We run the risk of losing this additional funding if we were to

re-structure into a larger charity and were then seen by Local Authorities as not providing 'local services'.

There could be some advantages for Victim Support if there were to be a move to a Wales-wide Police Service. Currently there is wide variation in the way each Police Service in Wales refers victims to Victim Support. Some Police Services refer the majority of victim of crime to Victim Support having a policy of requiring victims to 'opt out' of passing on their contact details to Victim Support. In other areas an 'opt in' policy is used and the victim must specifically request help from Victim Support before their details are passed on. In practice this can mean a difference of thousands of victims gaining access to Victim Support's services based on which Police Authority they live in. A single Police Service for Wales would have the obvious advantage of reducing these anomalies and ensuring a greater degree of consistency of service for Victims and Witnesses across Wales.

We believe that any consideration of Police restructuring in Wales must consider the following points

- All victims and witnesses in Wales should have access to consistent, services from the Police, which are timely and appropriate to their needs and which recognises any local, social and economic issues, which may affect their recovery from the effects of crime.
- There must be the same accountability for local issues even if those charged with the management of a larger structure, are removed both personally and geographically from the people they serve.

There are both advantages and disadvantages for creation of a single Welsh Police Service. However whatever changes are finally agreed upon, what we do know is that they will have a significant knock on effect upon the voluntary sector and particularly for organisations who work closely with the Police.

Jon Trew  
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