

Victim/Survivor Advisory Board to the Victims Taskforce Update November 2023

Introduction

1. At its previous meeting the Victims Taskforce (“VTF”) endorsed the initiation of a Victim/ Survivor Advisory Board (“VSAB”) whose purpose is to ensure that the voices of victims/survivors are at the heart of the work of the VTF. The VSAB provides a platform for victim/survivors’ feedback to be shared and discussed, and for these experiences to inform the VTF’s work in delivering practical, system-wide improvements. This paper provides an update from the VSAB since the previous VTF meeting.

Background

2. Membership of the VSAB was agreed at a previous VTF meeting and includes:

- Adult victims/survivors with lived experience of crime and abuse (‘lived experience representatives’)
- Victim Support Organisation (“VSO”) representatives, including those who will support members with lived experience
- Victims’ representatives to the Victims Taskforce would also be invited to attend

3. As previously stated, it is the intention is to identify up to four further lived experience representatives through specialist organisations working with groups who are multiply-disadvantaged or marginalised by the justice system. This is to ensure that the VSAB hears views and perspectives from as wide a range of lived experience representatives as possible. It was recognised in a previous paper to the VTF that this approach may take time to set up and this has been discussed by the VSAB with an agreed approach outlined below.

4. It was further agreed that although the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs and the Lord Advocate would not be members of the Advisory Board, they would actively support its work and would attend regularly as requested by the Advisory Board, as this would provide an opportunity for them to hear directly from victims and survivors of crime.

Progress Update

5. Set-up of the VSAB has progressed significantly since the last VTF meeting in June. There have been several meetings to progress practical arrangements in addition to a meeting of the full VSAB in July with the Cabinet Secretary in attendance.

6. In relation to practical arrangements, the role of those with lived experience has been further clarified. It was intended that members of the VSAB would be

representing other victims/ survivors and would seek views prior to/ and following VSAB meetings. It was envisaged that members of the VSAB with lived experience would be drawn from existing victim/ survivor reference groups. Work has begun to strengthen this in the documentation and induction of victim/survivor representatives to ensure that expectations are clear.

7. In addition, the approach to ensuring the VSAB is informed by a diverse range of victims and survivors has been discussed at length and it has been agreed that a series of themed meetings will be held to focus on key groups. It is envisaged that this will enrich feedback on issues faced by a wide range of victims/survivors and will provide opportunities to widen the membership of the VSAB.

8. At the July VSAB meeting, the Cabinet Secretary heard from representatives with lived experience about a range of issues including:

- Repeat court adjournments causing distress and challenging issues around arranging unexpected child-care for complainers and witnesses (e.g. Who can arrange this? Who will pay for it? Is there a list of accredited childcare providers if people can't arrange it themselves?);
- Lack of trauma-sensitive approaches to victims of sexual crime, particularly by the NHS (acknowledged this was out-with the remit of the VTF);
- Concerns from victims and complainers around data/ evidence they had provided and lack of clarity of ownership and data handling post-trial;
- Sentencing and lack of reasons being provided despite sentencing guidelines being in place;
- SG and First Word provided an update on the project being undertaken to improve communications from criminal justice agencies with victims and witnesses and this was well received by the VSAB.

9. As part of the forward planning work for the VSAB, it has been agreed that themed meetings will take place focussing on specific subjects including:

- Review of the Victims/ Survivors Advisory Board (Feb 2024)
- Survivors of sexual crime (March 2024) – small group session with invited representatives
- BAME victims/ survivors (date tbc)
- LGBTQ+ victims/ survivors (date tbc)
- Victims/ survivors with disabilities (date tbc)
- Victims/ survivors in rural or remote areas (date tbc)

Issues tracker

10. This is the main way that the VSAB captures issues victims experience with the criminal justice system and feeds those issues back to the relevant agencies. This process was agreed by the previous VTF and is summarised in Annex A. It is expected that each taskforce meeting will dedicate time to feeding back on the issues raised so that victims' experiences can be improved.

11. The issues tracker has been reworked to make it more action-focussed and encourage accountability. An up-to-date version of the tracker, presented in paper 3,

has been tested with criminal justice agencies, who have included the actions they have taken or intend to take in response to the issues raised.

Discussion Questions

10. Given the content of this paper and the annexes, there are a number of questions that VTF members could usefully discuss and feedback to the VSAB:

- Are there particular issues on the tracker that members of the Victims Taskforce can work together to address and how will this be progressed?
- Are there any issues that the Victims Taskforce would like to add to the tracker for the VSAB to consider and provide lived experience input on?
- How can the Victims Taskforce work to ensure future policy and its delivery is informed by lived experience?

**Victim/Survivor Advisory Board
November 2023**

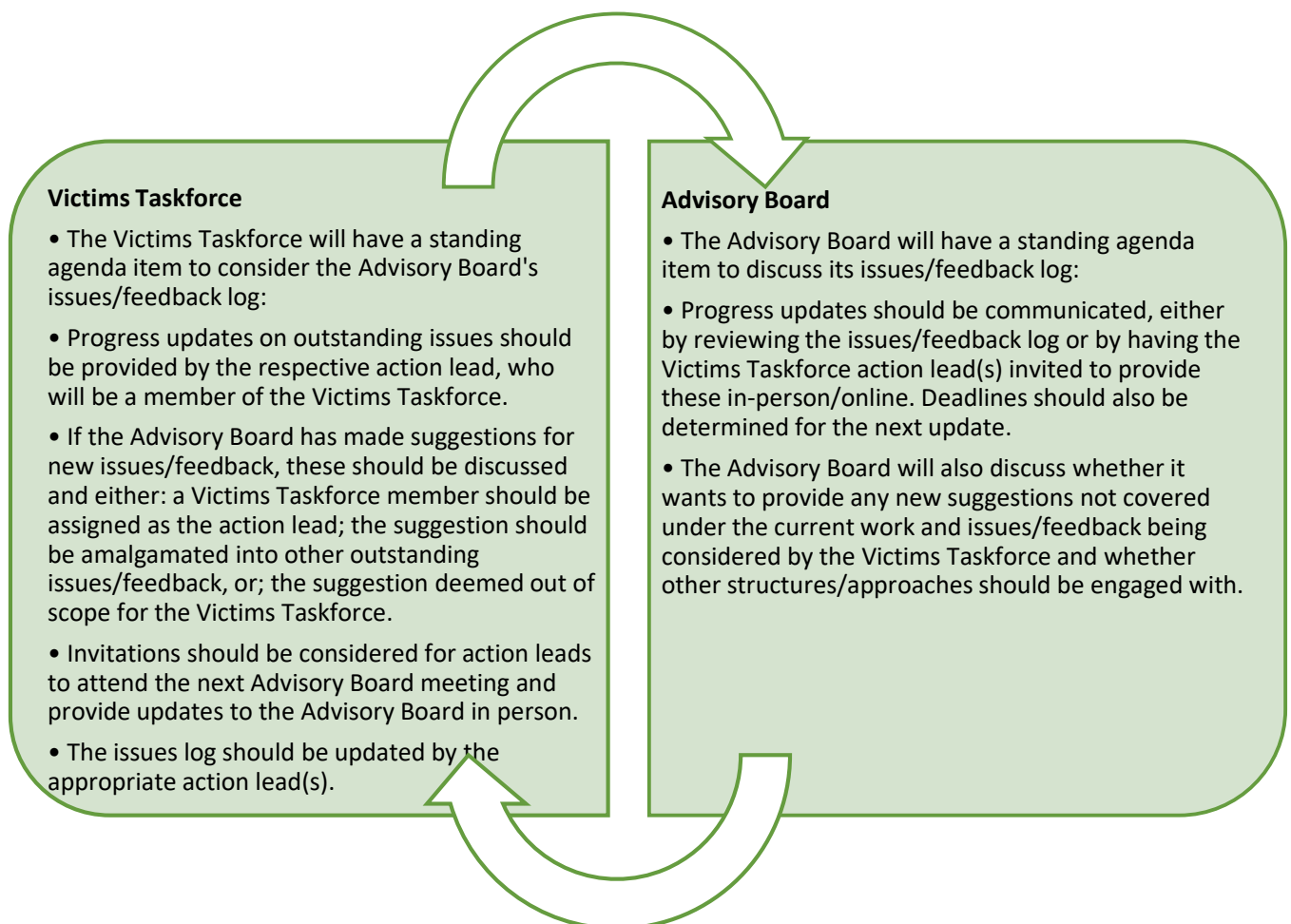
ANNEX A - Feedback Mechanism – Issues Tracker Background and Process

A 'feedback' agenda item is to be included at each Victims Taskforce and Advisory Board meeting. For example, each Victims Taskforce meeting will begin with an update provided from the previous Advisory Board meeting, with Victims Taskforce members invited to take responsibility for investigating issues raised.

Victims Taskforce members are invited to report back on the changes they were taking forward as a result of feedback from victim/survivors. This information is then fed back at the following Advisory Board meeting, with Victims Taskforce members potentially invited to attend Advisory Board meetings to provide updates on actions which they are leading on.

An issues/feedback log is in place which contains information on: the particular topic or theme under discussion; feedback from the Advisory Board; a Victims Taskforce action lead(s); actions being undertaken, and; progress made in a RAG (Red Amber Green) format. This log is to be a standing item on both the Advisory Board and Victims Taskforce agendas.

A diagram summarising the proposed feedback process is provided below:



ANNEX B

Victims Taskforce Advisory Board

Consent Form

Taking Part: Please tick Yes or No	Yes	No
I have had the Advisory Board's Terms of Reference shared with me and explained to me.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the Advisory Board.		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw my involvement at any time by using the contact details of the VSO staff member for my respective organisation. I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.		
I understand that my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the Advisory Board.		
I understand that stories or quotes provided may be quoted anonymously in publications, reports, web pages, and other other Scottish Government/Victims Taskforce outputs unless I have specified for these not to be used or specified I wish for them to be provided without anonymity.		

Please choose one of the following two options:

1) **I would like** my real name to be used in any publications, reports, web pages, and other Scottish Government (please note that this is not always possible).

2) **I would not like** my real name to be used in any publications, reports, web pages, and other VSS outputs.

Please sign below to show that you have understood the above and are happy for the Scottish Government to use your data as specified:

_____	_____	_____
Name of representative [printed]	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of VSO member [printed]	Signature	Date