Justice Committee

Post-legislative scrutiny of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012

Written submission from Victim Support Scotland

1. Victim Support Scotland (VSS) is pleased to respond to the scrutiny of the Police and Fire Service Reform (Scotland) Act as a follow up to our submission to the Bill in 2012 and as a complement to our on-going contributions to local policing plans.

2. We welcomed the Bill setting out the framework and structures for the new single police service in Scotland. In particular, we were encouraged by the policy objectives set out in the Bill, seeking to protect and improve local services and create more equal access to specialist support, in order to strengthen the connection between services and the community.

3. VSS has an on-going partnership with the police in Scotland. In our previous submission we noted the close partnership being of significant importance in ensuring the interests of victims, witnesses and communities are placed at the heart of police planning and practice. This was most notable in the establishment of robust Scotland-wide referral protocols which allowed all victims of recorded crime to be safely and securely referred to our services.

4. The Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 states in relation to referral to providers of victim support services that “The Chief Constable of the police service must ensure that, as soon as reasonably practicable after a constable identifies a person who is or appears to be a victim in relation to an offence or alleged offence, a constable informs the person that (a) the person may request a referral to providers of victim support services from any competent authority, and (b) the person may contact providers of victim support services directly without referral”. Consistent Scotland-wide awareness of VSS remains of importance for achieving a wider national objective of providing all victims of crime equal access to support and information services in the aftermath of crime. We are in dialogue with Police Scotland on the strategic position of our organisation within the Justice Sector and the resource we have to support and make a lasting difference to victims and witnesses of crime.

5. We therefore urge police and those responsible for local implementation of police plans to proactively engage with our organisation. There is an opportunity for new arrangements to strengthen local engagement and partnership working. We look forward to further discussions and opportunities for VSS to input about our services with officers at a local and national level.

6. Victim Support Scotland will continue to enhance our local and national partnership working with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Victim Support Scotland
21 May 2018