

Social Justice & Regeneration Committee

SJR(2) 04-06 p3

Date: 02 March 2006

Venue: Committee Rooms 3&4, the Assembly Offices.

Title: Improving Support for Victims and Witnesses

1. Gwent have one Witness Care Unit which was integrated with the Police in January and is still on two sites.
2. Gwent was an original Pilot Area
3. We were highly commended in the Justice Awards for 2004 for outstanding achievement for caring for Victims and Witnesses.
4. It has long been recognised that the needs of victims and witnesses should be at the heart of the criminal justice system and the Police and Crown Prosecution Service (under the auspices of the Gwent Criminal Justice Board) aim to further improve the efficiency of processes and provide full support to both victims and witnesses.
5. Criminal justice agencies cannot operate without the contribution of victims and witnesses and should therefore provide excellent customer service to all. Every victim of crime needs to know that these agencies will do everything in their power to ensure that the perpetrator of their crime will be brought to justice and that the victims and witnesses will be supported and protected throughout the criminal justice process.
6. The national 'No Witness, No Justice' (NWNJ) project is a key element of the Government's Criminal Case Management (CCM) Programme which is being rolled out across Gwent. The Programme consists of three strands, which are 1) The Statutory Charging Scheme; 2) No Witness No Justice Project and 3) Effective Trials Management. The CCM Programme is designed to ensure that cases are managed most effectively and efficiently from the charge stage through to their conclusion.
7. As part of the CCM Programme, the No Witness, No Justice Project has been responsible for ensuring that a dedicated Witness Care Unit has been established in Newport.
8. According to a set of fourteen minimum standards of service, victims and witnesses receive consistent standards and support from each criminal justice agency.

9. After a crime is committed, the police assess the needs of a victim or witness when they re first interviewed. The victim or witness then has the continued support of a Witness Care Officer from the point of charge through to outcome. Where a victim or witness has particular needs or concerns - be it in the absence of childcare on a trial day or fear of intimidation by the accused - actions to alleviate this can be assessed in good time.

10. The Witness Care Unit represent a single point of contact for victims and witnesses capable of facilitating access to a range of services. There should be no doubt in the mind of the victim or witness to whom they should turn for assistance. By appointing Witness Care Officers, victims and witnesses will also be kept better informed of progress in their case and have the support, enabling them to concentrate on giving their best evidence in court.

11. It should be noted that the fourteen minimum requirements are extremely demanding, and a full government review was never undertaken to assess the resources needed within the Units to deliver all of these requirements to victims and witnesses. Currently the Unit is delivering as many of the minimum requirement as it can with a view to providing a full service during the coming 12 months. The Unit will also need to be sustainable once government funding comes to an end in 2008.

12. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the services now being offered to victims and witnesses are better than they have ever been, and this is clearly evidenced through the growing proportion of victims and witnesses attending court on the day of trial. Pre-trial visits and special measures applications are also increasing in number and Victim Personal Statements are more regularly being offered. These allow victims to describe the effect a crime has had on their physical, emotional and psychological well-being and can be taken into consideration in the Court as part of the sentencing process.

13. To support the roll-out of No Witness No Justice and the implementation of the Victims Code of Practice and Witness Charter, the UK Government has identified seven victim and witness priorities to increase victim and witness satisfaction and deliver a high quality of service:

Priority 1:	Victims and witnesses must be provided with, or have easy access to, good quality information about: (i) the CJS and other support available from both local and national sources and (ii) their own case
Priority 2:	Victims and witnesses receive consistently high levels of service from CJS staff
Priority 3:	Victims and witnesses who require practical and emotional help are offered relevant services
Priority 4:	Victims views are sought and used throughout the CJS process
Priority 5:	The needs of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses are identified and met and victim and witness intimidation is tackled.

Priority 6:	Improve the experience of victims and witnesses going to Court and
Priority 7:	The needs of victims of domestic violence are met and repeat victimisation is tackled (refer to section 4.1 on page 16)