

**5 November 2013****Agenda Item: 6****REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR  
POLICY, PLANNING AND CORPORATE SERVICES****YOUNG WITNESS SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval for funding from the Community Safety Budget for Victim Support's Young Witness Service in 2013/14 (to a level of £15,000) and 2014/15 (£7,500).

**Information and Advice**

2. Victim Support is the national charity for victims and witnesses of crime and they run a witness service in every criminal court to help people with going to court and giving evidence.
3. In some areas, a special version of the witness service has been established for under-18s, whereby free and confidential support is given to children and young people who are victims or witnesses of crime.
4. Volunteers are checked and trained to help children and young people, as well as their parents and carers, to go to court and give evidence, which can be essential in securing successful court outcomes.
5. Courts can be confusing and intimidating places. The volunteers visit the young people at home beforehand to explain what will happen in court. They also take young people on a visit to court so that they can look around and ask questions. They are also available on the day of the court case when the young person gives evidence and can talk to them about it afterwards.
6. The golden rule for the service is that the volunteers are not allowed to hear or talk about the evidence the young person will give or what happened to them as the court may then say that they have influenced the victim/witness.
7. The importance of these young witness services has recently been underlined by a report from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).
8. The chief executive of the NSPCC has said:

"Dealing with the police and the courts can be a daunting and intimidating experience for an adult, let alone a child. Where is the justice in putting children in a position where they don't know what is going on, they can't understand the questions and are unable to make themselves understood? All this does is risk the child being further traumatised and the guilty walking free."

9. Currently, at national level, just 2% of child witnesses in criminal court cases receive guidance on criminal proceedings from registered advisers, the NSPCC said, and yet at least half said they were unable to understand some of the questions they had been asked.
10. The research showed that more than 50% of child witnesses reported symptoms of stress ahead of a trial, including panic attacks, self-harm and difficulty sleeping.
11. The Young Witness Service statistics for 2012/13 are as follows:

#### 2012-2013 YWS stats

**New** referrals – level of work in county only

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>Broxtowe</b>	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	2	1	0	1	0
<b>Gedling</b>	2	3	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	2	0	0
<b>Rushcliffe</b>	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2
<b>Mansfield</b>	7	0	3	1	7	1	0	4	2	4	7	0
<b>Ashfield</b>	4	4	5	5	4	6	1	0	0	5	0	0
<b>Bassetlaw</b>	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	1	3	2	1	5
<b>Newark &amp; Sherwood</b>	0	2	2	1	4	3	1	1	2	0	1	3

Total number of referrals of young witnesses who live in the county = 139 out of 216 overall  
(77 were City referrals therefore)

Young witnesses supported City and County – total **workload** for the service across the year  
(includes ongoing cases from 2011/12)

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>City</b>	14	6	10	9	9	4	9	14	11	1	2	6
<b>Broxtowe</b>	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1
<b>Gedling</b>	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0
<b>Rushcliffe</b>	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Mansfield</b>	7	4	11	1	3	6	0	2	2	5	3	5
<b>Ashfield</b>	2	8	6	9	14	6	7	0	3	3	3	0
<b>Bassetlaw</b>	1	1	0	8	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
<b>Newark &amp; Sherwood</b>	1	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	2	0	1	1

Total number of young witnesses supported who live in the county = 176

Total number of young witnesses supported who live in the city = 95

On these figures, this would equate to a cost per young witness of £85, from funding sought from the County Council for 2013/14. (£15,000/176)

## **Other Options Considered**

12. Not funding the Young Witness Service would mean the withdrawal of the service in the county area.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

13. The Young Witness Service in Nottinghamshire has a national reputation and provides a high quality level of service, which would be put at risk without funding from the Community Safety Budget and lead to a significantly inferior service compared to the one experienced by young people in the City. Advance indication of the tapering of funding from the County Council (2014/15) will enable Victim Support to forward plan their overall budget

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Crime and Disorder Implications**

Crime and disorder implications are covered in the body of the report.

### **Financial Implications**

The £15,000 contribution in 2013/14 will be tapered to £7,500 in 2014/15.

### **Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults Implications**

In some areas of the country cases collapse because not enough is done to help vulnerable witnesses. It is vital that children and young people are supported fully through the criminal justice process – justice can only be served if they are able to give their best evidence.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) It is recommended that the Young Witness Service receives £15,000 from the Community Safety Budget in 2013/14 and £7,500 in 2014/15.

**Martin Done, Service Director Communications and Marketing  
Policy, Planning and Corporate Services**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:  
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**Constitutional Comments ([LM 16/10/13])**

15. The recommendations in the report are that the Young Witness Service receives £15,000 from the Community Safety Budget and which does not appear to fall within the remit of the Grant Aid Sub Committee or the Grant Aid Strategy. However, the Community Safety Committee has responsibility for community safety matters and may consider the recommendations in the report subject to any financial comments or recommendations.

#### **Financial Comments ([SEM 17/10/13])**

16. The financial implications are set out in the report.

#### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Report of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

#### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- 'All'