

**Victim and Survivors Forum - London - 15 March 2017**

Thank you very much to those who attended the Victim and Survivors' Forum that took place in London on 15 March 2017.

We are grateful to those who attended and took the time to contribute comments and feedback on the current work of the Inquiry. We are currently considering the many comments and suggestions we received on the day. We have already taken action in relation to some of the suggestions received.

The following paragraphs set out what was discussed on the day.

**Agenda**

The meeting agenda is shown below. Following discussion with participants during the event, the agenda was amended on the day and the afternoon session was replaced with table discussions relating to how the Inquiry could improve engagement with victims and survivors.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 11:00 | Welcome and Overview of the day   |
| 11:10 | Session 1: Presentation and table discussion: Update on the work of the Inquiry, including the Review, Inquiry seminars and Public Hearings.<br><br><i>Followed by table discussions about the new programme of work set out in the Internal Review.</i>                                    |
| 12:15 | Lunch   |
| 13:15 | Session 2: Presentation and table discussion: Inquiry seminars in 2017/18 (65 mins)<br><br><i>Followed by table discussions considering the consultation included in the Internal Review (page 13), which invited suggestions for the issues to be covered in Inquiry seminars in 2018.</i> |
| 14:20 | Round up and Summary  |

We have attached the slides presented on the day as an Annex to this report.

### **Introduction and Overview of the day**

Robbie Kent, Deputy Secretary to the Inquiry, opened the event by welcoming all attendees and provided an overview of the programme for the day. As usual for Forum events, support workers were at the event and available to provide advice or support to anyone who wanted it.

Robbie Kent apologised on behalf of the Inquiry for the recent accidental disclosure of the email addresses of Victim and Survivors Forum members.

Concerns were raised by participants about the fact that email addresses continued to circulate and Robbie Kent asked those at the event to not recirculate the email addresses as it was causing concern to some.

### **Session 1: Presentation and table discussion: Update on the work of the Inquiry, including the Review, Inquiry seminars, Public hearings and the Truth Project.**

Inquiry Panel members, Dru Sharpling and Ivor Frank gave a presentation which covered the following:

- The key findings of the Internal Review;
- The seminars into criminal injuries compensation and the civil justice system;
- The Child Migrants public hearing.

Participants made the following comments during the presentation:

- It was suggested that the language and approach to the seminars and hearings was legal and technical, which might discourage some victims and survivors from following these sessions or attending;
- The perspective of victims and survivors at the two seminars was being put forward by solicitors who represent victims and survivors - but it was important to recognise that the views of legal representatives is not the same as the views of victims and survivors. The recent issues papers for the Civil Justice System and Criminal Compensation seminars were written in a formal style which served to create distance for some victims and survivors.

A number of questions were raised in relation to the Truth Project and around how many people the Inquiry expect to come forward. Attendees were concerned that more needed to be done to raise awareness of the Truth Project. There were also

concerns raised about the lack of on-going support for victims and survivors after they had their Truth Project session. It was explained that the Inquiry is not in a position to offer on-going support to victims and survivors - instead, we sought to signpost victims and survivors to support available in their area. Further questions that were raised included:

- What is being done to raise awareness of the Truth Project with children and young people?
- In addition to prisons, will the Truth Project be expanded into mental health services?

The Inquiry acknowledged there is more work to be done to raise awareness of the Truth Project and outlined that a marketing strategy is currently underway to raise awareness.

A series of paid-for articles are appearing in women's weekly and lifestyle magazines from late March until early June. The campaign is designed to introduce the Truth Project and aims to provide information to raise consideration to participate amongst victims and survivors. It also informs the wider public, especially those who know victims and survivors.

A [Facebook page](#) was set up at the beginning of April to communicate the work of the Inquiry and to encourage more people to share their experiences via the Truth Project. Please note that to view the Inquiry's Facebook page you will need to log in.

Forum participants stated that there is some confusion around the restriction order. The Inquiry confirmed that no one can stop people discussing their experiences with family and friends, however we do discourage publicising where we are located and what was said in the individual's Truth Project session.

Questions were also raised about what the Inquiry does with information provided to it. The Inquiry must pass on all allegations of child abuse to the police and will pass on Truth Project participants contact details to the police if they agree for us to do so. However, the Inquiry may have to pass on these details without your agreement to the police or other relevant authorities if there is a child protection concern or someone is at risk of serious harm.

Before lunch, Forum participants stated that they wanted further opportunities to provide suggestions and feedback. One attendee pointed out that a Forum should be open and participative - however, the agenda for the day involved the Inquiry presenting to attendees and that there was not enough time available to hear from participants. It was agreed that the programme for the afternoon should be changed and that it should be dedicated to discussion about how the Inquiry could improve its engagement with victims and survivors.

It was agreed that the Inquiry would circulate the Research presentation which was originally scheduled for the afternoon session. Please see these in the Annex to this report.

### **Session 2 :Table discussions**

The afternoon session began with table discussions about how the Inquiry could improve its engagement with victims and survivors. This was then followed by feedback from each table.

A clear message to the Inquiry was that the general communication to Forum members, in addition to other victims and survivors, needs to be improved. A number of suggestions were made, including:

- The Inquiry's responses to issues raised and/or announcements tend to use technical terminology and is often not addressed appropriately to victim and survivors;
- A newsletter needs to be created that can be circulated to Forum members. This would provide updates on the work of the Inquiry and act as a regular form of communication between the Inquiry and Forum participants. Participants also felt that they would like to be involved in this process;
- It would be helpful to have a single and named point of contact instead of responses from "The Forum Team".

The Inquiry agreed the suggestion to introduce an Inquiry newsletter and is currently in development.

A number of Forum participants asked if an online forum could be created which would enable Forum members to speak to each other outside of Forum events. It was suggested that this would be optional for Forum members to take part in.

It was made clear that Forum members felt that victims and survivors needed to have more involvement with the agenda items and the points for discussion for future Forum events. Other feedback around the Forum events included:

- Forum events need to allow more time for discussions, which would give further opportunity to provide suggestions and feedback;
- Less talking from the front and more talking from participants would be better;
- A wholesale restructure of Forum events should be considered to allow for more open discussion;
- Circulating slides and other information in advance of Forum events would help maximise the time available for discussion on the day.

The below feedback was provided after the table discussions took place:

- The Inquiry feels too far removed from victims and survivors generally, there should be less talk from the Inquiry and more from survivors;
- A voucher scheme should be in place for those who need assistance as counselling services are a definite need for those helping the Inquiry;
- The Inquiry's social media needs to be more active in publicising its work, such as public hearings and seminars;
- Responses from the Inquiry to victims and survivors need to be timely and helpful;
- Should the Inquiry introduce a single point of contact for handling complaints and concerns?

The Inquiry undertook to reflect on all the comments received - and to look at how the event in Manchester the following week should be changed in light of more comments received.

During a Q&A session one Forum participant swore at and was abusive towards another person attending the meeting and left the event. This conduct was a clear breach of the Forum's Conduct Commitment. As a result, the Inquiry has written to the Forum participant and indicated that they will not be invited to attend any of the next three Forum events. They will only be invited to attend future events if the Inquiry is satisfied that they will conduct themselves in accordance with the Conduct Commitment.

### **Thank you**

We are grateful for the input and participation of all members of the Victims and Survivors Forum. Your views are highly valued and help inform our work. We look forward to seeing you again at future Forum events.

This note, together with the slides that were presented on the day, will be published on the Inquiry website.