**Highlights from the PCC’s Advisory Groups 2018**

During 2018 Dame Vera’s Advisory Groups have helped to shape thinking on a wide variety of policy and local policing issues. Highlights from the year are included below.

**Age Advisory Group**

The main two issues the group advised on were the development of Northumbria Police’s Community Engagement Strategy and their approach to tackling hate crime committed against older people.

* **Community Engagement Strategy** – Northumbria Police reviewed the way they engage with local communities and sought advice from the Age Advisory Group about their engagement with older people. Organisations represented on the group work with, and support people with a range of needs such as dementia, mental health and sensory impairment so panel members stressed the importance of ensuring engagement is responsive to those diverse needs.
* **CPS Consultation on crimes against older people –** whilst research shows that older people are less at risk of crime overall than other groups, some crime types such as those linked to physical, mental, or financial abuse – disproportionately affect older people. Group members contributed to the PCCs response and welcomed the CPS policy in its ability to set out clearly the recognition of crimes against older people, the process and considerations to be taken in prosecution and the support available. They also pointed out that CPS should work with key partners such as police forces and those represented on Community Safety Partnerships to increase understanding of crimes against older people – patterns, motivations, dynamics and barriers to reporting.
* **Hate crime** – Northumbria Police undertook an internal review of the effectiveness of their work in tackling hate crime and have developed action plans for the future. Group members welcomed the opportunity to work with Northumbria Police to raise awareness of hate crime targeted at older people and influenced thinking about safe reporting centres. The group were asked to cascade the message to their peers about the emotional and practical support Victims First Northumbria (VFN) and Advocacy Centre North (ACN) can provide to victims of hate crime – both services commissioned by the PCC for victims in Northumbria.

**BME, Faith and Belief Group**

The main issues the BME, Faith and Belief group considered were the recruitment practices of Northumbria Police and their views on how Northumbria Police can improve the way they engage with underrepresented groups.

* **Recruitment of police officers** – Members of the group were provided with an update on BME representation in the workforce and work that was being developed to address the imbalance. Whilst the recent focus has been around the attraction and recruitment of police officers, panel members pointed out the force’s efforts should now extend to the entire employee journey, with a particular focus on retention and progression. The group also influenced the ‘Positive Action’ Action Plan with ideas to contact previous BME applicants and targeted advertisement campaigns which will aid BME attraction, retention and progression.
* **Community Engagement Strategy** – effective community engagement is a priority for this Advisory Group. It is essential to the OPCC that the views of the advisory group are heard to improve engagement and understand the concerns of minority groups, it is also of great importance that the group are provided with insight into what developments and progress are being made within BME and Faith communities to improve engagement with underrepresented groups. Panel Members highlighted the importance of Northumbria Police working in partnership with diverse communities to build confidence in the police to ensure approaches to engagement took into account cultural issues and language barriers. They also stressed the importance of ensuring any photographs used in the strategy should be representative of the communities served by the police.

**Disability Advisory Group**

During 2018 the Disability Advisory main focus was the improvement of Victims First Northumbria website and improving Northumbria Police’s awareness of disability and communication needs.

* **Victim First Northumbria (VFN) website** – the group provided advice and guidance to VFN during the re-design of their website for victims of crime in Northumbria. The group assessed how accessible the site is for members of the disabled community. The group provided valuable feedback in relation to font sizes, colours and software such as RokTalk which allows for visually impaired or blind users to access the information by listening to the content on the page. The group also suggested that an easy read document could be produced to assist members as some of the information on the site would be complicated for some to understand, they then went on to help design this document.
* **Disability Awareness Communication and Accessibility Guide** – members of the panel were instrumental in the development of this guide which focuses on Northumbria Police’s engagement with the disabled community. The guide contributed to the work commissioned by the OPCC on accessibility of Northumbria Police buildings and was published and launched on the force’s website.

**Gender Advisory Group**

During 2018 the Gender Advisory Group provided feedback on two key roles introduced by the PCC to support victims through the criminal justice system and helped to shape consultation responses on a range of gender based issues.

* **Criminal Justice Workers** - with an agreement to feedback information to appropriate specialist services, the group were informed about the implementation of CJS workers and the role they play to ensure anyone needing help/support does not ‘slip through the net’ whilst upskilling police by providing appropriate advice and guidance regarding domestic abuse, pursuing Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Coercive Control Charges.
* **Sexual Violence Complainants Advocate** - SVCA’s will work within the criminal justice system alongside Independent Sexual Violence Advocates and other specialist providers to ensure that all sexual violence complainants are offered an enhanced level of ‘needs focussed’ support. It is very important for the group to be aware of key developments that will provide enhanced support to victims they may be working with.
* **Domestic abuse and forced marriage** - the group contributed to the PCC consultation response about the governments Domestic Abuse Bill and more recently the Home Offices consultation on forced marriage. Views on the Domestic Abuse Bill include the need for any new Domestic Abuse Commissioner to have real powers to be effective and that the Home Office funded ‘whole system approach to domestic abuse’, led by Northumbria and underway across 6 police forces, should be considered by the government as a model for multi-agency working and a holistic response to DA. Key issues raised around the Home Office forced marriage consultation include the need for mandatory reporting to safeguard victims and those at risk of forced marriage and any professional should make a report upon receipt of information which indicates the existence of the risk of forced marriage.

**LGBT Group**

The LGBT Advisory Group focussed on understanding the services available for LGBT victims of domestic abuse and the response from Northumbria Police and they also influenced Northumbria Police’s thinking about methods to best engage with the LGBT communities.

* **Domestic abuse** – the group were keen to understand the approach by Northumbria Police to responding and supporting LGBT victims of domestic abuse. The group are influencing Northumbria Police’s practice around recording in this area as to the best our knowledge only Greater Manchester Police record LGBT incidents separately from other domestic abuse incidents.
* **Engagement with the LGBT community** - the group have met with Northumbria Police LGBT Liaison Officers to understand their role and encourage LGBT communities to engage with them to report a crime or to be connected with specialist support. As part of this engagement work the group has also supported Newcastle University in mapping how the force are engaging and identifying communities that are not routinely being engaged with.

**Victims Advisory Group**

The Victims Advisory Group is hosted by Victims First Northumbria and is made up of service users and non-service users who have been a victim of crime. During 2018 the group have influenced the continued progression of victim services provided by VFN and other specialist services.

* **Enhanced model of victim support** – VFN have introduced an enhanced service to best support the most vulnerable and persistently targeted victims of crime from the point of report right up to the end of a court process. The group have been consulted on the new service from the outset to ensure that the needs of victims are taken in to account in the service re-design. Their main influence has been around the improvement to capturing victim satisfaction.
* **Victim satisfaction** - the group have been part of re-designing the VFN Victims Satisfaction Survey to ensure that the survey is collating the most appropriate information from victims accessing the service to help inform future developments. The group outlined that that in order to improve performance the satisfaction survey could be improved in the following ways:-
  + Make the survey available online and via text message.
  + People don’t answer the phone when the call is made from a withheld number, the advisory group suggested using a mobile phone – this is being explored.
* **Engaging with victims** – the VFN website was refreshed in 2018 to make it more user friendly, and along with the Disability Advisory Group, the Victims Advisory Group directly advised on sections that could be improved to ensure victims accessing the website receive the best possible experience. The group advised that social media should be better used to promote the service and suggested case studies be added to the website. Following their suggestions VFN conducted a daily posting campaign to promote the service and provide information about support available.

**Youth Advisory Group**

Streetwise North East, a charity that supports young victims of crime host a Youth Advisory Group that provide their thoughts and views on a wide range of issues affecting young people.

In 2018 the main issue they talked about was the challenges facing the police in engaging with young people. To help Northumbria Police with this the group produced a short film to gain other young people’s views on policing across Northumbria and gain a wider audience of young people to provide information on policing matters that have a direct impact on them. The majority of young people, 65%, provided positive feedback about their experience with the police and stated that they felt respected and supported by officers. Some of the young people believed that officers should engage with young people more and approach them directly when on patrol.

The group have also provided feedback to Victims First Northumbria about how they can improve their service offer to young victims of crime – this has resulted in new online support sessions being offered by VFN via SKYPE.

As a result of the advisory group young people reported feeling more informed about policing matters and about the Police and Crime Plan and the members of the group have gained development skills such as, confidence in talking to their peers, and effective interviewing skills.