

Ms Suzanne Wylie
Chief Executive
Belfast City Council
Cecil Ward Building
4 - 10 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8BP

23 August 2017

Dear Ms Wylie,

The Commission for Victims and Survivors are implementing a new Communications Strategy and as part of the work plan activity, I attended the Annual Party Conferences in 2016 and throughout 2017. At these events, I was approached by many elected local councillors from across the region who expressed an interest in finding out more about how they can support victims and survivors and also build their knowledge and capacity around the needs of victims and survivors and the broader victims sector. They recommended that I contact you to request time to meet with the elected members.

Therefore, I am writing to you to request an opportunity to meet elected representatives in Belfast City Council and present some information about the work of the Commission for Victims and Survivors and the needs and issues affecting victims and survivors.

The Commission's principle aim is to promote the interests of victims and survivors of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Led by Commissioner Judith Thompson and supported by 11 staff, the Commission is a non-departmental public body and has been in existence since 2008. The Commissioner's statutory duties include convening a Forum of 23 individuals who are broadly representative of victims and survivors of the Troubles.

We would welcome the opportunity to present an overview of our work, to update councillors on our current priorities and to clarify our role in the wider context of the victims and survivors sector in Northern Ireland.

I would be grateful if you could advise me of any available time slots at upcoming Council meetings.

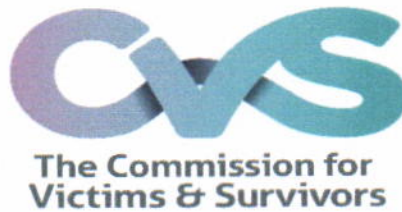
More detailed information about the Commission can be found in the attached briefing paper and also on our website, www.cvsni.org.

Should you wish to find out more information, please do not hesitate to contact Maureen Heaney by email, maureen.heaney@cvsni.org, or by telephone 028 9031 1000.

Yours sincerely,



Tina McCann
Head of Communication and Engagement



The Commission for Victims and Survivors

The role of the Commission was anticipated by the Belfast Agreement in 1998;

“The participants believe that it is essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation. They look forward to the results of the work of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission. It is recognised that victims have a right to remember as well as to contribute to a changed society. The achievement of a peaceful and just society would be the true memorial to the victims of violence.”

The Commission was formulated in legislation in 2006, established by Ministers in 2008 and given a policy framework by the Northern Ireland Executive in 2009. Its principal aim is to promote the interests of victims and survivors. This aim is the central reference point for all of the Commission's work.

The Commission is a Non-departmental Public Body of the Executive Office (formerly OFMDFM) and is unique in its construction and remit. The Commissioner is supported by a team of 12 staff.

The Commissioner

The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors is appointed by the First and deputy First Minister for an initial period of four years. The post of Commissioner is currently held by Judith Thompson.

Statutory Duties

Article 6 of the 2006 Order outlines the duties of the Commissioner as:

- Promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for the victims and survivors by bodies or persons
- Advising the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any body or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors
- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are sought
- Making arrangements for a Forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.

Article 7 outlines the general powers of the Commissioner as:

- To undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for research or educational activities concerning the interests of victims and survivors or the exercise of its functions
- After consultation with such bodies or persons as it thinks fit, issue guidance on best practice in relation to any matter concerning the interests of victims and survivors
- To compile information concerning the interests of victims and survivors
- To provide advice or information on any matter concerning the interests of victims and survivors
- To publish any matter concerning the interests of victims and survivors, including the outcome of any research or activities mentioned above and any advice provided by the Commission
- To make representations or recommendations to anybody or person concerning the interests of victims and survivors

Within the **Strategy for Victims and Survivors** the Commission is identified as being the primary source of advice to government on victims and survivors issues, having responsibility for the strategic assessment of need and for ensuring that the correct structures are in place to meet those needs and identify gaps.

The Commission has been influential in a number of policy and strategy developments, commissioning key pieces of research which have, for example, shaped the design of the new Mental Health Trauma Service, secured measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform on victims and survivors and highlighted the transgenerational impact of conflict.

The Commission's work on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment formed the foundations for the planning and delivery of services by the Victims and Survivors Service and resulted directly in policy which has shaped its structure and work. The Commission has been effective in initiating and supporting a process of performance improvement and quality assurance in relation to the early operation of the Victims and Survivors Service. The Commission continues to work with that service to improve information on the adequacy and effectiveness of the services which are provided to victims and survivors by more than 70 NGO's across Northern Ireland.

The Commission has established and maintains the Victims and Survivors Forum. This Forum provides the Commission and policy makers with a valuable insight into the lived experience of victims and survivors. The Commission and the Forum played a significant role in the development of the proposed measures for dealing with the past within the Stormont House Agreement. They also effectively articulated the disappointment and anger of victims over the failure of politicians to achieve implementation of these measures in the Fresh Start negotiations.

Some of the challenges that the Commission seeks to address over the coming three years are:

- **Supporting victims and survivors and their families to engage in legacy issues.**
Dealing with the past - including truth, justice and acknowledgement - remains an urgent need for the Commission.
- **Improving the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors.**
Our aim is for victims and survivors to enjoy improved mental health and a better quality of life.
- **Caring for victims and survivors and helping those most in need.**
We will work towards victims and survivors having improved financial support, and increased access to benefits and support.
- **Giving children and grandchildren of victims and survivors the best start in life.**
Research has shown that the impact of the Troubles in Northern Ireland affects many generations of families, so we will strive for victims and survivors to have improved family relationships.
- **Improving access to opportunities for learning and development.**
We will continue to ensure that victims and survivors have opportunities for personal and professional development to enhance their self-esteem and self-worth.