

Annual Report 2020-2021



Contents

Introduction	1
From our President, HRH, The Princess Royal	2
Who we are	3
Looking ahead	4
Outcomes 2020-21	5
Achieving our outcomes	6
DELIVER: Supporting victims and witnesses	8
BUILD: Strategic and partnership working	18
CHAMPION: Victim and witness rights	22
DEVELOP: People and services	25
Accounts	30



Introduction

CEO Foreword

The last year has undoubtedly been challenging for many of us. During this pandemic year, Victim Support Scotland has continued to provide consistent services for everyone in the aftermath of crime, as well as progressing our ambitions of advocating for rights and legislation that puts victims, witnesses and families affected by crime at their centre.

We have had to adapt how we deliver our services, and we have all embraced the switch to digital in order to remain connected to victims of crime and each other.

Victim Support Scotland continues to grow as an organisation allowing our services to be fit-for-purpose and able to support everyone impacted by crime. Highlights from this year include:

- ◆ A significant increase in investment to our **Victims' Fund** allowing us to provide **£285,000**, reaching more than **741** people and their families affected by crime. The impact of the fund has been felt by recipients who have reported finding it both lifechanging and lifesaving.
- ◆ Our Support for Families Bereaved by Crime (SFBC) service helped **118** family members who had been affected by murder or culpable homicide.



- ◆ Due to the backlog in court delays, we continually expressed our concerns about the **wellbeing of people affected by crime** in this situation, working closely with our partners in the justice sector to ensure people in this situation were prioritised.
- ◆ Joint collaboration with Police Scotland's Strategy, Innovation and Insight Team. At a national level, we have co-designed contact and referral process solutions that put victims and witnesses at the forefront.
- ◆ We marked our 35th anniversary in August 2020 and received a special message of thanks from our President, HRH Princess Anne, as well as been given recognition in the Scottish Parliament.

Despite the challenges, there has been much innovation within Scotland's justice sector at this time, which we have embraced. I would urge you to read on and find out more about our work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Kate Wallace', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Kate Wallace
Chief Executive Officer

From our President, HRH, The Princess Royal



The last year has been a year like no other. The impact of the pandemic has been felt in all aspects of our lives. I am continually impressed when I hear about the hard work and dedication of Victim Support Scotland volunteers and employees who, throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, have risen to the challenge of continuing to provide services to some of the most vulnerable victims, witnesses and families throughout Scotland.

I thanked colleagues at Victim Support Scotland in August last year as the charity celebrated its 35th Anniversary. As an organisation that started at a grassroots level back in the 1980s, volunteers remain the backbone of Victim Support Scotland to this day.

It has been encouraging to hear about the hard work that colleagues are doing to support victims in new and innovative ways, whether through embracing new technology with video conferencing and webchat, extending the National Helpline opening hours, or supporting those in financial hardship through the Victims' Fund – these are just some of the ways Victim Support Scotland has made a huge difference to the lives of many.

Dealing with the aftermath of crime is hard, during a pandemic or otherwise. The Support for Families Bereaved by Crime service within Victim Support Scotland has been fully operational for over two years now, and provides specialist support in some of the most harrowing of circumstances.

As a society, we are just beginning to understand more about the importance of looking after our mental health. The emotional support that Victim Support Scotland provides is therefore critical for many going through turmoil after a crime.

As President, I am proud of the number of achievements that have been made by Victim Support Scotland over the last year. I look forward to a time when I can visit the organisation again to see first-hand the impact it is having.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Who we are

Victim Support Scotland (VSS) continues to be at the forefront of providing emotional, practical and financial support for anyone affected by crime. What sets us apart from other support organisations is that we are available to everyone after crime, regardless of the type of crime or if you have decided to report to the police or not and regardless of the amount of time that has passed since it happened.



OUR VISION

is that people affected by crime – victims, witnesses and their families – are treated with dignity and respect and are at the heart of justice in Scotland.



OUR MISSION

is that all those affected by crime receive the high-quality support and care they need to move forward in their lives.



VSS prides itself in offering free and confidential services at the point of need for people affected by crime. Our services are available throughout all of Scotland, both in local communities and in the courts. We balance our consistent approach with personalised packages of support specific to the needs of people whose lives have been disrupted through crime.

VSS works alongside our partners to listen to the views and experiences of victims and witnesses. Our strength is our ability to take these views and experiences and to positively influence national policy decision making, advocating for a better justice system for all.

Looking ahead

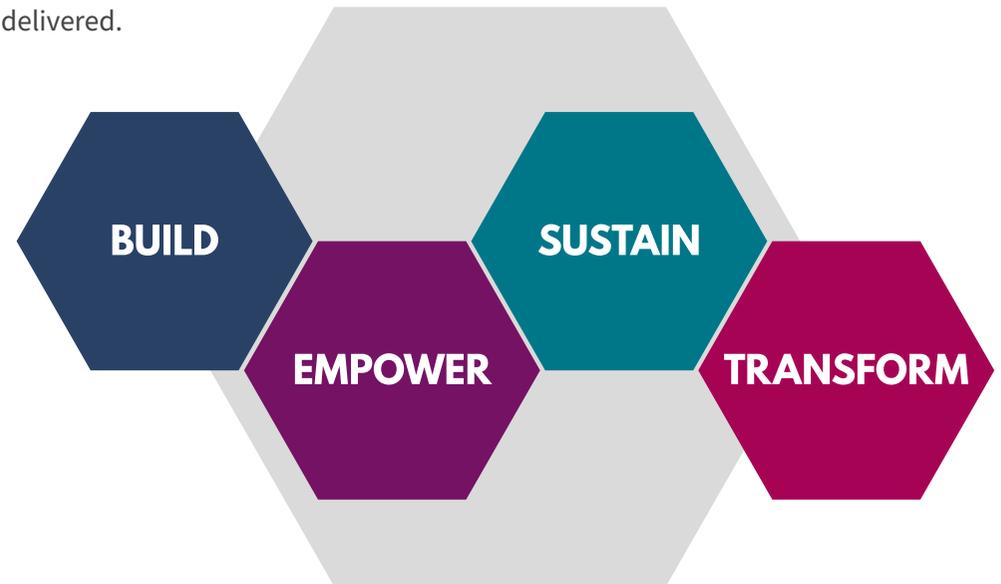
Based on the solid foundations we have built for our organisation in the previous years, 2021 is the first step in our new strategy – VSS Strategy 2021-2026: Empowering people affected by crime – which will last for the duration of the next Scottish Parliament until 2026.

As Scotland recovers from the Coronavirus pandemic, we have a tremendous opportunity to think innovatively about how justice and support services are delivered.

Our new strategy therefore focusses on the four strategic priorities:

- ◆ **EMPOWER** people affected by crime by providing high quality, outcome-focused support and care to all who need it.
- ◆ **TRANSFORM** victims' and witnesses' experiences of the criminal justice system.
- ◆ **BUILD** productive partnerships aimed at improving the experiences of those affected by crime.
- ◆ **SUSTAIN** our impact by focusing all we do, in every area of the organisation, on making a lasting difference for people affected by crime.

Our relationships with our partners and colleagues in the justice and third sectors remain central to us delivering on our aims, as does our relationships with victims, witnesses and families across Scotland who have been affected by crime. By listening to their experiences and views, we will be able to positively influence policy and legislation and better shape support services based on their needs.



Outcomes 2020-21

VSS' work is guided by four key outcomes that all staff and volunteers work towards in all that they do:

- 1 People affected by crime feel they have improved health and well-being**
- 2 Those affected by crime feel safer and more secure**
- 3 Victims and witnesses are more informed**
- 4 VSS is a more effective organisation that makes a lasting difference**

VSS' work contributed directly to the Scottish Government's Justice Strategy for Scotland (2017-2020), a plan for a just, safe and resilient Scotland.



Achieving our outcomes

We have now completed the final year of our three-year strategy, which focussed on the following aims to achieve our outcomes:



DELIVER high quality support for anyone affected by crime that needs it.



BUILD partnerships and alliances with other organisations so that we can work together on putting victims and witnesses first.



CHAMPION the rights of victims and witnesses.



DEVELOP VSS so that we provide excellent services that meet the needs of victims and witnesses.



“I wanted support because I was at an all-time low after domestic abuse. I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for Kirsty, my supporter. She’s a rock of support and a saviour.”

Fraser, domestic abuse survivor

11,799 
people supported
in the community

118 
families helped by Support
for Families Bereaved by
Crime service

93,000+
visits to our website

2,346 
people supported
at court

£285,000
in financial assistance
through our Victims' Fund

1,000+ 
people engaged
through webchat

165 
court familiarisation
visits

741 
people supported
by our Victims' Fund

10,953 
calls to the helpline



Achievements and Performance

DELIVER: Supporting victims and witnesses

Providing support during the Covid-19 pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, VSS had to quickly adapt how we deliver our services in response to new safety regulations imposed by the Scottish Government.

For us, this meant moving from primarily face-to-face appointments to offering our services on a number of platforms, ensuring we were able to deliver for victims, witnesses and families during the pandemic.

Our delivery methods expanded to include video conferencing, phone, email and text. We continued to offer face-to-face consultations, when it was safe to do so, but during the early stages of lockdown most people affected by crime were less comfortable with this option.

Our webchat service was invaluable in keeping in contact with people feeling isolated after their experiences of crime and deprived of their usual support networks.

We saw a spike in the number of people expressing suicidal thoughts and an increase in people visiting GPs for depression, anxiety, problems sleeping, and substance abuse.

People appreciated our work to provide continued access to support, despite the lockdown restrictions, and responded to the personalised approach they still could receive on a regular basis.

The lockdown meant that certain crimes increased. We saw a rise in support requests from people affected by domestic abuse, fraud, stalking, revenge porn and antisocial behaviour. Many people felt unsafe at home, especially in domestic abuse and antisocial behaviour situations. As a result, we distributed a large number of personal alarms and assisted people with applications to the Victims' Fund for security systems, rental costs, and items such as clothes, furniture and food, many of them for victims escaping domestic abuse situations.

In the summer of 2020, after the first lockdown period, we worked quickly to initiate safety processes to allow us to open our offices to those who would most benefit from face-to-face support.



Covid-19 and court delays

The impact of the pandemic was also felt in the court system, with court business reduced to only solemn and domestic abuse trials in the first lockdown period. This created a trial backlog that could take until 2025 to clear, according to the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service (SCTS).

For victims and witnesses awaiting trials, the impact of the pandemic was severe. The delays to court business caused many people to feel anxious, angry, and unsafe in instances where the accused was not remanded in custody. For many of the people VSS supports, this has caused re-traumatisation, preventing them from moving forward with their lives.

We worked closely with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and the SCTS to ensure timely and appropriate updates were shared with anyone affected by the court delays – both the people we support and the general public – through our online channels.



After the first lockdown, VSS was in place to ensure in-person support for vulnerable witnesses before, during and after giving evidence. Where appropriate, people were signposted to community support services for ongoing emotional and practical support following the trial. There was a greater engagement for this support than prior to the pandemic.

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, our employees and volunteers have shown commitment, flexibility and resilience when it comes to supporting people affected by crime; this has been evidenced in our ability to continue to provide high-quality services during the challenges of the last year.

For victims and witnesses awaiting trials, the impact of the pandemic was severe



Our support in the court

Giving evidence in court can be a stressful experience. VSS employees manage volunteers to deliver emotional and practical support and provide information to people affected by crime. This includes supporting victims and witnesses who are due to go to trial and creating support packages specific to their needs.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Scottish court system, with delays to trials affecting victims and witnesses across the country. Where trials did proceed, we supported over **2,300** vulnerable witnesses through the court process, including children and victims of sexual assault, domestic abuse, and stalking.

We delivered **165** court familiarisation visits, putting people at ease before a trial. This figure is less than previous years, due to reduced court business caused by the pandemic.

Many people affected by the court delays felt anxious, disappointed, traumatised and unsafe. We provided telephone support to over **5,100** people impacted by delays to their trials, in a total of over **8,100** support sessions.



Our local support

VSS has supported over **16,900** people in the community throughout Scotland in 2020/21.

We provided support to people affected by all types of crime including domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, violent crime, hate crime and antisocial behaviour as well as specialist support to families bereaved by murder.

We have helped people affected by crime to access information, feel safer, navigate through the criminal justice system and cope better in the aftermath of a crime. Throughout the year we made personal contact with people affected by crime to provide support services on over **42,500** occasions.

This year we contacted victims of serious crime an average of **1.33** days after receiving a referral from Police Scotland, which is within the two-day target we have set ourselves.

Accessing our services and information

VSS provides many ways to access our services and information regarding the criminal justice process. During the pandemic, our National Helpline, webchat facility and website were the main sources of contact into our services.

Helpline

We operate a free National Helpline service which is available to support anyone affected by crime and is open Monday to Friday. During the year our helpline received over 10,900 calls, and we made over 3,000 proactive telephone calls offering further support from our local services.

Webchat

Our webchat service provides an invaluable lifeline to people in unsafe situations or facing other challenges where phone or face-to-face methods would provide a barrier to obtaining support. Webchat conversations are untraceable, offering people affected by crime a discreet, secure, and intuitive way to access instant support, information, and practical guidance. Last year, we supported over 1,000 victims and witnesses across Scotland who may not have reached out to us previously.



Website

Our website continues to provide accessible information and support to those in need after a crime. With up-to-date information on court delays, legislation changes and victim and witness rights, it has been a key communication channel for people affected by crime during the Covid-19 pandemic. The site not only includes a range of contact methods but also hosts a range of personal stories so people affected by crime can see the impact of VSS support and feel less isolated. Throughout the year, there were over 93,000 visits to the website from over 65,000 visitors, with over 220,000 pageviews.

CASE STUDY:

Moving forward after domestic violence

Jean contacted our free national support helpline last year following a domestic violence incident. During lockdown, she had allowed a friend to stay with her in her home, but after they began a relationship he assaulted her.

A VSS support worker conducted a needs assessment with Jean and put a plan in place to provide structured support. The VSS support worker called her regularly, providing emotional support during a very difficult period. Jean had multiple health issues and her attacker still lived in the area, which was making her feel anxious, stressed and isolated.

VSS supported Jean through the court trial and helped to arrange a screen between her and the accused and a supporter to sit with her while she gave evidence. Jean commented that the support provided in court made the whole process much easier.

Jean's attacker was found guilty but she felt unsafe in her neighbourhood. Her VSS support worker helped Jean to apply for a housing transfer and she was offered a sheltered property in a new community. Jean's new home required flooring and, with support from VSS, Jean applied successfully to the Victims' Fund for carpeting for the property.

“I feel like I can start again and get my life back. I'm really grateful for all you've done these past months and for being there for me throughout the whole process.”





Victims' Fund

Throughout the pandemic, VSS provided **£285,000** in financial assistance through our Victims' Fund, reaching more than **741** people and their families affected by crime. The fund has paid for security systems, rent for people fleeing domestic abuse situations, funeral costs and food vouchers for some of Scotland's most vulnerable victims and witnesses. Many of the people we support have reported that this assistance can be life-changing and lifesaving.

We have been able to substantially increase the amount of support we have provided to people through the Victims' Fund through additional funding of £100,000 from the Scottish Government and £120,000 from the Victims' Surcharge Fund (drawn from financial levies on all offenders who receive a court fine).

Through the Connecting Scotland fund, which ensures people have the facilities to access essential services throughout the pandemic, we were awarded 40 Chromebooks and internet dongles. Through the Victims' Fund, we distributed this equipment to families with children so they could access support, continue with schooling, and interact with friends.

The additional resources to the Victims' Fund have enabled us to reach and support even more vulnerable people financially affected by crime.



CASE STUDY:

Critical financial support to asylum seeker

Victim Support Scotland works jointly with many agencies throughout Scotland to support people who are in financial destitution as the result of crime.

One such individual is Ade, who was supported by the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) at Glasgow City Council, to apply for our Victims' Fund.

Ade said: "At the time when I initially came to the UK as an asylum seeker, life was very difficult. I had no financial capacity to do anything as I was not allowed to do paid work, although I was getting some form of support from TARA and the Home Office.

"Ultimately, my status as an asylum seeker became a bottleneck and constrained me, making me unable to do many things for myself. The laptop and internet connection provided through Victim Support Scotland have helped me immensely, assisting me in participating in extracurricular activities, attending online classes, doing course work and taking part in various Zoom meetings. This has given me confidence and a huge boost in transitioning to normality and I want to say a personal thank you for this support."

"This has given me confidence and a huge boost in transitioning to normality and I want to say a personal thank you for this support."





Support for Families Bereaved by Crime

During its second year, the Support for Families Bereaved by Crime (SFBC) service helped **118** family members who had been affected by murder or culpable homicide.

The SFBC service continued to develop strong partnerships, particularly with Police Scotland, to improve their depth of knowledge and understanding of our support services, acknowledging the benefits of collaborative partnership working for all family members impacted by murder. We received a steady number of referrals into this specialist service, including **61** Family Liaison Officer referrals and a further **27** referrals from Police Scotland.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the SFBC service adapted its offering to ensure families were able to access our support when they needed it. We provided over **1,000** telephone support sessions and **31** face-to-face appointments. We offered **16** online support sessions for people looking for support via digital channels. We identified **23** families who did not have equipment to receive digital support, and provided them with Chromebooks so that they could access our services via digital means, conduct schoolwork and reduce feelings of isolation by speaking to friends online.

The Victims' Fund provided much needed financial support to families bereaved by crime. The SFBC service made applications on behalf of families, amounting to **£21,131** in clothes, food vouchers, security equipment, and funeral expenses, including repatriation to Poland and Latvia.





Victim-centred approach

Embedding a victim-centred approach across justice and support services in Scotland is core to the work of VSS. Through our partnership working, we champion the need for trauma-informed services, which are ways of supporting people that recognise specific needs they may have due to past or ongoing trauma.

Within a victim-centred approach, it is vital that the voices of people affected by crime are heard and used to inform meaningful change. VSS has continued to develop our Reference Group originally formed via the Victims Taskforce. This virtual co-production panel now consists of over fifty people affected by crime across Scotland, who have been central to shaping our ongoing work, as laid out in the VSS Strategy 2021-2026: Empowering people affected by crime and our 2021 Manifesto ahead of the Scottish Election.

Embedding a victim-centred approach across justice and support services in Scotland is core to the work of VSS.

Monitoring and evaluation

In June 2020, we implemented a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, Microsoft Dynamics 365. This new CRM allows us to better manage data, leading to a higher quality of support and reducing the need for a victim or witness to retell their story. As a continuous improvement platform, our new CRM provides a flexible and responsive approach to the organisation's changing needs and that of our partners. It also supports a more efficient exchange of referral data, which allows us to respond more effectively to victim and witness requests.

Monitoring and evaluation have informed the development of new partnerships with external organisations through highlighting crime trends, identifying key victim and witness needs, and evidencing emerging issues encountered by victims and witnesses. We will continue to strengthen these relationships and interactions with service partners to make referrals as smooth and accurate as possible.



Outcomes

As a result of VSS services:

2,081

people supported
in the community
reported
improved Health
& Wellbeing



295

people attending court
reported improved
Health & Wellbeing

1,948

people supported
in the community
felt better
informed



264

people attending court
felt better informed

1,838

people supported
in the community
felt safer



266

people attending
court felt safer



Achievements and Performance

BUILD: Strategic and partnership working

Police Scotland

Over the last year, VSS has continued to build on and strengthen its relationship with Police Scotland at both a national and local level. Our contacts at Police Scotland are critical to our work and act as a route to reaching out to all victims in the aftermath of crime.

Throughout 2020, VSS was involved in a joint collaboration with Police Scotland's Strategy, Innovation and Insight Team. At a national level, we have co-designed contact and referral process solutions that put victims and witnesses at the forefront. This includes using community and social media channels to promote safety messaging, increase awareness of VSS services and build productive working relationships that benefit victims and witnesses.

We have also worked collaboratively with Police Scotland to streamline non-crime-based referral processes at a local level. For example, incidents of antisocial behaviour do not always meet the threshold for recorded crime, yet a referral from Police Scotland means people can still receive support with their situation from VSS and other partners.

Child's House for Healing

As part of our work to keep victims' needs at the heart of justice in Scotland, VSS has been working with partners to improve the experience of children affected by crime. Often justice procedures require children to repeatedly tell their story to many different professionals as well as deal with complex, confusing procedures and long delays, which compounds their trauma and distress.

In April 2020, the People's Postcode Lottery Dream Fund awarded VSS, along with lead partner – Children 1st as well as Children England and University of Edinburgh £1.5m in funding to create Britain's first 'Child's House for Healing'. Based on the Scandinavian 'Barnahus' model, the Child's House for Healing will be a child-friendly, safe and welcoming place for children to go to, as an alternative to courts, social work offices and police stations.

This new initiative will bring health, justice, social work and recovery services under one roof, ensuring children are not further traumatised by the impact of crime and helping them to move forward.

With our partners, VSS has been working hard to develop the project and will be opening the Child's House for Healing in East Renfrewshire at the end of 2021.

Victims Taskforce

The Scottish Government Victims Taskforce 2018-2021 was established with the goal of improving support, advice and information for victims of crime.

VSS is a member of the Victims Taskforce and, working alongside other support organisations and individual victim representatives, has championed the voices of people affected by crime in Scotland with a number of achievements throughout the year.

Victim-Centred Reference Group

VSS has facilitated a reference group of people affected by crime who wish to shape key developments in justice through sharing their views and experiences. Group feedback about the impact of Covid-19 directly informed the sector's response to justice system recovery, such as this summary paper on Victims Voices.

Victim-Centred Approach Workstream Governance Group

VSS has led this governance group, which commissioned a systemic review of justice sector publications to ensure they are victim-centred, consistent, up-to-date, and use plain English and compassionate language.



'Transforming the Criminal Justice System' report

In partnership with the Scottish Government and COPFS, VSS commissioned 'Transforming the Criminal Justice System' report. It recommended greater use of the 'Tell Us Once' digital platforms, investment in leadership and collaborative systems, targeted funding, and the establishment of trauma-informed processes as standard practice. Recommendations aim to reduce re-traumatisation for victims and witnesses and improve their experiences of the criminal justice system.



Victims Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland

The Victims Organisations Collaboration Forum Scotland (VOCFS) is one of the cornerstones of our partnership working with other third sector organisations. The Forum is a collective of key victims' groups who advocate for change within Scotland's justice system by engaging with criminal justice agencies.

VSS has been instrumental in the development of this group to address challenges for victims of crime across different areas of the criminal justice system and where members have a common interest to respond jointly.

The Forum's achievements include:

- ◆ providing a response to consultations on sentencing guidelines for children and young people
- ◆ contributing to the Victims Taskforce
- ◆ feeding into the Recover, Renew, and Transform Programme to inform how the justice system in Scotland can provide better information and support for people affected by crime following the Covid-19 pandemic.

Local partnerships

Throughout the pandemic, strong partnerships with local support agencies were essential to deliver continuous, high quality services to people affected by crime. VSS and partner agencies had to work more closely than ever to overcome the challenges of both Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions, ensuring people affected by crime received the specialised support they needed.

We worked closely with 'Hear Me', based in Tayside, to provide the best support possible for people affected by sexual abuse. Together, we developed a clear and effective referral pathway resulting in increased access to specialised support. Greater information sharing has ensured people affected by sexual abuse have access to the most effective trauma-informed support and information for each stage in their journey.

Additionally, VSS' Victims' Fund has facilitated the growth of stronger local partnerships across the country. The Covid-19 pandemic led to a rise in victims and witnesses struggling to fulfil their basic and urgent needs following a crime. By working with local agencies to provide financial assistance to the people they support, we initiated collaborative relationships and increased understanding of VSS services. For example, VSS has developed local partnerships with 'Trussell Trust' foodbanks across Scotland to create efficient referral pathways to their services, quickly meeting the basic food needs of many people affected by crime who apply to the Victims' Fund for assistance.



Accessible community partnerships

VSS strives to ensure our services are accessible to people from all communities, and part of this work is evidenced in our partnerships with many specialist organisations who support people affected by crime from a range of backgrounds.

One of the strongest partnerships we developed in 2020 was with ‘Shakti Women’s Aid’ centres across the country, which support women, children and young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds affected by honour-based violence and domestic and sexual abuse. Shakti Women’s Aid provides culturally informed support in a range of languages. By working with them, VSS has increased engagement with refugees and BAME women, children, and young people.

People supported by Shakti Women’s Aid can now apply for financial assistance from the Victims’ Fund, providing them with the essentials they need to move forward with their lives, feel safer and set up new or temporary accommodation.



Achievements and Performance

CHAMPION: Victim and witness rights

Improving rights

Improving the rights of victims and witnesses is the central aim of VSS' policy and engagement work. Through consultation responses, working in collaboration with stakeholders and representing victims' voices at the Scottish Parliament, we work hard to make sure victim and witness rights are a priority for decision makers.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we advocated for people affected by crime to have access to justice and support services while courts were closed. We have worked with partners to ensure victims' rights are a priority as courts have reopened and measures such as the use of remote video evidence are put in place.

We provided evidence submissions on a variety of topics, including the incorporation into Scots law of the United Nations Charter for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to call for increased protections for victims of crime perpetrated by children.

We have also called for the establishment of a Victims Commissioner in Scotland to champion the voices of people affected by crime. Additionally, we have supported proposals for the Domestic Abuse (Protection) Bill to allow social landlords to transfer a tenancy to the victim of abuse, reducing the need for families to move out of their homes to escape a perpetrator, which often results in homelessness.

Forensic Medical Services Bill

In January 2020, VSS submitted a response to the Forensic Medical Services Bill consultation, allowing people affected by rape or sexual assault to self-refer for forensic medical examination. By collecting forensic evidence soon after the crime, victims of rape or sexual abuse get the medical attention they need but have the freedom to wait until they are ready to report the crime, should they wish to.

The Victim and Witnesses (Scotland) Act clearly places a duty on police to inform and refer victims to support services such as VSS. We called for a similar duty to be placed upon health boards to signpost support services for people affected by rape or sexual abuse, regardless of whether they decide to pursue prosecution.

In the follow-up consultation in March 2021, we welcomed the proposed evidence retention period of 26 months, along with a trauma-informed communication process for victims of rape and sexual abuse. We also supported the Scottish Government by promoting the evidence retention consultation on our website and social channels during the pre-election purdah period.

Victims Awareness Week 2021

Victims Awareness Week is VSS' foremost campaign of the year, coinciding with the European Day for Victims of Crime on 22 February. It provides the opportunity to promote messages in support of people affected by crime by championing their voices, experiences and rights.

This year, our 'Your Space' campaign focused on everyone's right to support following a crime, under the Victims' Code for Scotland.

The Your Space campaign highlighted seven themes found in the support we provide to people affected by crime and attending court as a witness. These themes explained the emotional and practical help, criminal justice system guidance, rights information and witness support that people can expect from VSS.

Due to the limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to hold our usual series of local and national events for the week. As a result, we created a vibrant social media campaign which provided insight into the depth of emotional support we provide, as well as describing what people affected by crime can expect when they visit us for support.

The impact of the week was felt across the sector, with key local and national partners such as Police Scotland, Community Justice Scotland and the Risk Management Authority Scotland substantially increasing the reach of our messaging. We experienced a significant rise in visits to our campaign and support webpages, as well as engagement on our social media channels throughout the week.



Hate Crime & Public Order Bill

Throughout the debate and scrutiny process of the Hate Crime & Public Order Bill, VSS provided numerous evidence submissions and briefings to the Justice Committee and MSPs.

We highlighted that the impact of hate crime is frequently more devastating and longer lasting than that of other types of crime because it attacks an aspect of an individual's core identity and that of the marginalised community of which they are part.

VSS argued that vulnerable marginalised groups such as homeless people, members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, asylum seekers, refugees and people with mental health conditions should be considered for protection by future hate crime legislation.

We called for investment in better communications to improve hate crime reporting as well as the active promotion of community-based third-party reporting centres, such as VSS. When various parties called for the Bill to be thrown out of Parliament, VSS campaigned publicly to let the Parliamentary scrutiny process continue, reiterating the need for hate crime legislation to evolve if Scotland is to live up to its global reputation as a tolerant and welcoming nation.

CASE STUDY: Victim Awareness Week 2021

As part of our Victims Awareness Week activity, the Your Space campaign raised awareness of everyone's right to support after a crime, and encouraged uptake of VSS services through a greater understanding of the support we provide.

We also aimed to give referral agencies such as Police Scotland in-depth information about our services, so frontline service providers could feel more confident encouraging people to request a referral for VSS support.

With Covid-19 restrictions in place, we turned to social media channels and local and national partners to deliver the campaign. We created partner toolkits with multiple resources they could use on a variety of digital channels to promote campaign messages. The campaign support from partners on social media was higher than ever before, which can be attributed to the strong relationship-building work in the current strategic plan, including with Police Scotland.

We partnered with the Scottish Government, Risk Management Authority Scotland and Electoral Commission on victim and witness-focused blog posts. Some of our most experienced volunteers and a range of victims and witnesses provided powerful quotes about the impact of crime to encourage people to contact us for support.

The week saw a substantial increase in social media activity and website traffic, resulting in our most successful awareness raising campaign to date, with a significant number of people finding out more about the support available to them as a victim or witness.

Your Space Campaign impact

- ◆ **57% website traffic increase**
- ◆ **500% increase in referrals to the website**
- ◆ **97% increase in social media engagement**





Achievements and Performance

DEVELOP: People and services

Responding to the pandemic

At the early stages of the pandemic, we created the Coronavirus Action Team (CAT), involving a cross-section of VSS employees working closely together with the aim of taking forward decisions and actions to handle the emerging situation.

Initially meeting twice per week, the CAT took responsibility for a number of areas, for example:

- ◆ assessing decisions regarding our operational delivery model (in line with Scottish Government guidance)
- ◆ developing and rolling-out new processes to enable safety within our premises
- ◆ managing a risk register
- ◆ and agreeing key internal and external communications to keep our workforce and stakeholders informed about developments both within our own services and externally.

The positive impact of the CAT has been felt throughout VSS, keeping the workforce informed with updates and ensuring safety in our workplace.

Investing in our volunteers

Our workforce is predominantly volunteers, from our Board of Trustees to the support volunteers who directly help people affected by crime. From practical assistance for witnesses attending court, to emotional support for vulnerable people impacted by crime, our volunteers are on our front line.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many people understandably chose to take a break, and our list of active volunteers fell to 110 during the first lockdown. As the courts and our community offices re-opened, we were able to increase our active volunteers to 250, still below levels for the previous year.

Despite this, our volunteers dedicated a total of 29,000 hours towards VSS, which shows an absolute commitment to supporting victims, witnesses and their families.

We helped our volunteers to work from home, providing extra IT equipment, and sometimes office furniture, and conducted health and safety assessments to ensure their homes were suitable places to conduct their volunteering. As lockdown restrictions eased, we encouraged volunteers back to Covid-19 safe spaces in the courts and all our offices, providing personal protective equipment, and a range of working protocols.

CASE STUDY: Being a VSS volunteer

Being a VSS volunteer has helped Christie progress her criminal justice sector career.

As a VSS volunteer, I support victims throughout the criminal justice process at Falkirk Sheriff Court. I help vulnerable witnesses, facilitating court familiarisation visits and assisting with remote court access such as CCTV witness links to the courts.

I've developed so many skills as a VSS volunteer. I'm more confident and have learnt to be more empathetic, deal with unpredictability, manage highly charged emotional scenarios and help to ground people who are anxious and distressed by crime.

The pandemic has affected the mental health of victims and witnesses. Court delays stop people from moving on from a crime and can cause anxiety and frustration for many around forgetting details of a crime. VSS volunteers really are invaluable in supporting people through the criminal justice system currently.

I've recently finished my Diploma in Professional Legal Practice at the University of Glasgow and have gained a traineeship due to start next year. As a student in my field, I don't think I would have been able to get my upcoming traineeship without having volunteered at VSS. It's given me an opportunity to see things from a different perspective, that of victim and witnesses, and broaden my knowledge of the criminal justice sector.

“I enjoy the experience of people saying to me ‘you really helped me, I couldn't have done this without you.’ Having someone say you've made this process easier for them is very rewarding.”





Learning and Development

Learning and development became more challenging due to homeworking and remote access. Nevertheless, VSS provided more learning and development for our workforce during 2020/21 than ever before, with new online self-study modules and virtual workshops.

We drew on the services of specialist suppliers like the Development Company, augmented our learning and development team, trained more of our employees to become in-house trainers for our workforce, and partnered with external organisations like Children 1st to extend our capabilities. The result was a significant uplift in the skills and knowledge of our workforce.



Equality and Diversity

VSS is committed to supporting everyone after a crime, regardless of their background or their identity. We know that marginalised groups are often affected disproportionately when it comes to crime (especially hate crime), and therefore we have consistently put out messages to remind people we are here for them when they need us.

Throughout the last year, we began to roll-out equalities training with external consultant Jamie Spurway, looking at Five Mottos for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The impact of this training was that colleagues were able to use a framework for understanding equalities better and consider how this could be applied to making VSS and our services even more accessible.

The VSS Equalities Forum meets every month and involves a cross section of the organisation. The Forum has driven some of our work forward in this area including: updating our policies and procedures to ensure they are equalities compliant; developing a calendar of religious and faith-based dates of recognition; and working towards LGBT Chartership. The LGBT Charter programme supports organisations to proactively include LGBTI people in every aspect of their work, protecting staff and volunteers and providing high quality services.

Safeguarding

VSS continues to be committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our workforce and the people who use our services. Through the Covid-19 pandemic, we saw an increase in the number of people we support telling us they felt suicidal. We therefore took the necessary steps to retrain all of our staff and volunteers in how to support and respond to those disclosing this area of risk.

We have continued to use this message, both in public and the media, to apply pressure to the justice sector to prioritise the needs of people affected by crime during the pandemic.

Our processes are continually reviewed to ensure we are responding to those at risk of harm or abuse.

“We have continued to use this message, both in public and the media, to apply pressure to the justice sector to prioritise the needs of people affected by crime during the pandemic.”



Health and Wellbeing

We fully recognise the impact that crime has on victims, witnesses and their families. It is also important to recognise the impact the nature of our work can have on both our staff members and volunteers. In 2020, this has been more of a concern as many of us have been working from home.

Recognising that stressed and traumatised colleagues might not be in a position to make the best support decisions for people affected by crime, VSS formed a Health and Wellbeing Forum.

To address some of these issues, the Forum rolled out a programme of activities, and resources, to help the workforce during this challenging time, including virtual coffee breaks, mindfulness sessions, and mental health first aid.

CASE STUDY: VSS turns 35



In 2020, VSS celebrated its 35th anniversary and took the opportunity to reflect on our progress since 1985 when a group of volunteers first came together in Coatbridge to form the ‘Scottish Association of Victim Support Schemes.’ In our first 35 years, we have supported hundreds of thousands of people affected by crime.

Over the years we have shown our ability to adapt services to the changing needs of victims and witnesses, challenging ourselves to work dynamically and creatively to ensure our services respond as crime evolves. Whether that is as a result of working with partners to tackle serious and violent crime, or responding to societal changes as we have sought to become a progressive, forward thinking nation that does not tolerate sexual abuse or hate crime.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and thanks to improvements in remote working technology, our staff and volunteers have managed to continue to deliver the high-quality support we are known for. To mark our anniversary, we looked to technology to bring us back together, utilising Microsoft Teams to share memories and to hear from our President, HRH Princess Anne and the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Humza Yousaf about the difference our work is making.

MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston, Fulton MacGregor, lodged a motion on the Official Report of the Scottish Parliament to commemorate the anniversary and praised the outstanding commitment of Victim Support Scotland colleagues.



Structure, governance and management

On 1st April 2019 Victim Support Scotland became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) and is registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). The SCIO is governed by its constitution that was revised as part of the transition to a SCIO. The charitable purposes were updated in this new constitution. Our trustees are no longer directors of the company, but members of the organisation.

Appointment of trustees

Trustees are appointed for an initial term of three years and may thereafter be re-elected for an additional three-year period. The constitution states that the maximum number of trustees is 12. VSS currently has 8 trustees. Details of changes to trustees during the year are listed on page 14.

Trustees' recruitment, induction, training and development

Throughout 2020/21, trustees committed to personal and collective development opportunities achieved through self-learning and attendance at professional seminars, these were held using Microsoft Teams.

Key management personnel remuneration

The board of trustees, the CEO and senior management team comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of managing the charity on a day-to-day basis. The trustees are volunteers and do not receive remuneration. Details of trustees' reimbursed expenses are disclosed in Note 7 in the accounts.

All staff roles (including senior roles) are evaluated using a bespoke job evaluation tool and set within job and pay grades. During 2020/21 a benchmarking exercise was carried out for all roles in VSS using a variety of sources including Croner and benchmarking surveys to ensure that salary scales were set in line with market rates. Salary scales requiring adjustment were amended in line with the benchmarking.

Committee structure

The board of trustees provides strategic leadership, governance, direction and overall accountability. The board decides the organisation's strategic direction, mission and priorities. It ensures that VSS complies with its governing documents, charity law and other relevant legislation. In addition, the board scrutinises, evaluates and accounts for the organisation's performance, ensuring that there is an effective risk management system in operation to safeguard sustainability, finances and otherwise to protect its assets and reputation and always act in the interests of the organisation. During 2020/21 the board met every three months in line with its constitution.

The finance and audit committee provides a strategic overview of VSS' financial and fiscal position to ensure that all the financial resources necessary are secured and managed effectively to deliver the objectives in the organisation's corporate plan, to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of the organisation, and to ensure the effective management of the financial risks which may threaten the organisation. This committee met quarterly in 2020/21.

The governance committee provides an overview of VSS' governance to ensure that the board fulfils its legal, ethical, and functional responsibilities, and ensures that adequate governance policy development, recruitment strategies, training programmes, board activity monitoring, and evaluation of board members' performance is in place. This committee met twice during the 2020/21 financial year.



The nominations committee which periodically seeks applications from a range of appropriate sources and has regard for the general principles of equality and diversity in considering applicants for appointment, makes recommendations to the board of appropriate individuals for appointment as trustees, considers all expressions of interest and maintains a register of suitable candidates for future reference ensuring GDPR compliance. This committee met three times during the 2020/21 financial year.

“Speaking to David at VSS makes me more confident and stronger. I feel better about the trial and know I will be supported when it happens. I feel more positive about the future, like I can get the things I want from my life.”

Craig, child abuse survivor

Reference and administrative details

President

HRH, The Princess Royal

Trustees

The trustees of the charity are also the members of the SCIO.
The directors serving during the period are as follows:

David Alexander – resigned 10.6.21

Flora Henderson

Ashok Khindra

Paul Main

Helen Roxburgh

Lynne Staples-Scott – resigned 21.9.20

Jon Turner – resigned 29.1.21

Laura Watkins (nee Battles)

George Welsh – resigned 29.6.20

James Wilson

Fiona Young – resigned 4.3.21

Paul McGuigan – appointed 29.1.21

Josie Saunders – appointed 29.1.21

Key management personnel

Kate Wallace, Chief Executive

Alison Love, Director of Operations & New Business

Jane Sturgeon, Director of Finance & Business Planning

Scottish Charity Number

SC002138

Our advisors

Auditors	Henderson Loggie LLP, 11-15 Thistle Street, Edinburgh, EH2 1DF
Bankers	The Royal Bank of Scotland plc., 2 Blenheim Place, Edinburgh, EH7 5JH
Solicitors	Burness Paull, 50 Lothian Road, Edinburgh, EH3 9WJ MacRoberts, Capella, 60 York street, Glasgow, G2 8JX
Insurance advisor	Keegan & Pennykidd, 50 Queen Street, Edinburgh, EH2 3NS
Capacity Building	Wren & Greyhound Ltd, 10 Milburn Road, Westfield, EH48 3BT
Organisational Design	Dorothy McKinney Ltd, Scott House, 10 South St Andrews Square, Edinburgh EH2 2AZ

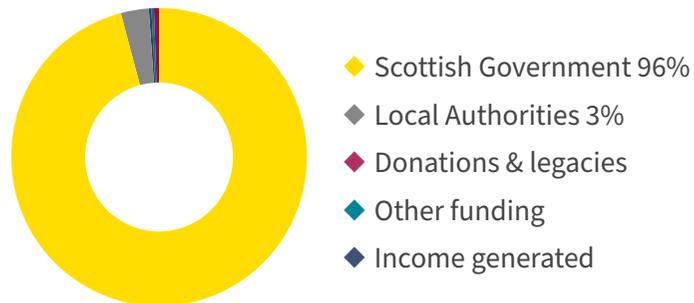
Financial review

Income

Our total income for the year was £5M (2020: £4.9M) an increase of £89k from the previous year. Income from Local Authorities continues to drop with a £49k decrease in income from this source in this year. VSS received £70k of additional funding for the Victims' Fund in this year.

Expenditure

Our total expenditure for the year was £4.9M (2020: £4.8M) an increase of £65k from the previous year. Our net income for the year was £136k (2020: £112k). Overall, there was a negative movement of £13k with respect to movement on the pension reserves. This led to a positive net movement in funds for the year of £123k (2020: £103k).



Principal Funding Sources

The principal funding sources for the organisation are grants from the Scottish Government and local authorities and VSS appreciates their continuing support. In 2018/19 we secured a three-year funding agreement with Scottish Government for 2018-2021. For the year 2021-22, we have secured funding of £4.9M.

Lothian Pension Fund

In 2017/18 VSS successfully negotiated an exit from Lothian Pension Fund (LPF) with an agreed repayment schedule over a 20-year period. VSS have now made three annual repayments to LPF. The actuarial valuation of VSS' liability was determined as £1.463m at 31 August 2018 and the agreed total level of repayments was settled at £676k. Under certain conditions, LPF may claim additional repayments but these conditions were not met in 2020/21. VSS pay compensatory additional years for two ex-employees. These unfunded pension liabilities are recorded separately on the balance sheet.

Principal Financial Risks

The principal financial risks facing us are: the fact that 96% of our funding is from one source, the Scottish Government; continuing reductions in funding from local authorities; the level of unrestricted reserves; and the LPF withdrawal debt that is repayable over 20 years.

Balance Sheet

The pension liability continued to have a significant impact on the balance sheet. However, the agreed exit debt from LPF brings more stability to the balance sheet as this element will not vary with actuarial fluctuations.

Reserves Policy

The trustees recognise the need for unrestricted reserves to be maintained at an appropriate level. Our reserves policy is to maintain a sufficient level of reserves to enable operating activities to be maintained, taking account of potential risks and contingencies that may arise from time to time. The policy is reviewed annually by the trustees.

The policy identifies the estimated amounts required to meet financial risk associated with potential contingencies and uncertainties relating to the charity's operating activities. These include:

- ◆ the provision for an orderly winding-down of operations in the event of a significant adverse event that is outside the control of the charity
- ◆ the funding of unforeseen major projects that have not been provided for in the normal financial planning process

Elements of the target figure will include the costs for redundancy and contractual liabilities for such items as rent of offices. The trustees are working towards having three months' running costs in reserves.

Reserves Position at 31 March 2021

The total balance of unrestricted reserves held as at 31 March 2021 is £95k (2020: (£29k)). The balance held on restricted reserves as at 31 March 2021 is £351k (2020: £352k). Total funds have increased by £123k to £446k in the financial year.

The pension liability continues to have a significant impact on reserves. There are two components to the pension liability; negotiated exit debt from LPF of (£365k) at 31 March 2021 (2020: (£428k)); and unfunded pension debt of (£161k) at 31 March 2021 (2020: (£148k)). The overall pension reserves at 31 March 2021 are (£526k) (2020: (£576k)). The unfunded pension debt was affected negatively by market fluctuations at the year-end due to COVID-19. Overall, the unfunded deficit increased by £13k.

Discounting the impact of the pension liability the position on unrestricted reserves improved from £547k to £622k in the year. In 2020/21 trustees set a target of £99k for the increase in unrestricted reserves. The trustees recognised that this was quite an ambitious target given the impact of Covid on fundraising during the year. The actual increase in unrestricted reserves in 2020/21 was £75k.

Going Concern

The Board consider it appropriate to prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis. In reaching this view, we have looked at the budgets prepared for the 3-year period 2021-2024. The charity's key source of income is the grant from the Scottish Government. One-year agreement is in place and Scottish ministers have agreed in principle to award annual grant funding to VSS in 2022/23 and 2023/24. The trustees recognise the need to supplement this with other sources of income for specific projects.

Fundraising Strategy

VSS is raising funds to enhance our vision of growing dignity and respect for victims.

In 2020/21 we developed a fundraising strategy that will see VSS seeking a diverse range of new supporters who can help us grow our insights and innovation so that we can be more impactful. To deliver this new fundraising strategy we have been piloting new approaches and creating projects that we want to co-design with victims.

We have also been making new, additional, statutory applications, including to the Victim's Surcharge Fund for our Victim's Fund for which we successfully received £120k funding for 2021/22.



During 2020/21, we were successful in receiving 50 new chrome books and mi-fi devices to support victims and their families through an application to Connecting Scotland.

We have joined the Chamber of Commerce in the Highlands to begin piloting greater engagement with corporates locally. We are also piloting fundraising engagement with additional new audiences including corporations and the wider general public so that we can use these findings to scale-up a diverse fundraising portfolio next year.

Investment Policy

The organisation has an instant access bank account where funds not required for day-to-day activity are held on deposit. Transfers are made as required to cover expenditure in the current account. The trustees are in the process of developing a new investment strategy and policy that will be finalised in 2020/21.

Victim Support Enterprise Ltd

During 2013/2014 Victim Support Enterprise Ltd suspended trading but has maintained its company status. There has been no activity in 2020/21. The company will play a role as part of our future income generation strategy.

Risk management

It is the responsibility of the board of trustees to ensure that there are effective and adequate risk management and internal controls systems in place. The board reviews all strategic risks and issues at each meeting.

We recognise that effective risk and issue management relies on sound systems and an understanding of risk management throughout all levels of the organisation. A risk and issue management strategy is in place, as well as the following processes and controls:

- ◆ Three levels of risk registers and issues logs in place – strategic, executive leadership and corporate leadership
- ◆ Escalation process in place between registers so key risks are reviewed
- ◆ Risk and issue management is core to the agenda of the board, executive leadership and corporate leadership meetings
- ◆ Annual risk workshops carried out by the board and senior management

The board of trustees ensures that all appropriate steps are taken to mitigate and manage the risks and issues facing us. The principal risks faced by the charity and mitigation factors in place are as follows:



Description of risk	Plans and strategies to manage risk
Overly reliant on one funder with 3-year funding award ending in March 21	<p>A three-year funding agreement for 2018-2021 in place with the Scottish Government, which was the source of 96% of our funding in 2020/21.</p> <p>Head of Fundraising appointed in 2020/21. An interim fundraising strategy that takes account of COVID-19 circumstances was rolled out in 2020/21 and a fundraising strategy aligned to 5-year strategic plan was developed.</p>
People affected by crime are not accessing our service due to drop in referrals	<p>We continue to work with Police Scotland and other stakeholders on a range of national and local approaches to ensure that their officers are aware of the support and information the VSS provides.</p> <p>The Victims' Fund has attracted applications from a wide range of other agencies that has led to increase in partnership activity and the visibility of VSS's services.</p>
That compliance requirements are not met	<p>All staff and volunteers complete annual mandatory, bespoke training on GDPR, Health & Safety and Safeguarding.</p> <p>Internal Data Protection Officer in place from March 2019. Health & Safety forum and action plan in place to focus on this matter.</p> <p>Board agenda has a standing item on compliance matters</p> <p>Clear management reporting on compliance matters.</p>
That legal action will be brought against VSS with respect to services provided	<p>We took legal advice on the best approach to handle an historic issue leading to this risk. VSS stopped delivering this service in Dec 2017.</p> <p>In October 2020 we retained professional indemnity insurance with our insurance provider with an excess of £2,500.</p> <p>There is one potential case outstanding relating to the historic issue mentioned above. Lawyers, appointed by our insurers, review all claims that are lodged.</p>
VSS' delivery model cannot meet the needs of victims and witnesses during COVID-19 pandemic	<p>VSS established a Coronavirus Action Team to co-ordinate the required work to continue to deliver support safely to victims and witnesses.</p> <p>Workforce equipped to work from home.</p> <p>Telephone support put in place as an alternative to face to face support.</p> <p>Live web chat service enhanced.</p> <p>Digital service delivery methods expanded.</p> <p>Recovery action plan developed and implemented.</p>

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The trustees of Victim Support Scotland are responsible for preparing a trustees' annual report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in Scotland requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and the application of resources, of the charity for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for maintaining proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and to enable them to ensure that

the financial statements comply with the Charities and Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charity Accounts Regulations (Scotland) 2006 (as amended). They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and the integrity of the charity and financial information on the charity's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of financial statements may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

Statement as to disclosure of information to auditors

In so far as the trustees are aware, at the time of approving the trustees' annual report:

- ◆ there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditors are unaware, and
- ◆ the trustees have taken all the steps that they ought to have taken as trustees in order to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditors are aware of that information.

Signed by order of the trustees

2021



Empowering people affected by crime

0800 160 1985

www.victimsupport.scot

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