



Consultation on the Cleveland Independent Sexual Violence Adviser Service

February 2026

Background

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cleveland currently commissions an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) Service. The role of an ISVA is to offer independent, non-judgemental emotional and practical support to victim-survivors of historical or recent sexual violence. They provide one-to-one guidance through the criminal justice process, including in-person support at court trials.

The current contract for the ISVA Service is due to end on 30th September 2026. As such, the OPCC are starting the process to re-commission this service, with a refreshed service specification setting out the requirements and expectations of a provider.

To support the development of a refreshed specification for the ISVA Service, a short consultation was planned to take place during February and March 2026. The aim of the consultation was to ensure that the experiences and needs of victim-survivors was factored into the design of the new service. Views were also sought from professionals working with victim-survivors of sexual violence, including those who regularly make referrals to the ISVA Service.

The consultation consisted of:

- Analysis of feedback from victim-survivors gathered by the current service provider and provided to the OPCC via quarterly returns
- A short survey for service users
- A short survey for professionals referring into the ISVA Service
- A focus group of service users, hosted by the current service provider

Feedback from ISVA Service users – collected from quarterly performance reports

The below feedback has been collated from the quarterly performance updates provided by the current service provider. It includes analysis of surveys completed by service users and written feedback collected for the financial years of 2023/24, 2024/25 and up to 31st December (Q3) of 2025/26.

Survey responses

The current provider collects survey data from service users, to measure progress against a range of measures and to demonstrate impact of the service.

Across the specified period, at least 1,000 service users completed the survey and provided their feedback.

A summary of the results can be found below, noting the percentage of service users who **‘strongly agreed’** with the key statements listed in the survey:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 (to Q3)
Know more about the services and resources available to them	97.3%	95.8%	96.9%
Have enough information to decide what to do	94.5%	97.2%	97.6%
Feel heard and believed	97.7%	99.1%	98.3%
More empowered to make decisions about their future	92.3%	95.1%	97.2%
Able to recognise abuse relationships/ behaviour	93.4%	96.9%	98.2%
Felt able to go through legal proceedings if they choose or/ are required to	96.9%	93.5%	94.8%
More confident in dealing with organisations	93.7%	94.5%	97.5%
Do you feel safer? (Yes/ No/ Not applicable)	81.0%	81.1%	78.8%
Has your health and wellbeing improved? (Yes/ No/ Not applicable)	71.5%	67.8%	69.2%
Do you feel more knowledgeable and informed re the Criminal Justice Process? (Yes/ No/ Not applicable)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Can you return to your previous lifestyle or adjust to changes? (Yes/ No/ Not applicable)	74.5%	74.4%	71.9%

The service maintains consistently high results (over 90%) of service users feeling they have made progress against immediate or short-term measures, such as *‘feeling heard and believed’*.

These percentages start to drop slightly regarding longer-term recovery measures or measures relating to wider health and wellbeing. This is perhaps not unusual

considering the traumatic experiences of service users, but worth noting as a potential area for development for a future service.

Written feedback

Written feedback has been collected from a variety of individuals, including directly from service users, their parents and police officers or other partner organisations. Much of it appears to have been collected via written contact, including via email or text message – whilst some is a record of a telephone call or conversation.

The testimonies have been collated by the current service provider and therefore consideration should be given as to the impartiality/independence of the below submissions.

Financial year	Number of testimonies
2023/24	41
2024/25	63
2025/26 (to Q3)	38

Summary of feedback

The 142 pieces of feedback identified have been summarised to highlight key themes raised by service users and professionals, as below:

- **ISVA support is described as life-changing and essential**, with many clients saying they could not have coped or progressed without it.
- **Clients feel believed, validated, and treated with dignity**, often for the first time in their journey.
- **Trust and emotional safety are major themes**, with survivors saying their ISVA was the only professional they could open up to.
- **ISVAs provide exceptional guidance through the Criminal Justice Process**, making court, Section 28, ABE interviews, and long trials feel manageable.
- **Consistency and reliability stand out**, especially when other agencies change frequently or fail to communicate.
- **ISVAs go above and beyond**, offering lifts, attending appointments, providing regular check-ins, and being available whenever needed.
- **Practical support has a huge impact**, including help with grants, appeals, housing, finances, counselling access, and navigating services.
- **Clients report empowerment, recovery, and renewed confidence**, often describing the support as giving them a “second chance” or lifting a weight from their shoulders.
- **Professionalism combined with genuine compassion** is repeatedly praised— ISVAs are described as angels, rocks, stars, and assets to the service.

- **Families express deep gratitude**, noting that ISVA support helped them cope and understand the process, not just the survivor.
- **Partner agencies recognise the service's value**, praising ISVAs for their dedication, collaboration, and positive impact on multi-agency work.

Survey with service users and professionals

Two short surveys were developed to seek views from ISVA service users and professionals who may be required to refer into the service, as part of their role working with victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The service user survey was promoted by the current service provider to their clients and on social media. The professional survey was circulated to contacts within key agencies to circulate to their staff.

A summary of the service responses can be found below.

Service users

Across all 17 responses, feedback about the Cleveland ISVA service was overwhelmingly positive. Victim-survivors consistently described the support as *vital, trust-building, non-judgemental, and emotionally grounding* during an extremely difficult process. Many stated they would not have coped or continued with the legal process without their ISVA.

What victim-survivors found most helpful

- Emotional support and being believed
- Clear explanations of the legal process
- Consistent contact with the same ISVA
- Practical help, including attending court, interviews and appointments
- Quick access to support

What made the biggest difference

- Having someone trustworthy at court
- Being able to ask questions and get reassurance
- Feeling understood and not judged
- Face-to-face support that built confidence

What was difficult

- ISVAs not being allowed in ABE/Section 28 interviews
- Long waits for court dates
- Weekend support not available
- Police or witness care contacting survivors directly despite requests for ISVA-only communication
- Initial lack of explanation from police about the ISVA role

Suggested improvements

- Allow ISVAs to attend interviews
- Better coordination so all updates go through the ISVA
- More flexible contact (e.g., between long court dates, weekends)
- Earlier explanation of the ISVA role
- More information about local support groups

Professionals

Across 14 responses, professionals showed strong awareness of the Cleveland ISVA service and recognised its value, particularly in supporting victim-survivors through complex and distressing processes. While some described referrals as easy and outcomes positive, many highlighted significant challenges around capacity, waiting times and communication.

What professionals found most helpful

- Clear referral routes when known and generally easy processes
- ISVAs providing practical and emotional support
- Specialist knowledge of the criminal justice system
- Trusted relationships formed with clients
- Support at key stages, including court attendance

What made the biggest difference

- Consistent contact and clear explanations of procedures
- ISVA reassurance during the criminal justice process
- Feeling understood and supported
- Specialist Child ISVA expertise where available

What was difficult

- Long waiting lists and delays in allocation
- Difficulty contacting ISVAs or receiving updates
- Limited direct support for children in some cases
- Inconsistent information sharing and limited holistic working
- Capacity issues affecting responsiveness

Suggested improvements

- Increase ISVA capacity to reduce waiting times
- Strengthen referral pathways and prevent people “falling through the gaps”
- Improve communication while clients wait for allocation
- Expand specialist Child ISVA provision
- Broaden access by dispersing support across more agencies
- Offer more sustained, holistic support based on individual need

Focus group

A focus group was held at the building of the current provider with four victim-survivors of sexual violence, all of whom had accessed support from an ISVA. All four of the victim-survivors had been through the court process and also accessed counselling support from the same service provider.

A summary of their feedback is as below:

- **Strong communication and consistent support**
Victim-survivors valued frequent, flexible updates, a single reliable point of contact, and the reassurance that they could return for support when needed.
- **Empowerment and person-centred care**
ISVAs helped restore confidence by believing survivors, offering choices about the level of support, and providing nonjudgemental, victim-focused guidance.
- **Practical and emotional support through the justice process**
In-person court support, careful logistical planning, and attention to safety and comfort were seen as essential to helping survivors navigate a difficult system.
- **Areas for improvement**
Survivors highlighted the need for more ISVA funding, stronger collaboration from other agencies, and a more personal, in person approach to ending support.

Summary

Victim-survivors consistently describe the ISVA service **as essential, high-impact, and often the only stable support available** to them during an extremely traumatic and complex process. Across all feedback routes, several priorities emerge that define what victim-survivors value most.

1. Trust, safety and being believed
2. Consistent, reliable support
3. Clear guidance through the criminal justice process
4. Practical, hands-on help that reduces stress
5. Empowerment and progress towards recovery

Suggestions for service redesign

- Increased ISVA capacity to reduce waits and maintain continuity
- Stronger multi-agency coordination, with updates routed through the ISVA
- Permission for ISVAs to attend key interviews
- More flexible contact, including between long court dates and at weekends
- Expanded Child ISVA provision

- More recovery-focused, longer-term support options
- More personal, in-person endings to support