Supplementary written evidence from Jon Collins, Chief Executive, Restorative Justice Council

Thank you for inviting me to come and speak to the committee on Tuesday. It was a good to have the chance to talk about some of the key questions the restorative justice field is currently facing.

There were two issues that were raised in the session that we did not have the chance to address. I thought it would be useful to clarify our position, and the evidence, in writing as an addendum to my oral evidence.

Quality

The committee asked a question about both the quality of restorative justice delivery and guidance given to commissioners. Rt Hon David Hanson MP asked the panel if there should be standards set by the Ministry of Justice, and if commissioners had sufficient guidance about how to assess quality.

There are two different issues within this question which we would like to answer separately.

First, the question of whether standards for restorative justice delivery should be set by the Ministry of Justice. To expand on a point in our written evidence, the Ministry of Justice has already done this by funding the RJC to develop the Restorative Service Quality Mark (RSQM). This provides organisations delivering restorative justice with external validation that they are delivering a high quality service by demonstrating that they are meeting the RJC’s Restorative Service Standards. The Restorative Service Standards describe the minimum requirements needed to provide a safe and effective restorative service.

Second, the question of whether sufficient guidance is given to commissioners about standards and quality in the organisations that they commission. While we have worked to raise awareness of standards and the RSQM in criminal justice services and commissioners, we do agree that this is still an area of concern.

As you know from both our written and oral evidence, we strongly recommend that to ensure quality in delivery, all restorative justice service providers working in the justice system and in receipt of statutory funding should be required to hold or to work towards achieving the RSQM. This will give weight to the guidance that the RJC, with the support of the Ministry of Justice, is already providing.

The RSQM is currently under review in order to make sure that it is meeting the needs of the field. Since the creation of the RSQM in 2014, the restorative justice field has changed
dramatically and with that in mind we will be making it suitable for all organisations, irrespective of size or structure, involved in delivery of restorative justice.

**Awareness**

In the evidence session, discussion of awareness focused mainly on what the police or victims' services can do to raise awareness with victims of crime when they are in contact with the justice system.

We agree that it is important to raise awareness and understanding among criminal justice agencies about restorative justice. The organisations that interact with victims and offenders need to fully understand restorative justice and their obligations under the Victims’ Code. As raised in the oral evidence, PCCs and the police have very variable levels of knowledge about restorative justice, which means that not all victims are offered the chance to participate. It also potentially deters participation if victims are not offered an accurate explanation of the process when first approached.

To remedy this, we have prepared and disseminated an information pack to all of the current PCC candidates. We have also prepared a leaflet for the police on what they need to know about restorative justice, which we have sent to every chief constable in England and Wales. There is, however, still more work to do to ensure that all the relevant agencies fully understand restorative justice, its benefits and referral routes in their area. The RJC, with the support of the Ministry of Justice, is continuing to work with PCCs and other key stakeholders to achieve this.

We would also like to stress the importance of raising public awareness of restorative justice. The RJC commissioned polling from Ipsos MORI in 2015 which found that in a nationally representative survey of 1782 individuals, only 30% had heard of restorative justice. This figure has risen from 22% when similar polling was conducted in 2013, but clearly there is still a lot of room for progress.

Where people have heard the term ‘restorative justice’, there is still some confusion around what it means. The RJC has done a great deal of work to raise awareness of restorative justice with the public, including campaigns, films and extensive media coverage. Our films, for example, have received in the region of 600,000 views. This work needs to be built upon in order to ensure that as many victims as possible understand the benefits that participating in restorative justice can provide and are receptive to the offer.

I do hope that this additional information proves useful to your ongoing inquiry. I look forward to reading the report upon its conclusion and please let me know if there is anything else that we can provide to the inquiry.

*22 April 2016*