



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

Tuesday 19 May 2020

**Emergency Police and Crime Plan Priority: *Objective 3:***

*Leading and supporting a partnership response to the national emergency*

**Presented by:**

**Alethea Fuller, Deputy Chief Executive**

**Purpose of paper**

1. To provide members of the Strategic Police and Crime Board with an update and overview of the OPCC response to objective 3 in the [new emergency chapter](#) of the Police and Crime plan: 'Your Police, Your Priorities'.
2. This report will set out the objectives within the chapter and this will be followed by an update against each one.

**Overview**

3. Objective 3 of the emergency chapter sets out how civic leadership will both lead and support a partnership response to the national emergency. This includes supporting organisations who receive grants for services, leading the criminal justice response to COVID-19, ensuring a joined up whole systems approach, and utilising existing structures such as the West Midlands Community Safety Partnership to provide a whole system response to crime and disorder.

**4. We said:**

The Commissioner [pledged](#) continued support to organisations which receive grants so they do not face uncertainty. We expect these services to adapt their approach so the public can still access services during the crisis. Even if those services are delivered in a different way, we want those services to be creative and continue. We remain committed to partnership working, with a recognition that services will have to be delivered differently: we will work with others to identify and respond to vulnerability.

**5. We did:**

OPCC teams have been working closely with our providers to understand the impact of COVID 19 on their service provision. Grant variation letters have been issued to all providers articulating what steps they have put in place to change their delivery



models to ensure an adapted service is still being offered. Reassurance has been offered with regard to reasonable flexibility around timescales of delivery, acknowledging that it will take time to set up alternative arrangements that includes moving from face-to-face to remote, virtual or Skype support.

In relation to domestic abuse, sexual violence and first contact, assessment and referral, we remain in daily contact. We continue to hold fortnightly meetings with all domestic abuse providers as this area of business continues to present significant challenge. Challenges include increased demand on services, in particular helplines some of which have seen an increase of up to 25%. There are challenges around appropriate accommodation for victims who need to flee as well as challenges around domestic abuse trials. Local challenges echo those which are being faced nationally and the OPCC remains in fortnightly contact with the APCC victims and witnesses' portfolio group and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ); this includes collating monthly returns reflecting the needs of victims and services at this time. To address concerns around the bottle neck of cases which is developing and the increase in demand which is anticipated once lock down is lifted, government is responding by making a significant amount of funding available for the voluntary sector. The OPCC has submitted a large proposal of £4.4m into the MoJ on behalf of the voluntary and community sector in the West Midlands and is awaiting outcome of this which is due imminently. This bid will respond to the increasing needs of victims of crime across all of our priorities, as well as including a contingency budget for smaller charitable organisations that will need support during the crisis.

The following are some examples of how victim support services in the West Midlands have adapted their services in response to COVID-19:

### **Housing**

Providers reported following the 'Lockdown' announcement that there were less than the average numbers making referrals to the Home Options Hub in Birmingham City Centre which could have been an indication that less victims would report DV incidents to WMP and avoid seeking support from victim services.

To address this, agencies are seeking alternative self-contained housing to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19 as many of the properties used are in form of shared accommodation often with mixed genders. It is important to recognise the importance of domestic abuse and other specialist support that needs to be in conjunction with the support of new accommodation.

The Victims Team is also working with partner agencies to seek alternative accommodation, victims can still access support from DA professionals through support agencies without living in refuges.

Where necessary, some services have highlighted that food and provisions will be provided to women and delivered with minimal contact to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

Most refuge accommodation in the region continues to take referrals and house women and children, all safety precautions are being taken and where there is increased risk, those accessed into shared accommodation services will be asked to self-isolate for the first 7 days of their stay.

Women and families living in refuges continue to receive 24 hour support from staff whose work-bases are within refuges, staff continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines when supporting their clients.

Victims and survivors living in their own accommodation are supported via telephone or video-calling (*they opt for times to be contacted and the appropriate method of contact*).

## **Children**

Agencies supporting survivors and victims of Sexual Abuse/Violence and Domestic Abuse have highlighted the following:

Counsellors are unable to carry out counselling that is not face-to-face with children under 11. To address this challenge, non-abusive parents are being offered support both online and via the telephone and email on how to best support their children. Children and young people aged 11 and over will continue to receive support services through online and telephone support, where it is appropriate to do so.

Some agencies have reported that although they are unable to carry out any comprehensive assessments for their children and young people on waiting lists, they continue to offer basic telephone assessments for crisis counselling services.

Some of the challenges faced by providers supporting children remain such as difficulties in assuring the safety and privacy of clients during support especially those sharing homes with perpetrators. Like the domestic abuse campaign, supporting children remains a priority and the message of reassurance can be delivered through various agencies such as schools that are communicate with families regularly. Including information relating to support for DA and SV victims alongside generalised information could be beneficial. It is our responsibility to ensure that when messages are shared, appropriate safeguarding measures are taken especially among those children sharing homes with abusive family members or guardians.

Victims Commission members have emphasised the importance of making children and young people a priority for the exit plan, increasing safeguarding and professionals early response when the lockdown regulations are lifted – this will enable early identification of children requiring support. The next Victim's Commission meeting will hear discussions from the VRU's education task and finish group to look at the ways that they are helping schools to prepare by circulating tool kits to support children in tackling returning to education.

## **Messaging**

We have identified the importance of consistent messaging to run alongside the guidance around self-isolation and social distancing. It is vital that victims are aware of the services available and open to them during this time which highlights that their wellbeing and safety is the priority therefore, it is acceptable to leave home to seek support. The domestic abuse campaign is at the forefront of the OPCC messaging campaign.

## **Additional cost incurred**

Organisations commissioned through the Victim Fund have responded to the pandemic by buying emergency IT equipment, investing in technology and supporting their staff to work from home, all of which carry unforeseen costs. Also having to bear the cost of moving helplines/phone providers to be able to deliver support remotely. Some are still in the process of purchasing IT equipment along with adapting their systems for staff to access information when off-site.

Professionals offering regular support to victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence such as Independent Sexual Violence Advisors, Independent Domestic



Violence Advisors and counsellors are among those that have had to move to remote working which has resulted in additional costs for providers.

The same concerns raised nationally are evident in the region, mostly relating to limited availability of Personal Protective Equipment and cleaning products. This adversely affects staff working within refuge accommodation and to address this, providers have been encouraged to spend on material that will enable staff to offer support to their clients safely. We will continue to encourage providers to flex their service delivery in an aim to maximise their preparedness and increased support within their organisations. The OPCC will continue to monitor any developing trends through updates provided by the Victims Commission.

#### **6. We said:**

Partnership working across the Criminal Justice System (CJS) will be key. As of 18 March 2020, the Ministry of Justice confirmed that all criminal justice agencies had contingency plans in place to respond to COVID-19, including a Strategic Command Protocol which joins up the CJS response at a national level. I will ensure we translate that locally. Crown Court trials have been suspended, which will have impacts across the whole system. Self-isolation and the potential early release of prisoners will impact on communities and policing. I will ensure that our partnership structures in the West Midlands can respond appropriately.

#### **7. We did:**

A lot of important work is being carried out by partners across the criminal justice system in response to the growing pressures of covid-19. The office has held meetings and conversations with leaders of criminal justice agencies such as courts and prisons, to understand how the system can continue to operate under the current circumstances.

There are a number of key issues we are working with partners to address, including;

- Court closures and the related impacts, for example there will be no new jury trials and this will produce a significant back log of cases that need to be heard.
- The use of audio/visual technology within courts and to/from custody suites to ensure, where possible, criminal justice services continue to be delivered.
- Ensuring the implementation of the [Interim Charging Protocol](#)
- Implications of early prison releases and taking a multi-agency approach to ensure appropriate services are available for those released on temporary license.

There was also a recognition that under the current circumstances, our criminal justice partners will not have the capacity to attend four separate Local Criminal Justice Boards across the region and therefore a regional approach to addressing emerging threats and issues would be more appropriate. We have utilised existing governance structures and have convened a Regional Criminal Justice Collaboration Forum to translate the national criminal justice system response at a local level. This will provide a key mechanism to ensure decision making continues and where appropriate, a collaborative response to issues is undertaken. The meeting is also used to identify where local issues can be addressed through task and finish groups, an example being the West Midlands' task and finish group around early prison releases."

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner chairs the task and finish group for prison releases. This group brings criminal justice and health partners together to

focus on the response to both early releases from prison and the business as usual releases. The group have made considerable progress in tackling this as a system and have considered the need for continuity of care from prison back to local drug and alcohol treatment services, support to reduce reoffending, potential impact on victims and ensuring appropriate accommodation on release. This group has been effective in aligning the priorities of multiple agencies, by collaboratively troubleshooting issues caused by agencies having different governance structures and terms of reference. An example of this is CRC and WMP cooperating to ensure all prisoners being released into the West Midlands have appropriate intelligence checks ran and are not a risk to the wider public.

**8. We said:**

West Midlands Community Safety Partnership (WMCSP) will continue to provide a whole system response to crime and disorder. We have moved to regional commissioning to ensure consistency and efficiency, while giving local community safety partnerships the ability to respond to local, emerging issues. We will ensure their use of community safety funding during the national emergency is effective. Services need to be responsive to the changing needs of the public, moving to online and social platforms where necessary to do so, in order to protect the public.

**9. We did:**

The OPCC has maintained its community safety structures by meeting with the Heads of Community Safety (HOCs) on a weekly basis to maintain the strong links that we have built up. It gives us the opportunity to understand what is happening locally and to be able to respond to the emerging issues as they arise. The HOCs are the conduit to the WMCSP and are now in the process of signing their Grant Conditions, after demonstrating that they are in a position to effectively use their community safety budget allocation over the next 12 months. We will continue to work with them to ensure that they are responsive, while giving them the flexibility to determine local needs. The VRU have begun to utilise these weekly meetings to signpost and consult HOC's on their emerging priorities and strategies. This forum has also been instrumental in ensuring there is regional consistency in response to the immediate and emerging challenges that COVID-19 has presented the West Midlands. For example, localities have been able to share best practice in supporting the street community and have collaborated to maximise the impact of the #NoExcuseForAbuse campaign. We will continue to work with senior leaders through the WMCSP to consider and determine West Midlands' activity through effective local projects.

**10. We said:**

We will work with the community and our partners to deliver community messages, utilising our links into the community, faith and voluntary sector. Our work within those sectors is critical and ensures that our community-led way of working is delivered. We will support services for victims of crime to move to online until we are able to resume face to face contact. This shift will deliver longer term benefits.

## 11. We did:

The OPCC coordinated and funded a region wide messaging campaign in relation to domestic abuse. Working with partners from the Violence Reduction Unit, Public Health, Local Authorities, Community Safety Partnerships and West Midlands Police. The messaging was directed at victims trapped in their homes; the message is clear – services are open and we are here to help. The partnership is working hard to ensure referral pathways are in place and that women who need to flee have safe accommodation. We understand the challenges of leaving home especially among those living with perpetrators, we are seeking guidance from victim support agencies on the messaging and how best to reach out to women that are being further isolated as a result of the lockdown.

To offer a region-wide response, we are working with partners from across West Midlands Police, Community Safety Partnerships, West Midlands Combined Authority, Public Health and the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit to draw up consistent messaging and ensuring that victims are aware that services that can offer support are still operating. The **#noexcuseforabuse** campaign was launched on the 15 April and is to ensure that victims know that help and support is available, in response to increasing concerns of Domestic Abuse incidents in homes during the lockdown period.

The voluntary sector providers that we work with, have all been reassured that their funding from our office is secure. We are working with all of our providers to ensure that they can continue to deliver services, with the assurance that funding will not stop if method of delivery has to change. We are showing the necessary flex and understanding, to offer support and reassurance to all of these organisations.

With regards to community messaging, we have had constructive discussions with the community-based communications project that our office has commissioned. (The project is called OnPoint and developed by Aspire4U/ThatsAllMedia) We have specifically instructed them to tailor their content to include Covid-19 related advice and guidance that can be delivered into our communities, via a different forum. They have agreed to include this and have already begun to put out this new content in the last fortnight. This allows us to get information out to individuals who may not see the info through the more formal channels such as the OPCC website. We can use this channel to distribute any key messages that need to be communicated.

We will also continue to support the Violence Reduction Unit's newly set up Faith Alliance group. The intention is to carry this on remotely, which again provides us access into communities which our more formal routes may not have reach into.

We supported the West Midlands Police promotion of several campaigns regionally including their #SuspectItReportIt, See Me, Hear Me, Thinkuknow and NSPCC Still Here campaigns along with linking the child abuse element in with the new Domestic Abuse #noexcuseforabuse campaign to push the same message out that it is important to recognise the further issues for children and young people at this time. This is coupled by West Midlands Police training frontline staff through the Domestic Abuse Matters training to capture the Voice of the Child by asking children five wellbeing questions when they go out to incidents. This is particularly important as the voice of the child which is normally captured via health, education and social care is significantly reduced at this time and having this wellbeing element supported by

WMP will allow the safeguarding issues relating to children to be addressed much sooner.

#### **12. We said:**

We will work to reduce the risk of increased hate crime, working with the Force, our partners, our networks and the public. We will be urging coordination between the 7 local authorities in the West Midlands, to ensure a consistent approach to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities during the crisis. We will raise this issue nationally.

#### **13. We did:**

The OPCC had arranged to hold a Hate Crime Symposium late March 2020. It aimed to coordinate a community response to supporting victims of this crime allowing providers to share their expertise on models that could work to support various groups affected by hate crime. Through this, we would be able to shape a model for the region that accurately responds to the needs for victims of hate crime. Voluntary and community sector providers in the West Midlands would take part and WMP representatives would consult with agencies present on the day to share understanding from a policing perspective. There have been concerns raised by agencies following victim reports directly linked to being harassed or assaulted as a result of COVID-19. The objectives of the symposium remain the same and it will now take place online in form of a webinar. The symposium will open with an exploration of hate crime and hate incidents, including an assessment of reporting mechanisms and a discussion around the importance of reporting. The information we gather on the day from service providers and victims will enable informed commissioning responses and improved working with WMP and other statutory bodies supporting victims.

Like other projects, the OPCC has encouraged the organisation currently delivering support to victims of hate crime in Birmingham to adapt their services to meet the needs of victims. Following the symposium, the OPCC will be able to fund an additional organisation to provide support to victims of hate crime, delivering a regional service that will respond appropriately to the needs of victims affected by hate crime.

Currently, the NPCC guidance advises local authorities and police forces to enact a temporary stay of eviction on unauthorised encampments. The OPCC will endeavour to address any issues as they arise concerning Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) communities during covid-19 by liaising with the force, and Local Authorities and any other relevant individuals where necessary. Currently the advice to offer enhanced needs assessments and tolerate unauthorised encampments is agreed as the right response by Local Authorities and SPOCs. The force lead of unauthorised encampments has stated that there are many GRT charities offering support to these communities and that officers will provide the details of relevant support networks to any unauthorised encampments they engage with.

#### **14. We said:**

We will continue the New Chance programme for female offenders. This programme has effectively adapted its support to these women, which will be vital given the increased risk of domestic abuse during social isolation. We will also ensure effective use of Out of Court Disposals to reduce pressure and backlog of cases in

the wider CJS.

**15. We did:**

New Chance have adapted their service offer, ensuring that support can still be given virtually rather than in person, and no physical groups. The service is quickly adapting to increased need for support in certain areas due to COVID-19 for example, support with accessing benefits/universal credit, mental health support, providing necessities such as food parcels if women are self-isolating.

Providers of the New Chance programme have agreed to share anything they come up with such as specific support packs they are putting together to help them all navigate this together, have consistency across the programme and share best practice.

We are working with partners to try and think creatively to boost referrals into the service during this time. Already, work has been done by West Midlands Police to streamline the referral process so it is quicker and easier for officers to make referrals into the service and produce multiple internal communications. We have also ensured a closer working relationship with additional interventions in custody such as the Craunston Arrest Referral Service.

Due to reduction in referrals, all providers regionally have agreed to pool resources and adapt capacity to provide support to women anticipated to be part of the COVID-19 early prison release cohort.

We have set up a fortnightly meeting with providers, WMP, and OPCC to monitor how this service delivery is working and navigate any changes or issues that arise.

A consistent finding from New Chance providers is that the majority of the women they support are victims of domestic abuse. Therefore, support from New Chance is especially needed right now with the rise in DA incidents during the implementation of covid-19 lockdown/self-isolation conditions, particularly if women is living with perpetrator.

It is essential that West Midlands Police continue to utilise the New Chance service for female offenders.

**16. We said:**

We will work with partners to identify the impact the national emergency has on children who are experiencing care and what can be done throughout the response and recovery phases to support them and keep them away from harm. We will also consider and respond to the impact of on children already excluded or off-rolled from school.

**17. We did:**

We are working with partners throughout the Criminal Justice System and local authorities to identify actions that need to be taken in order to reduce the harm COVID-19 has had on those who are in care. This will be done by using existing structures such as the criminal justice delivery group as it already has a number of the key partners involved.



We are also collaborating with the VRU and Barnardo's to create information packs and toolkits for schools to raise awareness and provide practical advice for schools about ACEs and a trauma-informed approach and the additional impact of covid-19. Whilst much of the ACEs information will be applicable to children and young people in care or who have care experience, within this there is a resource specifically tailored to supporting children in care and care experienced children and young people and the additional impacts of covid-19 on these individuals. The initial [information pack element](#) of this has been published on the VRU website and shared with schools and Directors of Childrens Services. The toolkits are currently being created.

#### **18. We said:**

We will continue to lead the region's response to fraud through the West Midlands Fraud Board, which will support the Force through partner networks and help facilitate a greater insight into how the fraud landscape is changing both during and after this crisis. As part of this fraud effort we will work closely with the Force, Local Authorities and banks to ensure that government support reaches those who need it most and is not taken advantage of by fraudsters and scammers. We will engage as appropriate with partner led activity to support businesses facing reduced income and closure.

#### **19. We did:**

The next Fraud Board is due to take place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May and there have been agreed agenda items of updates from the City of London Police, from West Midlands Police, Trading Standards on profiteering in the Coronavirus climate and a non-COVID-19 topic on Unexplained Wealth Orders by CPS.

Specific requests are being given to topic presenters on how they use and make requests to the Fraud Board. It is expected that at the next board meeting a discussion point will be how banks, the Force and Local Authorities can work more effectively around this issue.

The OPCC has committed to funding a Fraud Protect Officer, for a 12 month period, who will be able to work with WMP's Fraud Protect Coordinator to help support the Fraud Board. We expect this to greatly improve the protect messaging being distributed through the board.

As part of our work in supporting partners with recovery and their activity after this crisis, our office is looking to commission a piece of research on applying a public health approach to tackling fraud - it has not yet been explored whether this approach could be used to tackle the issue of fraud. The key to preventing fraud is through education and prevention. If we were able to use this research as a way of informing new practices to help combat fraud, then this could make a hugely positive impact on this policy area. We have already had encouraging discussions about funding this work and talks which are ongoing. Once this is confirmed, we will develop the proposal, draw up a specification and commission an academic to do this ground-breaking piece of work.

From a crime prevention perspective, we have started to engage with partners in the business community, such as Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small

Businesses and providers who support businesses, to identify the support that they need from the OPCC in this period and also when we enter the recovery phase of COVID-19.

#### **20. We said:**

COVID-19 is predicted to claim thousands of lives in our area. The circumstances of these deaths will often be particularly heart-breaking, claiming loved ones in isolation, with victims unable to spend their last moments with family or friends. In our diverse area, recognising all cultural preferences and religious practice will be a challenge. We will ensure that the deceased and their families are dealt with compassionately, with care, and with religious and culturally appropriate protocols, working with partners to ensure temporary mortuary facilities are effectively and sensitively managed.

#### **21. We did:**

West Midlands Police (WMP) have a dedicated Silver Commander who leads on the tactical response to Covid-19. Within this response there are a number of key roles which lead on specific work streams and are responsible for the immediate public facing capability in response to Covid-19. They are also responsible for the resourcing of operational delivery in line with the strategic objectives. In respect of communities, there are a number of key areas of focus which ensure that WMP provide dignity and respect to the deceased and their loved ones as a result of the pandemic.

There is a dedicated Community Bronze and this ensures a number of work streams are integrated. Each work stream is led by a senior officer from Local Policing who contributes to ensuring the deceased and their families are treated with dignity and respect. The work streams that ensure this are: Local Partnerships; Communication and Engagement; Community Tensions & Hate Crime; Vulnerability and Volunteering.

There is also a dedicated Mortality lead, leading on Coronial requirements with regards to the deceased. This work stream has included working with the Excess Deaths Working Group chaired by the Senior Coroner and the establishment of a temporary mortuary at Birmingham Airport.

A Multi-Agency Response Team (MART) has been created to attend deaths in the community to carry out the sudden death process and organize the recovery of the deceased, in a respectful and dignified manner, on behalf of Her Majesty's Coroner. This team consists of blue light partners including fire and Ambulance Services. The MART provides a service to families which minimizes exposure to Covid-19 and gives a single response to the families avoiding multiple visits by different agencies over a prolonged period of time. To support this WMP have prepared a leaflet which gives clear information on bereavement and the processes which follows in light of the pandemic. It also gives key links to agencies who can support at this time of need. This will be in multiple languages and is available to officers now.

A community based network of inter-faith contacts has been established specifically in response to COVID19. Key faith leaders have come together and are working alongside the West Midlands Combined Authorities' inter-faith group. Their work to



date has included advising on matters pertaining to the government imposed restrictions, religious festivals, cultural issues and burial/cremation services.

A Multi-Faith Group specific to burial and cremation processes has also been established and sits under the Excess Deaths Working Group chaired by the Birmingham and Solihull Coroner. WMP play a leading role in many aspects of this working group. The multi-faith group are working closely with HM Coroners, the NHS, MOD planners, and local authorities and with faith leaders and people of no faith, alongside funeral directors to ensure that we deal with all deaths in a compassionate manner during this incredibly difficult time. Providing bespoke information that is designed to explain the next steps, answer some of the community's questions and signpost them to extra help and support that is available.

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