



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

Tuesday 19th May 2020

Emergency Police and Crime Plan Priority: Objective 4:

Ensure the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner does all it can to effectively respond to the national emergency, including commissioning services that mitigate its effect and support the return to normality

Presented by:

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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 4 in the new emergency chapter of the [Police and Crime Plan](#)

Overview

2. Objective 4 of the emergency chapter sets out the commitment from the office of the police and crime commissioner to effectively respond to the national emergency, including commissioning services that help mitigate its effect and support the return to normality. The commitment continues to work with the force and partners to maintain longer term planning and leadership to address the root causes of crime.

3. We said:

We will ensure the continuation of services to victims of crime, exploring new and creative service models. We will work with providers to identify emerging trends. We have committed to ensuring that funding continues to flow to services we have commissioned, although we expect delivery models to change.

4. We did:

Grant variation letters have been issued and all providers have been reassured that their funding will continue. The Police and Crime Commissioner promised continued support to all commissioned services and signed up to a new pledge in support of organisations which receive grants, whilst the current public health emergency continues. In most cases providers have been able to adapt their service delivery moving to remote working and providing support over the phone or by virtual means.



It has been acknowledged that, whilst grant agreements commence 1 April 2020, it may not be possible to deliver the service until alternative methods of delivery have been put in place. Quarterly reporting will continue and payments will be made thereby ensuring continuity.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has issued clarity over the key worker status of victim support workers and we have made a letter available to any organisations who may need evidence of their status to assist them when traveling around the region to deliver services or indeed to access school/childcare provision.

On 9 April the Chancellor announced:

- £750 million pot for frontline charities across the UK – including hospices and those supporting domestic abuse victims.
- £360 million direct from government departments and £370 million for smaller charities, including through a grant to the National Lottery Community Fund.

Further announcements from the Communities Minister Robert Jenrick on 2nd May 2020 clarified that from the above the fund available for Emergency funds to support the most vulnerable in society was £76 million comprising of:

- Vulnerable children: £34.15 million will support work to safeguard vulnerable children including children with disabilities, those who are critically ill, care leavers and children in the early years. Funding will also allow charities to offer support services in new ways, using remote working and technology solutions, for example, to help tackle criminal threats and mitigate the risks to vulnerable children and young people during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Domestic abuse survivors: £28 million to help survivors of domestic abuse and their children by providing more safe spaces, accommodation and access to support services during the coronavirus outbreak.
- Survivors of sexual violence: £10 million has been announced to support victims of sexual violence access advice and support, through the funding of technology to enable charities to offer services remotely. A further £3 million per annum until 2022 will also be invested in the recruitment of more Independent Sexual Violence Advisors across the country.
- Survivors of modern slavery: £ 1.73 million will provide emergency support to modern slavery charities who have been impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. This funding will go towards individuals supported through the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract and will allow victims to stay in government-funded safe accommodation for the next 3 months, access financial assistance, access support services remotely, and ensure we can manage additional demand on the services during this period.

This money will be distributed through the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, among other avenues to reach victim's services.

The OPCC has made an application of £4.4m to this fund for our charitable organisations across the West Midlands. The predominant aim of the funding is to support charities working on the front line to meet increased demand due to the

outbreak. We will use the funding to help our charitable organisations continue to deliver front line services.

Victim Support is also offering a LiveChat service which is available 24/7. We know that for victims of crime who are living with others, and who could be self-isolating with their abusers, whether they are partners or family members, live chat is an important way for them to access practical and emotional support discreetly.

Also, My Support Space is their online platform to help people cope and move forward and includes topics such as difficult emotions, coping strategies, trauma and sleep. These are all common issues that people may experience after crime, but may be intensified during the coronavirus pandemic.

5. We said:

We will work with our commissioned services to ensure they are able to respond to the fast evolving needs of victims during this period. We will support services to build their resilience by offering greater flexibility around working hours, locations and types of interventions. We will work closely with partner agencies, assessing and responding to the emerging trends and putting in place contingencies. We will allow our commissioned services to flex and adapt, to utilise their existing funding differently and allow them to change their service provision to best suit the needs of victims they are supporting. Domestic abuse victims who are self-isolating at home seem less likely to make contact with service providers, meaning that what is already a hidden crime moving further out of sight. We will work with partners to create an avenue for victims to seek support online. We will continue to monitor the trends and impact on victims. We will continue to map gaps in service provision and commission services to meet demand generated by the crisis.

6. We did:

The PCC commissions significant services with a budget of over £12million and therefore it is critical that we ensure those services are able to respond as necessary to emerging needs. Services and projects cover a raft of areas and the budgets for 2020/21 include:

- Violence Reduction Unit with a budget of £3,370,000
- Victims Fund £3,460,000
- Community Safety Fund £3,879,957
- External Commissioning £2,300,000

We are asking our providers to work differently and be creative. Most of them are delivering services remotely via online and social media platforms. We are working closely with our Victims Commission (a partnership made up of thematic experts from the across the voluntary and statutory sector) to assess how the crisis and this new way of working has impacted organisations and victims. This will allow us to identify and respond to new and emerging issues.

Remote working

All of our commissioned services have now moved to remote working and most group/drop-ins sessions have been cancelled. Emotional support including



counselling for victims of sexual violence is being done over the phone or for some agencies in safe online counselling chat rooms but this option will not be offered to children under 11. Waiting lists for in person counselling continue to grow and the surge of referrals predicted around the stages towards recovery after lockdown are at risk of overwhelming these wait times and leading to victims not getting their support needs met in a timely manner. We are supporting our commissioned providers to flex and adapt their service provision to meet these emerging needs and will do so through grant variations wherever necessary.

The Cranstoun Arrest Referral Service, which operates a consistent service across the custody blocks in the West Midlands is continuing to operate under the current COVID-19 emergency. Drug and Alcohol Assessments continue to take place, including remotely over the phone, cell sweeps continue and the liaison with probation colleagues in the courts has continued to support the development of pre-sentence reports, leading to the issuing of Drug Rehabilitation Requirements and Alcohol Treatment Requirements. This is important given the backlog currently in the criminal justice system, tackling the root causes of crime such as addiction will help to prevent future reoffending.

Helpline Calls

Within the first week following the 'lockdown announcement', providers reported a drop in calls to helplines as a result of victims not being able to make contact with support workers safely, specifically among those living with perpetrators. This is something we continue to explore with our providers and looking at ways in which we can enhance the online support offer utilising the Victim Support 24 hour support line and their Live Chat facility via several avenues. In the following weeks the Domestic Abuse providers noticed an increase in the numbers of professionals ringing helplines for advice and support options. This was then followed after the release of the #noexcuseforabuse campaign and several local and national campaigns with a return to normal levels for victim's calling the helplines again. The services are all predicting that as we move away from lockdown that the calls to their helplines will increase as victims are able to have opportunities to disclose and have space away from living in close proximity with the perpetrator.

Refuge Accommodation

There is concern for individuals living in refuges due to reduced staffing numbers. This will impact on the safety of women and children, as perpetrators may use the under-staffing to their advantage. Shortage of cleaning products, food in supermarkets and food banks has been concerning particularly among women living in refuges. Providers have been delivering food and cleaning materials following social distancing guidelines but this is challenging in accommodation-based support where staff work 24/7 and individuals access shared communal spaces. As women and children are not able to move on easily from refuge accommodation due to the clog in the system with housing it has been a concern that spaces within refuge will not become free for other families needing to escape abuse. So far this has been managed by using national spaces and aided by the letter to local authorities from the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing which has asked local authorities to prioritise housing in instances of Domestic abuse.

Mental Health Support

For those relying on regular face-to-face interaction, this period of uncertainty will increase levels of anxiety and feeling unsafe due to the sudden change in their routine. Providers have reported that waiting times on waiting lists have been

extended for counselling and other forms of support for victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse as a result of staff shortages, remote working and furloughing employees. Support through advocacy has been delayed due to consent and GDPR restrictions as most advocates support victims in face-to-face meetings. The normal role of the advocate cannot be fulfilled within the remote working world and important aspects such as attending a GP or Sexual Health appointment with a victim has become more difficult. All services are working adaptively to try and support their client's as far as they can at this time.

7. We said:

COVID-19's effect on the Criminal Justice System will, in turn, have an impact on victims of crime, creating anxiety, disappointment and concern. There will be time delays, potentially weaker communication with police and the Crown Prosecution Service, and victims without the ability to know or understand what may happen next. Anecdotal feedback has been that victims had attended court only to be told at the time that the trial has been cancelled.

We will work with the Force and partners to implement contingency plans to mitigate these risks. We will provide oversight of changes to service provision, and ensure these are effectively communicated to the public. We will work with partners to consider issues such as offender management, ensuring appropriate protections to prevent repeat victimisation, managing individuals released from prison, and protecting victims of harassment and stalking. We will use existing structures such as the Local Criminal Justice Board to bring these issues to the forefront.

8. We did:

Offender management and early release from prison is a worry for victim services. The ambiguity around who will be released and where they will be released to. From a victims' perspective we will want to seek reassurance that victims will be notified should their perpetrators be released from prison. Victims support agencies have raised this on behalf of the individuals they support and will offer additional help to victims who feel they may be at increased risk especially those being support through domestic abuse charities.

The PCC has convened a multi-agency response to early releases from prison in the West Midlands, this has included looking at the business as usual releases. The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner chairs this meeting and we have been able to provide assurances about the positive processes in place that will ensure only the most appropriate individuals will be released from prison and a history of domestic violence would exclude an individual from early release.

The PCC has also developed and delivered a PCC Prison release package. Working with existing providers, this package aims to complement the existing 'through the gate' support delivered by the probation service. Providers are able to give additional support to individuals leaving prison which will reduce reoffending, support transition through the gate and ultimately save money to the criminal justice system.

Working collaboratively with PCC colleagues in the wider West Midlands region, a Regional Criminal Justice Collaboration Forum is meeting monthly to identify emerging issues and task system wide responses. Key issues have included the development of remote hearings, prison releases, system wide recovery and backlog in the courts.

A separate recovery task and finish group, chaired by the Deputy PCC is now meeting on a fortnightly basis, with a two strand focus of focusing on the backlog within the system and also identifying innovation and new ways of working which could be kept following the COVID-19 emergency.

9. We said:

Ensure that the Violence Reduction Unit continues to deliver systemic change across the West Midlands, working with partners and the community

10. We did:

The Violence Reduction Unit has been supporting all of its commissioned service providers to transition to new arrangements in light of Covid-1. Initially, providers transferred resources into detached youth provision in line with national guidance, and on entering the lock-down period further adapted resources to provide remote, digital and telephone services. This is not without challenge and risk, but providers are endeavouring to continue to support young and vulnerable people to make sense of the current situation and to take advantage of opportunities it presents to exit gang and peer group activity. The work that the unit began in 19/20 with vulnerable localities is continuing, providing a vital opportunity for connectivity with communities and between organisations operating in the same area. The unit are supporting the partnership Domestic Abuse campaign including by providing tailored Public Health Education guidance for practitioners.

Looking to the future, the grant application for 20/21 has been submitted and has passed 3 of 4 check and challenge points; we anticipate this will be finalised by the close of the month. The OPCC has supported the unit to continue at risk, and we are making progress with resourcing the unit, with recruitment continuing at pace despite the challenging circumstances and with establishing our outline delivery plans. Areas of additional focus including extending the location based pilots with navigator roles to support all 7 local authorities in their response to serious violence including domestic abuse, consolidating and strengthening our offer to education settings, including supporting the education system to assist students with the transition back to school. A range of training is being made available online to support practitioners to extend trauma-informed responses in a range of disciplines. A portfolio of services continue to be funded through this route, offering universal and targeted interventions, with a strong focus on evaluating the impact of these a baseline condition of the grant. We are seeking opportunities to engage about our plans for 20/21 and beyond with stakeholders in the near future, given the cancellation of our consultation event at the start of the pandemic. VRU governance structures are currently being reviewed, widening to incorporate other key stakeholders in order to support wider system change.

11. We said:

We need to maintain oversight of custody whilst safeguarding the health and wellbeing of our volunteers. We will explore new ways of delivering the Appropriate Adults service. We will ensure appropriate oversight of the provision of Appropriate Adults to children, which are provided by local authorities and children's trusts.

12. We did:

The custody visiting scheme exists to provide reassurance that police custody is safe. The enclosed nature of custody facilities (small rooms, with furniture often

secured to floors) and the large proportion of detainees who are from a vulnerable background make this a challenging area during the COVID-19 outbreak. We need to maintain oversight but at the same time safeguard the health and wellbeing of our volunteers. We will continue to operate the scheme with the reduced number of volunteers and we will supplement this with increased focus on the arrangements in custody, for example we will join the weekly COVID-19 Stakeholder Group, which provides a regular update and discussion on custody and also receive briefings from partners who work in the custody environment, such as Liaison and Diversion staff. Appropriate Adults are provided for vulnerable adults in police custody. This is a high priority service because it safeguards vulnerable people, and because it is a requirement under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act codes of practice. We are now testing and working towards more remote and digital ways of working with the Force to deliver these services.

13. We said:

The crisis will have significant economic consequences. We will use the OPCC's spending power, and the spending power of the Force, to ensure that we procure in a way which will benefit the economy of the West Midlands. We will seek to buy services and goods locally, and use social value assessments to shape procurement decisions as far as possible. We will work with public sector partners to adopt a similar approach. We will work with our partners to identify and support businesses which have an elevated risk of crime during this period. We will work with partners to support the economic recovery of the region, as we recognise the potential risk of unemployment and economic harm on increases in crime.

14. We did:

At present much work has been done in partnership with WMP's procurement team to ensure that Force procurement budget is spent locally. The Force has proactively made great advances in this space. In 2018 54% of the Force's spend was within the West Midlands. As is evidenced within the procurement agenda item this month, for the most recent period 58% of Force spend was within the West Midlands. An increased spend of 4%, which equates to over £4.2million, has been locked into the West Midlands over the last year through the Force procuring locally.

A similar story can be seen with the Force's social value offering. In the first quarter of 2019 the Social Value Portal was launched. Previously the Force did not have a comprehensive set of metrics by which to evaluate the total social value of the services they were procuring. With the Social Value Portal, the Force will have measures. For every contract that exceeds £100k, 10% of the core evaluation will be measured on the social value offering.

With both of these pieces of work being performed by WMP's procurement, the OPCC is in open dialogue with the team to see how this work can be expanded over the coming year. Scoping needs to be performed to see how we get other public sector partners to adopt our approach.

In April the ONS released a survey asking for businesses to articulate how they are being affected by COVID-19. We encouraged businesses to feed into the ONS survey so we can get a good West Midlands and national picture of how businesses will be effected.

Our engagement plan will also encourage feedback from business support

organisations and networks on the specific needs of the sector and how they are responding with information to members themselves. Businesses Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce, Regional Fraud Forums, Federation of Small Business, as well as WMP officers in the Economic Crime Unit, ROCU, Digital PSCO's, and the Business Crime Partnership Coordinator will provide up to date data on the impact to inform policy.

Undoubtedly, the restrictions on employment and retail will impact on the self-employed, social enterprises, charities and those on low paid or zero hour contracts. The OPCC intends to ensure that information on government support for businesses, crowd funding, paying forward schemes and other sources of investment or loans is widely communicated. The PCC intends to design a more comprehensive engagement plan during the summer to ensure a more in depth engagement on the proposals for the 2021/22 precept.

15. We said:

We will work with the Force to adapt our approach to the Active Citizens Fund in response to the emergency and the recovery period.

16. We did:

The OPCC have developed a new [Community Initiatives Fund](#) for Q1 and Q2 20120/21 of £200,000, which will give West Midlands Police and partners the ability to respond to the emerging needs of the communities of the West Midlands. The new process for this period will be streamlined, with an expectation that the community still works with officers locally who will still need to endorse and give testimonials to support any applications. We are maintaining the democratic and community led element, but this process will be much more responsive, have complete oversight over the issues that are emerging, meanwhile ensuring that there is no duplication of activity..

We will review the process towards the end of Q2 to continue to respond to needs of the public as they emerge for the remainder of the financial year.

Meanwhile, liaison continues between the OPCC and the Force in respect of ongoing projects. Contact has and is being made with grant recipients, to assess the affect Covid-19 is having and to offer re-assurance that their funding is not being withdrawn if they intend to complete projects once the virus threat is over. Most ACF projects involve members of the community coming together, often through sporting activity or through delivering mentoring sessions in educational establishments, but this has not been possible since mid-March. A few have advised that they can continue in a very much reduced capacity, offering on-line and telephone support. This work is ongoing.

17. We said:

Pension forfeiture hearings will continue during the crisis.

18. We did:

The Commissioner has an important role in maintaining public trust and confidence, and this includes a robust response against the very small minority of police officers who are guilty of serious misconduct or crimes. We will maintain our list of Independent Chairs for police misconduct hearings and make sure that a Chair is available if required during the Coronavirus Crisis. We will also ensure that Police



Pension Forfeitures continue without disruption during this period. Pension forfeitures are used against ex police officers guilty of very serious crimes which bring the police service into disrepute. Most recently the Commissioner has forfeited part of the pension from an ex officer who has served a prison sentence for serious sexual offences. There is no place for criminal or dishonest behaviour in the police service, and the Commissioner will continue to take appropriate action during the crisis.

19. We said:

If capacity allows we may be able to release OPCC staff to support Force functions, including secretariat support to Force and partnership meetings.

20. We did:

We continue to review whether we can capacity in the OPCC to provide support to the Force in departments where they are short staffed. The Coronavirus crisis places exceptionally high workloads on the Force, and at the same time we know that unfortunately police officers and police staff may themselves become unwell and be absent from work. During this difficult period we will keep our own staffing needs under review and if there is any spare capacity we will release our own staff to support Force functions. This might include secretariat support to Force and partnership meetings, or help with finance, depending on staff availability and what is required to fill the gaps. We will monitor this continually, so that we contribute as much as we can to help the resilience of the Force.

21. We said:

During this crisis and the period of returning to business as usual, Internal Audit will continue to provide assurance that risk governance and control frameworks remain robust through its consultancy and assurance role.

22. We did:

There is an ongoing requirement to provide assurance around risk, governance and internal control arrangements of the Force and OPCC. Internal audit are concluding the planned audits from 2019/20 in order to deliver an annual audit opinion that is used to inform the Annual Governance Statement and work is ongoing on year end reporting arrangements.

The audit plan for 2020/21, approved by Senior Management Team and Joint Audit Committee during March 2020, just as this crisis unfolded and government restrictions were heightened, is starting to be progressed, with planning for specific activities underway. However, Internal Audit will now start to reflect on the risks the organisation is now facing, which are new and will inevitably need to be assessed over the following weeks and months. A revised audit plan will most likely evolve that will be agreed with Senior Management and the Joint Audit Committee.

Remaining mindful of ongoing demand and commitments of both the OPCC and Force, the internal audit will be kept under review throughout the year and Internal Audit will continue to be available to provide support and advice to the organisation, this might be sharing key skills, it might be auditing real time as the new controls are put in place to mitigate risks from new processes.

Internal Audit will continue to support the Joint Audit Committee in its scrutiny role and to maintain regular contact with the Chair as events evolve, plans change and the organisation becomes familiar with new ways of working.

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