

SURREY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

VICTIM AND WITNESS CARE UNIT UPDATE

30 JUNE 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 1 April 2019 Surrey Police opened its new Victim and Witness Care Unit, based out of Guildford Police Station. This professionally trained team has been established by the OPCC and Surrey Police to help victims of crime cope and, as far as possible, recover from their experience, putting in place care plans tailored to the needs of the individual.
- 1.2 All victims of crime in Surrey are automatically referred to the unit at the point a crime is reported, with subsequent contact based on an individual's need and vulnerability. Individuals can also self-refer themselves, or use the Unit's dedicated website (<https://victimandwitnesscare.org.uk>) to find local specialist support services.
- 1.3 The team is also able to provide support to witnesses of crime, linking with other criminal justice agencies, departments and charitable organisations in order to obtain information and ensure individuals are kept informed about the case and possible attendance at court.
- 1.4 At its heart, the new Victim and Witness Care Unit is designed to allow a truly end-to-end service for victims of crime, from initial contact through to court, and beyond if needed.
- 1.5 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Police and Crime Panel with an overview of the governance arrangements that sit around the Victim and Witness Care Unit and to share with the Panel the outcomes of recent formal reviews commissioned to ascertain Unit performance.

2. CURRENT GOVERNANCE & OVERSIGHT

- 3.1 The OPCC's Head of Policy and Commissioning chairs the bi-monthly Victim and Witness Care Unit Governance Board, which oversees and supports the continued development and performance of the Victim and Witness Care Unit, ensuring that the service is meeting the needs of victims and complying with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime.
- 3.2 The main duties of the Board include:
 - i. **Performance Monitoring:** Members of the Board have a responsibility for overseeing delivery of the service, including adherence to agreed performance measures, MoJ reporting requirements, VCOP and wider service user satisfaction.
 - ii. **Budget and Finance:** The Board provides high level oversight of the Unit's budget and acts as the forum through which any modifications - beyond those dealt with in the agreed Scheme of Consent (Appendix 1) between the Force and OPCC - are considered and agreed.

- iii. **Service Development:** The Board is responsible for considering and agreeing proposed changes to the Unit's operating model, including but not limited to triage methodology, staff numbers / allocation, co-location of specialist services and service expansion.
 - iv. **Risk Management:** The Board maintains a risk log of key issues facing delivery of the service and, where appropriate, works with the Departmental Head to mitigate and plan accordingly.
 - v. **Technical input and direction:** The Board provides technical advice and support to the Departmental Head, ensuring that the development of the Unit is sensitive to the wider operational and political context of Surrey Police and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner respectively.
- 3.3 As referenced above, the OPCC has agreed a formal Scheme of Consent with the Force, which sets out the relationship between the two organisations in relation to the delivery and funding of the new service.
- 3.4 The OPCC is also required to submit half-year returns to the Ministry of Justice, setting out expenditure against all local services – including the Victim and Witness Care Unit – and high level performance and service usage data.

FORMAL ASSESSMENTS

- 4.1 Being a new service and model of delivery, both the OPCC and Surrey Police have been eager to test the original business case's assumptions and to ensure that the intended benefits of the internal Unit are being realised.
- 4.2 Since launching, the Victim and Witness Care Unit has been subject to two formal review processes:
- An internal audit review of Surrey Police Victims Code compliance; and
 - An internal audit led post-implementation review
- 4.3 The findings of these two reviews are set out below.

Surrey Police Victims Code Compliance

- 4.4 This audit focused on the controls and processes in place in the newly opened Unit and reviewed the new arrangements for delivering the Victims Code. This included the download of data from Niche (the Force's incident recording system), the allocation of cases to staff, the different methods used to contact victims, and the allocation to case workers and volunteers, if required.
- 4.5 Whilst no significant failings were found, there were three areas auditors highlighted as having limited assurances in place. These were as follows:
1. Niche downloads, which include details of all crimes and victims within the last 24 hours, are expected each morning so that victims can be triaged, and attempts made to contact them within 24 hours in accordance with the Victim's Code. However, on the day of the audit visit the download was delayed until the afternoon. It was reported that this was happening on average once every week, which impacted on the Unit's performance and its ability to meet the first contact targets.
 2. The Unit reported that it could not currently obtain key performance data from the Niche system on an aggregated basis, including the distance travelled data required for the Ministry of Justice.

3. Priority victims should be contacted by phone within 24 hours of the Victim and Witness Support Unit being provided with details of the incident. Out of a sample of 25 priority incidents tested by auditors, 2 recorded contacts were outside of this window.
- 4.6 With reference to point one, the issue of delayed case transfers reflects a wider force issue concerning the stability of the data warehouse and therefore sit outside the remit of the Unit itself. However, alternative methods of case extraction have since been explored and the team is now able to extract details manually in the event of automatic data transfer failure. This was not possible under the former external contract. Management also carefully monitors staff caseloads to ensure adequate capacity remains available to expedite late referrals. The issue of data transfer remains an ongoing focus for the VAWCU Governance Board.
- 4.7 With reference to point two, this remains the biggest issue facing the VAWCU and is reflected in the Unit's Risk Management plan. Discussions are currently taking place with senior technical teams within the Force to ascertain whether mass extraction of data is possible. If it becomes apparent that extraction of performance data is not possible due to Niche limitations, a dedicated case management system will be explored. There is potentially some scope to migrate VAWCU staff to ECINS, for which the Force already has a licence. This system is used by some other forces operating an internal model. However, careful consideration will still need to be given to the operational impact of running multiple systems in parallel, and the potential loss of Officer in the Case (OIC) oversight that is afforded by usage of Niche. In the meantime, the Unit is relying on a dip sampling approach to provide the OPCC with the required performance information. As with 4.6, this issue remains a key focus of the VAWCU Governance Board.
- 4.8 With reference to point three, these cases were investigated to ascertain the reason for non-compliance. It was ultimately found that the non-compliance related to some initial cases handled by the Unit shortly after launch when the team was not yet at full staff capacity. These issues have now been addressed.

Post-implementation Review

- 4.9 This audit focussed on reviewing the intended benefits of an internally delivered VAWCU, as outlined in the original Business Case, and assessed whether there was evidence that where these can be measured, they have been achieved. Where intended benefits were not measurable, auditors gathered anecdotal and case evidence to assess whether service improvements had been made in line with intentions.
- 4.10 Whilst it was possible for auditors to complete the majority of the audit remotely with the support of the VAWCU, due to the Covid-19 pandemic there were limitations to some of the detailed testing and access to OICs. It was not therefore possible to complete testing as comprehensively as originally intended.
- 4.11 The Panel should also note that the findings of this review have not yet been formally published, and therefore this paper is providing a high level summary of the auditor's comments which may be subject to change. The full paper can be circulated to Panel members once published.

Business Case Intended Benefits	Post-implementation Review Findings
<p><i>“By remodelling this service to an internally delivered VCU, the OPCC will be able to use any liberated cash savings to deliver targeted support to those that need it most. Equally, it puts us in a better position to respond to emerging and evolving victim needs and crime types.”</i></p>	<p>There are no significant changes in the cost of the service since it transferred from an external contract to the VAWCU. However, it was noted that the expansion of some areas of support indicated that savings were being reinvested to better respond to emerging and evolving victim needs.</p>
<p><i>“An internal VCU allows a truly end-to-end service for victims of crime, from initial contact through to court process, reducing the risk of service fragmentation and minimising management costs. Surrey Police and OPCC will be clear on the service’s remit for supporting victims, ensuring that any internal unit will not be absorbing any of the responsibilities of an OIC. The onus will remain with the OIC to comply with all their legal obligations as per the Victims’ Code of Practice as is currently required.”</i></p>	<p>It was confirmed that an end-to-end service for victims of crime, from initial contact through to the court process was being provided by the V&WCU, in line with the original intentions set out in the business case.</p>
<p><i>“There is a real opportunity to build a team around the victim by bringing together key professionals under one roof, providing wraparound quality care and support.”</i></p>	<p>The V&WCU are based at Guildford Police Station, ensuring the unit are seen as one team, enabling team members to support each other and create a team culture. The PIR reported that feedback from the team members was positive, particularly in the relationships established with the OIC’s, formalised or on-the-job training, demonstrating the unit and key professionals were working together to drive improvement. It was also noted that team members felt a real sense of belonging and pride working in the V&WCU.</p>
<p><i>“An internally delivered VCU negates the need for any data transfer from force to provider, avoiding the risk of IT failure or of non-compliance with GDPR.”</i></p>	<p>Full testing was not possible, but based on available data it was felt that this benefit had most likely been achieved.</p>
<p><i>“A Surrey Police delivered service would have complete case information on the crime and victim, allowing staff to better tailor support and minimise the risk of danger to the victim.”</i></p>	<p>Full testing was not possible. However, based on feedback from the Unit’s team members, the Unit’s delivery of the end-to-end process and the use of Niche for recording and sharing case information, the PIR reported that there was</p>

	significant evidence that the systems were set up to achieve this.
<i>“Success will be measured by using the results of the Victim Satisfaction Survey which is currently undertaken by an external company and managed by the Performance and Consultation Team. Performance and Consultation are currently being liaised with to measure baseline satisfaction level in readiness for the when the new team goes live.”</i>	The Victim Satisfaction Survey is managed independently, by the Performance and Consultation Team. In April 2019, a new methodology was introduced for consulting with victims of crime through contact via a 'text message'. This is bringing benefits and driving improvement through reaching more victims of different crimes and providing a greater insight into the service through victims' comments. The results of the surveys are presented on a monthly basis to the OPCC Performance Meetings. As the methodology for assessing victim satisfaction has changed since the transfer to the V&WCU it is difficult to measure whether there are any significant changes, however, the results would indicate a rise in the satisfaction levels since the new methodology was introduced.
<i>“Other Forces that have implemented an internally delivered VCU have reported increased frontline understanding of the support available to victims. With the organisational barriers of an externally commissioned provider removed, the victim centred culture of the VCU was able to cascade through the wider culture of the Force.”</i>	Full testing (focus groups with officers) was not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, the use of and accessibility of Niche demonstrates improved access to information and understanding of individual cases for both the V&WCU and frontline officers. The feedback from team members and documented complaints and compliments suggest that collaborative working has promoted a good understanding amongst frontline officers of the support available to victims.
<i>“The provision of timely and accurate information, in parallel with support services if required, reduces anxiety, improves confidence and encourages victims to remain engaged with the criminal justice process. This will likely increase co-operation with police investigation and evidence, and reduce rates of non-attendance at court, enabling witnesses to give their best evidence in court (if required) resulting in greater efficiencies throughout the process and achieving justice by enabling the court process to proceed.”</i>	The monthly and annual figures of court attendance show levels remain consistent with the previous service provider (V&WCU – 89.6%, Victim Support – 90.9%) but exceed the national average attendance statistics (87.2%).
<i>The collaboration and transparency of</i>	There is evidence to confirm good

<p><i>the service between Surrey Police and OPCC will allow greater agility of service provision to meet priorities and changing needs, as well as opportunities to develop and build upon work already underway to embed specialists support within operational teams e.g. Domestic Abuse Advocate on North Division and WiSE workers within CSE teams.</i></p> <p>AND</p> <p><i>Potential for closer joint working with other local statutory service providers.</i></p>	<p>collaborative working between Surrey Police and the OPCC, through the establishment of a joint governance framework and the ongoing work to jointly resolve Niche reporting issues. Whilst it has not been possible to test how this works in practice with other statutory providers through checking a sample of cases, the feedback from members of the V&WCU and through compliments and complaints, indicate that good working relationships have been developed ensuring the victim is provided with appropriate support.</p>
<p><i>The internal unit will also provide a proactive function to contact victims of crime where concerns may be raised and offers multiple opportunities for victims to access support which is not currently afforded by the external contract.</i></p>	<p>It was felt that the approach to contact in the new VAWCU does indeed allow for multiple opportunities for engagement.</p>

- 4.12 The post-implementation review did also re-flag the previously identified issue around data extraction from Niche and the limitations this placed on accurately measuring some performance areas. As detailed in section 4.8, this remains an urgent priority for the OPCC.

5.0 Service Data & Qualitative Feedback

- 5.1 The table below shows the number of individuals contacted by the Unit since April 2019. Individuals are triaged based on individual need / vulnerability and crime-type. Those that are identified as being at greater risk or likely to require a higher level of support are contacted by telephone by a member of staff. All other victims are contacted by either SMS, letter or email, referring them to the Unit's website and inviting them to make contact by telephone if they require direct support.

	Enhanced	SMS	Letter/email	Total
April 2019	1442	4716	1362	7520
May 2019	1141	3822	1440	6403
June 2019	1995	5395	1735	9125
July 2019	2294	4174	1744	8212

August 2019	929	2773	976	4678
September 2019	706	2230	783	3719
October 2019	861	2474	866	4201
November 2019	698	2635	953	4286
December 2019	964	2440	822	4226
January 2020	1088	2469	821	4378
February 2020	654	2367	874	3895
March 2020	774	2301	784	3859
April 2020	1412	1233	367	3012
May 2020	1619	1486	442	3547
summary April 2019 - May 2020	16577	40515	13969	71061

- 5.2 To provide greater context around the work of the Unit, Panel members are invited to review Appendix 2, which sets out some short case studies and recent feedback provided by service users.

6. RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 That the Police and Crime Panel note the report.

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