



POLICE AND CRIME PANEL
4 February 2016

AGENDA ITEM NO:

HORIZON VICTIM AND WITNESS CARE UNIT

1. Introduction and Background

From April 2015 the PCC was given responsibility for commissioning services for victims of crime. Previously this was managed through a national contract between the Ministry of Justice and the charity 'Victim Support'. These arrangements were based initially on crime type rather than on the vulnerability of the victim.

Nationally PCCs have taken different approaches to commissioning services. In Wiltshire we have created a model with three elements:

- Horizon – Police led victim and witness care unit
- Victim Support – practical and emotional help for victims
- Specialist Services – support for specialist support providers, particularly sexual and domestic violence/abuse.

The Horizon Victim and Witness Care unit is jointly funded by the PCC and Wiltshire Police. Horizon supports the local delivery of the National Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (VCOP) which was updated in November 2015.

2. Work of Horizon

Horizon was created by expanding the existing Witness Care Unit to include additional responsibility for Victim Care. The unit has 1 supervisor, 13 liaison officers, and 2 administrative assistants.

Response officers and the Force Contact Centre (FCC) carry out an assessment of all victims of personal crime. Those that are entitled to 'enhanced services' under VCOP are considered to be

- Vulnerable;
- Intimidated;
- Persistently targeted; or
- Victims of serious crime

and are referred immediately into Horizon. Horizon staff also search for serious crime cases daily on the NICHE system. Victims are then allocated a single named member of staff who will remain their point of contact throughout their journey in the criminal justice system. Staff contact the victim, carry out a more detailed needs assessment and refer victims on to support services as required. Horizon team members are fully trained in both the victim and witness care process.

Victims of crime can be referred to Horizon by any officers dealing with their case at any stage should they become vulnerable or request support.

All other victims of personal crime receive a letter outlining support available to them and can self refer into Horizon for advice and support. Information is also available via the Horizon website.

3. Progress – 6 months April to October 2015

- Referrals into Horizon from May – October 2015 were 1053. This equates to an average of 175 each month. During the same time period there were 13,161 personal crimes recorded in Wiltshire. This equates to 8% of personal crime referred to Horizon. This is considerably lower than the estimated 25%-30% projection during the planning phase.
- One of the reasons for the lower numbers is because it was decided that Horizon would not initially contact victims of domestic abuse because of the complex risk factors involved in those cases. This has now been reviewed.
- Team members have found that the majority of victims appreciate being contacted by the team and need no additional support beyond the first or a follow up 'phone call.
- In the 6 month period, Horizon referred 186 victims to Victim Support, equating to approximately 5-8 referrals per week. Victim Support can provide practical and emotional support to victims, and visit them at home if necessary. Victim support staff sit within the Horizon unit on a rota basis to enable closer working relationships.
- Horizon also works alongside officers to keep victims updated on the progress of their case, and can task neighbourhood policing teams to re-visit vulnerable victims.
- Horizon coordinate victims and witnesses on approximately 850-900 court cases at all times. This involves between 9000-10000 non-civilian/civilian victims and witnesses.
- Support for victims and witnesses is essential in helping individuals to cope with, and recover from the impact of crime, and in helping them to take part in criminal justice processes.
- Horizon is currently funded by both the OPCC and Wiltshire Police. The Police Witness Care budget was retained within the unit. Additional cost is met by the Police £100k and the OPCC £125k per year.
- A workshop led by Business Improvement was held in December to identify the performance reports required to evidence what the team is achieving.
- The process for referring victims of sexual offences to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) has improved. Prior to Horizon, not all sexual offence victims were informed and given the opportunity of support from the SARC. Horizon now ensures every victim of any sexual offence is given the opportunity to be referred to the SARC. This is one of the most significant impacts Horizon has made on the quality of service provided to victims.

4. Next Steps

- Continue to provide the *new* Horizon staff with experience on the coordination and needs of court victims and witnesses, especially on large/complex cases, and align expertise with former WCU colleagues.
- Report on the number of referrals from Horizon to SARC. There appears to be peaks/troughs in cases.
- Continue to research support services available to victims with specialised needs.
- Continue to gather feedback from victims on their experience of support provided.
- From January 2016 standard risk domestic abuse victims in Wiltshire are being contacted by Horizon. A process has been designed in consultation with Wiltshire Council, Wiltshire Police and the specialist DA support service SPLITZ. Victims are contacted to raise awareness of support available and individuals can be referred to SPLITZ with their consent. This process will be regularly reviewed and results shared with partners in Swindon.
- We are currently reviewing support for victims of Fraud and working with the national Action Fraud team and local officers to see how Horizon can best support local victims.
- Prior to April 2015 a high proportion of victims referred to victim support were victims of Burglary. Burglary is not a crime included in the VCOP 'enhanced services' category. We are reviewing whether all victims of burglary should be referred to Horizon.
- It is recognised that some of the most vulnerable victims reporting to the Police are victims of anti-social behaviour. Further work is required to understand how Horizon could support ASB victims.
- We are reviewing how the Horizon unit will support the delivery of the STOP project in local community support for victims.
- The Strategic Alliance with Avon and Somerset (ASC) is playing a key role in shaping the way in which the Force will operate in future. ASC's 'Lighthouse' is similar to Horizon and staff have met with their counterparts in Lighthouse to understand what work they do and join up on processes.
- Review the imminent Niche upgrade and identify whether this improves the way in which the data can be analysed in relation to VCOP and Horizon performance.

Pam Gough
Policy & Community Area/Locality Lead

Background / Supporting Papers: None