

MOPAC MPS Oversight Board

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Witness Care

Report by: Sara Lewis

1. Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on Witness Care within the MPS and the CPS Victim Liaison Units and to note progress in relation to a Victim Care Hub.

2. Recommendations – that the Oversight Board:

- a) Note the current provision of Victim and Witness Care post charge in London; and
- b) Note the proposal to introduce a Victim Care Hub

3. Witness Care Units and Victim Liaison Units

- 3.1. The MPS introduced Witness Care Units (WCUs) in 2003 to address the issue of victims and witnesses not being engaged or supported through the Criminal Justice System and to improve their attendance at Trials.
- 3.2. In 2005 the national No Witness, No Justice project introduced additional enhancements in the form of Minimum Requirements which were underpinned by the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime which was introduced in 2006. One of these minimum requirements included co-location of CPS staff within WCUs.
- 3.3. At this point the MPS had 33 WCUs based on each Borough. The CPS embedded 1 member of staff per WCU who performed the same role as the MPS Witness Care Officers and provided a conduit back to the CPS office for enquiries to be expedited.

- 3.4. In 2010/2011 in light of the Comprehensive Spending review both the MPS and CPS reviewed our approach to our delivery of services and adopted a more streamlined approach to victim and witness care.
- 3.5. This involved the MPS restructuring to 6 Witness Care Units and the CPS withdrawing their staff from the units and providing Single Points of Contact from within their offices.
- 3.6. The MPS WCUs also adopted the CPS Witness Management System to record and note contact and issues with victims or witnesses. This system allowed for two way communication with the CPS to enable queries to be dealt with expeditiously.
- 3.7. The WCUs continue to undertake needs assessments of victims and witnesses and update them on the progress of their case in line with the Victims Code of Practice including notifying them of any adverse outcomes in their case.
- 3.8. The CPS Victim Liaison Unit (VLU) are responsible for informing victims of decisions to stop a case or significantly change charges. They are a dedicated point of contact for victims who want further information about decisions taken. The VLU also provides information on how victims can request a review or make a complaint.
- 3.9. Whilst the WCU will inform victims of adverse outcomes they will refer victims to the VLU for detailed explanations therefore providing a more complete service.

4. Victim Care Hubs

- 4.1. In January 2020 MOPAC commissioned Gate One and Crest Advisory to conduct a feasibility study on the role of an integrated Victim Care Hub for London.
- 4.2. This was a twelve week Programme of work whereby senior stakeholders were interviewed and an accelerated Victim Care Hub event took place in February to examine options and hear from other police areas on work they were undertaking.
- 4.3. A final report was produced in April which set out several options:

Option 1: Independent Information and Support Hub

- Provide a victim advocate and coordination service for all victims of crime in London, independent from the CJS process, enabling victims to feel safe and supported, and enabling CJS partners ensure VCoP compliance.

Option 2: LVWS+

- An extension of the current LVWS offering, with them being the owners of the end to end victim journey. This would necessitate higher volumes of victims accessing and taking up the service and support, with expanded pathways.

Option 3: Locality-based Hub

- A distributed network of within community multi-functional drop-in hubs, to raise community awareness and provide victims with information and guidance at any point in their journey.

Option 4: CJS Information Hub

- A hub that is within the CJS, providing end to end updates and information to victims throughout their CJS journey.

Option 5: Digital-only Hub

- Provides a single place for all relevant information for victims of crime in London, with the ability to initiate personalized support pathways, and create proactive alerts to CJS partners in fulfilling VCoP requirements.

- 4.4. The MPS is committed to working with MOPAC and the Victims' Commissioner to assess the feasibility of these options to ensure more enhanced support to victims and witnesses.
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