

Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub

A support service offered to all victims and witnesses of any type of crime living in Cambridgeshire.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Independently evaluated
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Adults at risk Criminal justice
Organisation	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
HMICFRS report	PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Cambridgeshire Constabulary
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Key details

Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Health services Local authority Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2016
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities Disability General public LGBT+ Race/ethnicity Victims Women

Aim

The aim of the Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub is to:

- provide telephone or face-to-face support for all victims of crime living in Cambridgeshire
- provide an assessment of needs with an onward referral and signposting to support services

- provide co-ordinated support for victim and witnesses throughout their experience with the criminal justice system

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub are to:

- improve the health and wellbeing of victims and witnesses
- improve the support offered to victims and witnesses
- increase victims and witnesses' safety

Description

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) worked with Cambridgeshire Constabulary to establish a police-led victim and witness hub.

Planning process

The planning process for the hub involved conducting a victim needs assessment and a victim mapping event to look at local sources of support services. The Cambridgeshire Criminal Justice Board Victim and Witness Sub-Group provided multi-agency governance and oversight.

The PCC office was also part of a group of 'early adopters' who were moving to a locally commissioned victim support services model. A national working group, led by the Ministry of Justice ensured learning was shared, as each area moved to a new delivery model. This included resolving issues such as if person became a victim of crime in another county, their details would be sent to the Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub.

As an early adopter Cambridgeshire Constabulary received mobilisation funding which was used to set up a multi-disciplinary steering group to support the creation of the victim and witness hub. The steering group included representation from:

- human resources (HR)
- IT
- estates team
- communication team

- operational police officers from different workstreams

The steering group was led by a detective superintendent, who appointed a hub manager (police staff role) to lead on the recruitment process of staffing the hub. A delivery manager was also appointed, who was responsible for the development of training packages and resources.

Implementation

In November 2014 the Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub was launched, providing support to victim and witnesses of all crime types. This evolved two years later when the Witness Care Unit was merged to become a single service providing free, confidential, emotional, and practical support to victims and witnesses of crime.

There are two referral routes into the hub: self-referral and an automated referral as a result of an initial victim needs assessment carried out when a crime is reported to the police. The data is transferred from Athena (force management system) into a bespoke case management system, which can only be accessed by hub staff. Hub supervisors then triage the victims and witnesses and allocate them to a designated victim and witness care co-ordinator.

The co-ordinators attempt to contact the victims and witnesses by phone at three different times to complete a detailed victims needs assessment. The assessment determines the support required and onward referrals or signposting for specialist service(s). Victims who decline to receive support are sent a letter informing them about support services – where it is safe to do so. The cases for victims of high and medium risk domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and sexual offences are automatically closed under a local protocol. They are referred into local specialist services by police officers through set processes.

The hub is victim-led, based on a detailed assessment of need with onward referral and signposting of services. This is available from the time of the offence, through any police investigation or court proceedings and beyond. Although predominantly telephone based, the hub does extend to outreach where appropriate, which is facilitated by a team of volunteers and specialists. The service also accepts self-referrals from victims of crime whether they have reported to police or not.

Staffing and funding

- head of service

- delivery manager – duties include line management responsibilities of the supervisors, specialist co-ordinators and volunteers
- three supervisors – duties include line management responsibility for victim and witness care co-ordinators and business support assistants
- 17 victim and witness care co-ordinators – are single point of contact for both victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process
- specialist victim and witness care co-ordinators for:
 - restorative justice
 - serious violence
 - children and young people
 - mental health support
- three business support assistants – duties include general administration and managing an anticipated guilty plea (GAP) caseload
- ten volunteers – duties include telephone and outreach support

The Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub receives £500,000 a year from the PCC, through the Ministry of Justice core victim services grant and Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Evaluation

An [evaluation](#) conducted by Tonic Consultancy, based on a specification developed by the PCC, was published in December 2023.

The evaluation looked at three areas:

- service delivery – which included whether it was meeting the PCC's specification
- staff management – which focused on staff continued professional development (CPD), wellbeing and caseloads
- information management and service improvements – such as whether the independent case management system was fit for purpose, the complaints policy and feedback from the service

Tonic Consultancy carried out desk-based research on other models of support, interviewed staff and stakeholders and observed staff carrying out their roles. This was carried out through a series of site visits, one-to-ones, group focus groups and virtual interviews via Teams.

The review also conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis to guide future recommendations.

Tonic Consultancy is conducting a follow up review in Spring 2026, to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.

Overall impact

During April 2023 to April 2024, of the 6,377 victims received support from the hub:

- 5,770 felt better informed and empowered to act
- 1,163 identified improvements to their health and wellbeing
- 1,331 felt that they were better able to cope and recover with aspects of everyday life
- 1,081 advised of increased feelings of safety

Feedback from those who access the service, suggests that the intervention leads to sustainable engagement from victims and witnesses in the county. Referrals are accessed through Athena within hours of an investigation being raised. The aim is to make initial contact within 48 hours of the hub receiving the referral. Currently 64.5% of victims and witnesses receive initial contact in within 24 hours and 30.2% within 48 hours.

Learning

What went well

- the Cambridgeshire victim and witness hub is compliant with the Victims' Code of Practice
- the hub provides an effective referral pathway for victims and witnesses to receive support
- the hub is triaging victims and witnesses to ensure they receive the appropriate support

Challenges and recommendations

- the 'cost of living' crisis is affecting the retention of volunteers

- it is important to increase service feedback and incorporate the voice of the victim in the future service design
- a consideration should be given to the introduction of a self-service support offer via the force's website

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