

## Assurance Meeting to Discuss Digital Forensics – Meeting Notes

Date: Tuesday 13 June 2017  
Chair: John Campion  
Note taker: Jackie Irvin, Policy Officer  
Venue: Hindlip Hall Worcestershire

	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Capacity:</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	John Campion	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
	Anthony Bangham	Chief Constable (CC)
	Amanda Blakeman	Assistant Chief Constable Local Policing (ACC)
	Natasha Noorbakhsh	Policy Officer

### Purpose

The PCC opened the meeting by explaining that it was to be a structured conversation rather than a formal holding to account session and was the first part of a longer conversation.

### 1. The Future

**PCC: The MASS review published in 2016 had proposed a hub and spoke service model along with a number of recommendations. Does the force have a costed action plan of how the recommendations are to be implemented?**

Response:

- There is no costed plan around all the recommendations. Some recommendations have been taken up and progressed, but in light of increasing demands there does need to be a costed plan, built into the financial planning cycle.
- A number of the recommendations were rejected. The unit were keen to completely redesign the business model for the longer terms, but this meant they weren't addressing the immediate short term requirements.
- Nationally there is a desire to have a commissioned model, but this approach is some way off.

**PCC: As the national approach is in the medium to long term what is being done to protect people from harm now?**

Response:

- Whilst there is not a cohesive plan work has been done and the CC is confident that the critical issues have been addressed and people are not being put at risk. The volume of investigations remains high, but risk assessments and triaging are in place to manage this.

**PCC: What has changed as a result of digital kiosks being introduced?**

Response:

- The kiosks have provided a resource that was wanted but aren't being fully utilised.
- Performance hasn't fundamentally changed as a result of the introduction of the kiosks and there remains high demands on forensic services.
- The demands of the CPS and other agencies is increasing the workload and there is a need to challenge some of these demands.
- The head of the service is very well regarded in the field but service demands mean he is totally involved in managing the now and not able to focus on the medium to longer term. It will be a priority for the new Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) for Protective Services to develop the service for the longer term.

**PCC: Is the CC confident that the current ICT support function is sufficient and can be improved?**

Response:

- The CC is not confident in the IT systems currently in use, for example extraction of data is difficult and does not marry up with other systems. As there is no apparent national solution in the pipeline, something else needs to be put in place.
- The CC is confident that the department is coping and able to fix the daily problems with the ICT support they get, but there is a need to consider a longer term vision.

**PCC: The ISO accreditation requirements for digital forensics is a challenge for all forces what reassurance can the CC give that plans are in place to attain the various stages of accreditation?**

Response:

- The deadline for accreditation was initially October 17 and all forces are working towards it, however nationally it recognised that no force will be meet the deadline.
- The force should meet the deadline for the mobile data accreditation element and a plan is in place for the full accreditation.
- West Mercia is in a good position and has been well connected into the national programme, however there are challenges and risks, one of which is the requirement for staff to maintain their accreditation.

**PCC: It is estimated that ISO accreditation will add an additional 20% of time to each case submitted. What is the likely impact on volumes when levels are already high?**

Response:

- There will be an initial impact but it is anticipated that it will level out over time.

**PCC: What reassurance can the CC give that the investment in triage technology is worth it and that management processes are robust enough to ensure officers and staff are using it?**

Response:

- There has been a plan for the numbers needed and training. More needs to be done to ensure people are using it properly before developing it further.
- Management processes need to be more effective.

## **2. Performance management**

**PCC: Accepting that IT may be a barrier is the CC confident that the department has sufficiently robust performance management systems in place?**

Response:

- Forensics performance is not a feature at the weekly management meetings or at the local Superintendents meeting, but it should be. There needs to be a more sophisticated system around it.
- Performance management needs to be addressed now and this is something the new ACC will pick up.

**PCC: Will any future development of a performance management system provide a more rounded picture, for example the assessment of outcomes for victims?**

Response:

- Yes it will be important to look at different activities and overlay them so that the cumulative impact can be seen. This will not be easy to do but will help to develop what the business needs are.

**PCC: A number of West Mercia's *most similar forces* have seen reductions in submissions, whereas West Mercia's have continued to increase across all categories. Does the force understand the drivers for the increasing demand?**

Response:

- Some forces are making different risk based decisions. In West Mercia level 1 lower risk volume crimes and image collection is done locally with the kiosks, but all higher risk, level 2 crime is managed centrally. Elsewhere some forces are using kiosks for level 2 work.
- The force needs to research what is done elsewhere and take a more innovative approach so that with the help and support of other safeguarding agencies it can be more risk prone.

## **3. Risk management**

**PCC: What reassurance can the CC give that activity is prioritised and risks managed?**

Response:

- Risk analysis is applied to a number of factors in each case to determine the most appropriate priority level.
- Around 6% of cases are turned around within the day because an immediate risk has been identified, these are the highest risk cases.
- Serious cases can be closed and then re-opened on the IT system for example because the CPS has asked for further information. This will then show case as overdue when it is not.
- The force has not changed its risk thresholds for some time, but is aware of another force which has reviewed its response to level 2 risk through mapping expectations around safeguarding and now has service level agreements in place in relation to timeliness. The ACC will be asked to look at this.

**PCC: Anecdotal feedback to the PCC from frontline officers is that they aren't getting a good service from the digital forensics unit. What are chief officers doing to build confidence?**

Response:

- Previously forensic services had always been the number one topic raised at CC forum meetings, but in the last 12 to 18 months this has reduced. Officers do recognise that the kiosks can reduce delays but need to be more proactive in using them with less reliance on certain staff. More communications are needed to ensure kiosks are being used and stronger local ownership is developed.

#### **4. Resources and capability**

**PCC: Can the CC provide reassurance that the investment made is going to maximise the use of kiosks?**

Response

- Currently the figures show the kiosks are mostly used between 9 – 4 and the bulk of the work is being undertaken by a small group of people. This needs to change with a move towards a 24/7 service and the 130 people trained all actively using their training and accreditation skills.
- Those people trained in using the kiosks aren't managed by the forensics department and it is important that their own supervisors are managing them in this respect.

**PCC: Both now and the medium to longer term is the balance between specialists and generalists right?**

Response:

- The balance isn't right now and too many cases are coming into the centre. Most of the work is local volume crime and should be dealt with locally. A different risk based approach to level 2 cases, may enable those currently trained at level 1 to do more.

#### **Summary of actions**

The following actions were agreed in response to the discussion.

- The PCC will share his research findings with the CC.

- The new ACC will be tasked with addressing issues discussed during the meeting
- A progress report will be brought to the monthly holding to account meeting in August.