

RECORD OF DECISION

TITLE: North Worcestershire Achieving Best Evidence Suite

Ref: PCC/D/2021/19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Appropriate accommodation is required for the interviewing of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, accessible to every part of the Force area. Such facilities are known as Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) suites.

Following the forced closure of Kennedy House and imminent closure of the Birches, two ABE suites in North Worcestershire, new arrangements are required in the area.

An exhaustive search was undertaken in conjunction with the West Mercia Police Investigative Skills Team to find an appropriate alternative in the north of Worcestershire. After considering several different options in the Redditch and Bromsgrove area, a most suitable property, subject to works, has been identified and is the subject of this proposal. The facility will have appropriate interview rooms for Children, teenagers and adults, each styled appropriately to make them feel at ease and achieve best evidence. The rooms are to be sound proofed so no other users can hear what is going on and two monitoring suites will be constructed.

The proposed lease is for 20 years with 5 year reviews and a starting rent of £7,500 per annum. If the facility proves to be successful in terms of an enhanced and seamless approach to victim, survivor and witness care there is the option to purchase it.

PROPOSAL

That set up costs and lease of new ABE suite in Redditch are approved.

**APPROVAL OF
West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner**

I hereby approve the above proposal.

Signed



PART 1 – NON-CONFIDENTIAL/EXEMPT FACTS AND FIGURES

SUPPORTING REPORT

1. Appropriate accommodation is required for the interviewing of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, accessible to every part of the Force area. Such facilities are known as Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) suites
2. The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced a range of Special Measures that can be used to facilitate the gathering and giving of evidence by vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. The Special Measures relevant to this proposal that are available to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses with the agreement of the court are:
 - o The use of live TV link (Section 24); and
 - o The use of video recorded interviews as evidence-in-chief (Section 27).
3. These measures are delivered through ABE suites. If these are not conducted due to unavailability or inaccessibility of interview suites then those that should be entitled to this special measure may not receive it and this may require justification in court
4. Following the forced closure of Kennedy House and imminent closure of The Birches, two ABE suites in North Worcestershire, new arrangements are required in the area.
5. Kennedy House was forced to close in 2018 once the landlord (WCC) decided to close the site. A temporary facility was erected in a former police house in Kidderminster. This is not ideal as vulnerable witnesses may feel intimidated by attending a Police Station site and public transport links are questionable.
6. The Birches is also a tenanted facility on a site owned by Worcestershire Children First who wish to occupy the site as a whole and have given notice for the Police to quit
7. An exhaustive search was undertaken in conjunction with the Investigative Skills Team Leader of West Mercia Police to find an appropriate alternative in the Redditch area. After several different viewings of accommodation in the Redditch and Bromsgrove area, the most suitable property, subject to works, has been identified.
8. The proposed property is a single storey premises that has been previously used as a children's nursery and is currently vacant. Though the property dates from the 1960s, after the proposed redevelopment it will provide a long term ABE centre for the north of Worcestershire
9. This facility will have appropriate interview rooms for children, teenagers and adults, each styled appropriately to make them feel at ease and achieve best evidence. The rooms are to be sound proofed so no other users can hear what is going on and two monitoring suites will be constructed.
10. The lease with the landlord, WCC is for 20 years with 5 year reviews and a starting rent of £7,500 per annum. It has already been verbally discussed

that if the facility proves to be successful in terms of an enhanced and seamless approach to victim, survivor and witness care there is the option to purchase this facility.

11. In 2019, 380 interviews were recorded in the books at Kennedy House and The Birches, meaning more than one day. This facility with its three interview rooms that will be able to cope in a modern and (following refurbishment) purpose built facility designed to enable all the special measures referred to under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

This decision supports the following element(s) of the Safer West Mercia Plan

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Putting Victims and Survivors First | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building a More Secure West Mercia |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reforming West Mercia | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reassuring West Mercia's Communities |

The decision supports all of the above listed objective(s) through the following:

An enhanced and seamless approach to victim, survivor and witness care which will include:

- An inclusive approach to commissioned services where all victims, survivors and witness are kept informed and receive tailored support
- A seamless pathway of commissioned activity from my office, dovetailing where possible into existing provision from partner agencies increasing victim confidence
- Achieving the right outcome for the victim and supporting more cases through the criminal justice system.

This would also be in accordance with the Police and Crime Commissioner's Victims Charter

All of this is supported with this facility and provide reassurance to the most vulnerable of the population. Such a facility will give them a voice and an environment appropriate to their needs and thus helping to make West Mercia a more secure environment.

FINANCIAL COMMENTS

The cost of works required to the property is £174,779.10 with professional and legal fees being £11,643. The total estimated set up cost and sum requested is £186,422.10 for a 20 year lease with the option to own the freehold.

TREASURER COMMENTS

Provision of £539,000 was made in the capital programme in 2021/22 to fund the relocation of Safer Neighbourhood Teams. The Head of Estates has confirmed that the capital costs of this scheme will be met from this budget. The revenue costs will be met from existing Estates budgets.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

By virtue of schedule 11, paragraph 14 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 the Police and Crime Commissioner may do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the functions of commissioner. That includes entering into contracts and other agreements (whether legally binding or not) and acquiring and disposing of property (including land).

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information in this form is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI Act) and other legislation. Part 1 of this form will be made available on the West Mercia Commissioner's website. Any facts and advice that should not be made automatically available on request are not included in Part 1 but instead in a separate Part 2 report.

OFFICER APPROVAL

Chief Executive Officer

Signature *A. Cropper* Date *11th May 2021*