

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2019

Report to: the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

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1.0 Purpose of Report

The presentation seeks to brief the PFCC on the support that SCD provides to the force in terms of the investigation of fraud since the decision to centralise the investigation of all fraud packages from NFIB within SCD, and to create additional teams to deal with the demand.

The presentation gives an overview of the national and local position in terms of fraud and cybercrime, and outlines some examples of recent investigations linked to vulnerable victims.

2.0 Recommendations

The presentation is for the Board to note.

3.0 Executive Summary

The presentation outlines how fraud offences, and the financial cost of fraud, continue to rise at both a national and county level. Fraud remains significantly under reported when comparing the data from Action Fraud to the data obtained by the National Crime Survey, which estimates fraud makes up around 33% of all crime.

The presentation gives an overview of the new fraud investigation structures and the roles of the various teams. It outlines how Essex Police ensures that all victims whose packages are sent for investigation from NFIB receive as a minimum a desk based investigation and crime prevention advice, which is contrary to make forces who triage out a high percentage of the packages allocated.

Following a recent post implementation review conducting after a year of the new model being live, the presentation outlines the highlights of that report. The PIR concludes the new model has improved and professionalised the way the force investigates fraud, and how the time taken to investigate volume offences has improved when compared to when LPT and CID were investigating these cases.

Some recent examples of successful cases involving vulnerable victims are included to highlight a sample of the work the team have completed, and highlight some of the challenges of such cases. The presentation concludes with some of the future risks in this area.

4.0 Introduction/Background

This presentation was given the Chief Officer Group ahead of the forthcoming Synergy meeting. The Chief Constable requested that the presentation be given to the Board to highlight the work in this area to the PFCC.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

Is outlined in detail in the presentation.

Fraud reports have risen by 11% to 21,227 victims over 2018/19. In the same period victim losses have risen by 41.2% up to £46.7m.

83% of all fraud in Essex is cyber enabled.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

The PIT outlines how current staffing is sufficient for current volume. However, with fraud and cyber expected to rise then resourcing will need to be subject of periodic review.

6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

This presentation is relevant to Priorities 5 and 6 on the Police and Crime Plan.

The Economic Crime Team plays a significant role in taking assets off of organised criminals, as well as securing convictions against OCG members involved in level two frauds such as boiler rooms.

The Economic Crime Unit is involved in a wide array of activities under the 4P plan to ensure that vulnerable victims are supported. These include participation in the Banking Protocol, growing Op Signature which supports vulnerable victims through partnership work, and working with the private and charitable sector to undertake a wide range of initiative and provide crime prevention advice to reduce the risk of people becoming victims of fraud and cybercrime.

6.2 Demand

Provide information on how this work supports/links to the PA Consulting Demand Analysis Report (if relevant). – N/A

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

HMIC recently published details of a thematic inspection for fraud. A number of recommendations were made but the majority were for the Home Office or City of London Police as the lead force for Economic Crime.

The 5 areas of improvement and 2 recommendations for forces, all of which have been recorded on the action tracker and work is at an advance stage to resolve them, with two having already been closed.

6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

N/A

6.5 Health and Safety Implications

N/A

7.0 Consultation/Engagement

Presentation given to Chief Officer Group on 3rd July and feedback noted.

Consultation with the Strategic Change Department who completed the PIR.

8.0 Actions for Improvement

AFI 1 - Improve the way their force uses the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau “monthly victim lists” to identify and support vulnerable victims and others who require additional support.

EP utilise the victim list to contact every victim from Essex to highlight the Essex Police website and the fraud prevention elements within it. This has seen a 500% rise in traffic too this area of the site.

EP are building on the current use of the NFIB victims list whereby a version of Op Signature has been delivered with using staff from Economic Crime, Special Constables and Volunteers to conduct visits to the most vulnerable victims, by recruiting three dedicated Op Signature co-ordinators.

These new posts will be aligned with the local policing areas and allow a more localised delivery of Op Signature and save a rise in the number of visits which can be delivered.

The job description has been drafted and scored, and the force are finalising the operating model of the new process ahead of advertising and recruiting to fill the new positions.

AFI 2 - Ensure their forces improve the identification and mapping of organised crime groups in which the principal criminality is fraud.

EP has a mature process for ensuring OCGs where the principle offence is fraud are mapped and scored. All staff in the economic crime command are aware of their responsibilities in this area and a significant amount of training has been completed.

Additional governance layers are established whereby each complex fraud job will be taken to tasking for commissioning and the chair will raise the issue of OCG mapping if it hasn't already been considered. The bi-annual Star Chamber process, where all live cases are reviewed by the ACC with the Head of Department also provides a further backstop to ensure this is picked up.

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AFI 3 - Ensure that fraudsters are included among those considered for serious organised crime “prevent” tactics, including by local strategic partnership boards and through integrated offender management processes.

EP developed two Cyber Prevent & Protect posts in 2017 as growth posts to ensure they were meeting the forces regional and national obligations as part of the Protect strategy.

The economic crime command has strong links with a range of partners and regularly undertakes crime prevention activities across the county.

The next phase is that additional Prevent posts are being created under the SCD business case which will see a dedicated Fraud Protect officer. The JD has been drafted and recruitment is ongoing.

In terms of IOM further work is needed to align fraud with the current processes.

AFI 4 - Increase their force's use of ancillary orders against fraudsters.

EP has completed a significant amount of training across the disciplines in Economic Crime regarding the range of ancillary orders. As such there has been a significant growth in the number of orders, not only orders under POCA but also SCPO.

The starting position for all newly commissioned cases is that ancillary orders should be considered by the OIC as part of the investigative strategy. The bi-annual Star Chamber process ensures that the Head of Department is held to account regarding this process.

Given the reluctance of the Judiciary to grant some of the range of ancillary orders this is captured in the weekly reporting data which outlines the rate of applications to successful orders so it can be raised with the CPS and other partners to help ensure a partnership approach to offender management.

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AFI 5 - Ensure their force complies with the victims' code of practice when investigating fraud.

EP has instilled in its investigators the importance of compliance with the Victims Code, especially in the area of fraud whereby not all cases can be investigated.

Under the current model all NFIB packages received are subject to a desk based investigation as a minimum whereby the victim will be contacted directly to gather additional information from the initial report. From these some of then closed as not having viable lines of enquiry. All victims of such cases are updated of this fact and given crime prevention advice.

There has been a sustained drive across the command to ensure that the Victims Code is complied with. The DCI reviews the weekly data and identifies gaps where Victim Contact failures are reported and as required the respective teams and supervisors are challenged.

Overall the VCC compliance rate is very high, currently sitting at 98%.

Due to the fact that some of the larger cases investigated can have a high number of victims it has been important to show elements of innovation in ensure the Victims Code is complied with. OICs have when applicable have used email groups and bulk text messaging to ensure victims are update in line with the Victims Code.

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R1 - By 31 March 2020, the NPCC Coordinator for Economic Crime and chief constables should ensure that forces have processes in place to accurately and efficiently report fraud outcomes to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau.

EP currently compiles monthly returns to NFIB which are coordinated by Crime Bureau from update fraud Athena records.

EP are dependent on the City of London Police as lead force to deliver the next iteration of the NFIB portal which will allow live time update of records. In advance of the next phase going live 18 crime bureau staff have been trained to access the portal with plans to uplift this number.

R2 - By 30 September 2019, chief constables should publish their force's policy for responding to and investigating allegations of fraud (in relation to both calls for service and National Fraud Intelligence Bureau disseminations for enforcement).

The draft Post Implementation Review has been completed which included a review of the current policies and procedures. No recommendations were made in this area. The paper is going through internal governance for approval and subject to that there will be engagement with the Head of Media to agree the best approach to publishing the policies.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

With the growth in terms of Financial Investigators it is anticipated that performance in terms of the ability to pursue orders under the Proceeds of Crime Act will improve. The investment allows dedicated FI's for each LPA which ensures greater partnership working and improvement in knowledge in application of powers. This is evidence with the local Raptor and CPT teams.

The recruitment of dedicated staff to coordinate Op Signature across Essex will see a better level of service for victims of fraud who live in Essex even if their case is not suitable for investigation. This process will identify the most vulnerable and ensure they receive a bespoke partnership approach focusing on their needs and seeking to protect them from further offences.

This compliments the growth of more Prevent & Protect staff, with dedicated staff for fraud and cyber. This will result in greater opportunities for partnership work to focus across the 4P framework, acknowledging that Pursue alone is not the key to reducing fraud and supporting victims.