**Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2020**

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

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| **Title of Report:** | **Single Online Home Website Communications Plan** |
| **Classification of Paper:** | **Official** |
| **Agenda Number:** | **10.0** |
| **Chief Officer:** | **DCC Pippa Mills** |
| **Date Paper was Written:** | **10 December 2019** |
| **Version Number:** | **1** |
| **Report from:**  | **Essex Police** |
| **Date of Meeting:** | **20 December 2019** |
| **Author on behalf of Chief Officer:** | **Robin Punt** |
| **Date of Approval:** | **12 December 2019** |

1. **Purpose of Report**

The Performance and Resources Board requested a report on progress of the Single Online Home website (SOH) Communications Plan. SOH is a website platform, and the latest in a series of programmes to modernise policing in the County.

The migration to the SOH website platform was driven by a number of factors including the requirement to set a national standard for online Police interaction with the public and the fact that ongoing maintenance of a range of different force sites was becoming increasingly problematic, not least in respect of system compatibility.

This report addresses the issue of a Communications Plan to let:

1. Colleagues
2. Partner organisations
3. The public

 …know how to make the most of the new SOH website platform.

The report includes a brief update on the rollout of the SOH platform, which was implemented in Essex in September 2019.

1. **Recommendations**

The paper is for the board to note the work and activity in place to support a Communications Plan for Single Online Home.

1. **Executive Summary**

When fully-functioning, the new SOH website will offer an improved online point of contact with the public. This is part of a coordinated plan to divert customers from using the telephone as their primary method of contact with Essex Police.

The force will need to communicate the existence of this new functionality to fully see the benefits of the services being offered, and to achieve the aim of diverting traffic from telephone contact.

A full internal and external communications plan is required to inform all audiences of the benefits of the new SOH website. The plan is presented in this paper and will be implemented to coincide with the full proven functionality of the platform.

The recommended target date for this pro-active communication is the week commencing Monday 20th April 2020, to allow time for:

1. Resolution of outstanding issues by the national Digital Public Contact team who administer the SOH platform. Improvement of services relating to Crime Bureau / Resolution Centre and the Athena system.
2. Addition of key functionalities (eg social media plug-in to the Your Area section).
3. **Introduction/Background**

SOH is one of a number of national products being developed by the Digital Public Contact (DPC) Programme within the Digital Policing Portfolio (DPP). SOH will unify all police public-facing websites to use the same website hosting platform, Content Management System (CMS), shared services and shared content.

There are currently 17 forces live with SOH, with 20 forces scheduled to be live by March 31, 2020. All forces that wish to use SOH as their public-facing website should be live by March 2021.

Nationally, the Media & Communications Team is aware of only one force of the 17 using the new SOH platform has pro-actively communicated the existence of the new platform technology. That force is the Metropolitan Police Service, who designed and built the platform and who have been using it since Spring 2017.

The Essex and Kent SOH websites were developed simultaneously between January 2019 and August 2019. Both forces’ pre-existing websites had good functionality for online services compared to the majority of other forces. However, from a customer perspective, the existence of multiple force sites, all in different formats and with limited or no ability to report incidents that affected multiple force areas meant that a switch to a national agreed standard was necessary.

Advantages of adopting a national standard include consistency of user experiences for members of the public and economies of scale in respect of purchasing and expenditure. These advantages come at the cost (in the short term) of restrictions to customisation and a diminished ability to tailor the online user experience to meet the specific needs of local communities across the country.

The Essex SOH website has been live since September 4, 2019.

**5.0 Current Work and Performance**

The following Communications Plan has been developed with the aim of making a number of distinct audiences aware of the improved functionality of the Single Online Home (SOH) Essex Police website.

**Objectives**

1. Promote SOH to colleagues, partners and the public.
2. Raise public confidence and demonstrate how the force is modernising services in line with the Force Plan 2019 and the PFCC Police and Crime Plan.
3. Reduce demand arising from telephone enquiries to the Force Control Room (FCR) or to Local Policing Areas (LPAs) by promoting online reporting via SOH.

**Audiences**

1. Internal
2. Partners
3. The public

**Strategy**

*Internal*

* Ask staff to act as advocates for campaign via command teams
* Use intranet news to promote SOH opportunities and how staff can best use services e.g. being aware of local news, campaigns and crime prevention advice
* Ensure web address is incorporated on all staff emails (via IT)
* Training and guidance regarding appropriate use of social media aligned with ‘Your Area’

*Partners*

* Advance note via partnerships (use existing networks):
1. Rural engagement team
2. Business crime unit
3. Chamber of commerce
4. OPFCC communicators
5. Local and district councils
6. Business contacts held by Media and Communications Team and Force Engagement Team
* Encourage partner agencies via Essex Online Partnerships web group to share our content and ensure they incorporate relevant links to our content on their website.
* Create simple URLs for the most used pages partners link to. This will ensure links won’t break in the future e.g. Essex.police.uk/report rather than [www.essex.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime](http://www.essex.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime)

*The Public*

* New tagline – **Essex Police online. Here to help. 24 hours.**
* Relaunch the **‘Do It Online’** brand with hashtag **#Doitonline.**
* Create a Do it Online campaign page, which will be promoted on the homepage to reinforce the search boxes that currently sit at the top of the page

*(As per Section 4.0, we are restricted in our scope to set out content on the homepage and on other key pages due to the standardised format of the new SOH website.)*

* **Use social media campaign/graphics to promote the 5 existing icons (see graphic below) and services of the website, predominantly:**
* Report non-emergency crimes online
* Directs you to the correct agency to report non-policing incidents
* Advises victims on how to claim compensation
* Allows you to see the top reported crimes and crime hotspots in your area by postcode
* Allows you to compare the crime in your local area to wider parts of Essex
* Allows you to voice your policing concerns for your local area
* News and social media feeds from your local area
* Information about your local policing team, nearest police station and upcoming public meetings
* Relevant crime prevention advice for your area based on local stats
* Latest news, campaigns and appeals, wanted and brought to justice news
* How to join Essex Police and the opportunities available
* Incorporate web address and #Doitonline into communications including force logo, posters, leaflets, social media posts, merchandise, banners, free advertising space etc.
* Optimise Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) ranking and Wikipedia entry to make it easier for people to find us online.



**Implementation**

* Soft launch (recommended) approach via partnership workshop delivered by Internal Communications.
* Public awareness media activity to follow based on stories of success. We should be maximising opportunities to sell eventual benefits not the service itself. Basis public expectation is that these services should be available.
* Hard launch (not recommended): public expect these services already. Website is developmental and BAU.

**Scoring/evaluation**

Measure:

* Number of page views before and after compared to MSG forces who have adopted the SOH website platform.
* Increase in reports online (compared to MSG forces).
* Increase in take up of other online services (compared to MSG forces).
* Decrease in FCR calls (compared to MSG forces).
* Effects of SEO
* Links from partner sites.

**Interim update on activity since launch on September 4, 2019**

In the months following launch, public contact through SOH continues to increase due to the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) automated caller messaging which recommends that members of the public making calls to 101 use online services as an alternative. This is a positive development.

However, before proceeding with any significant pro-active communication about the new SOH website, it is important to ensure that the infrastructure that underpins the new site is working effectively.

**The graph below shows total service transactions for one week in October 2019 and one week in November 2019.**



The graph indicates that online services such as crime reporting and road traffic collision reporting continue to be used by the public since the launch of the new SOH website, at a rate of approximately 1,200 transactions per week. The Essex SOH website has more transactions than the other forces using the SOH platform, with the exception of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). (MPS is not shown as volumes are so great that the chart scale would be distorted.)

**Table showing a weekly snapshot of the type of form completed on the new SOH website by members of the public, Aug 2019 to Nov 2019.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Transactions** | **Team** | **Form type** |
| 572 | Crime Bureau | Crime reporting |
| 187 | Quality of Service | Contact/concerns/crime |
| 167 | RTC Investigations | Road traffic collisions |
| 62 | Firearms | Firearms |
| 49 | Driving Complaints | Road traffic offences |
| 40 | HR Recruitment | Recruitment contact |
| 17 | Foreign Nationals | Foreign nationals contact |
| 7 | Information Rights | Freedom of Information |
| 6 | Operational Planning | Events |
| 4 | DV Disclosure | Clare’s Law |
| 3 | Force Control Room | Hate crime/notice to film |
| 3 | CSI Colchester | Fingerprints |
| 1 | Press Office | Media contact |

The table above shows that the new SOH platform is being used by the public, and this is good news. However, the usage indicated in the table is not significantly greater than usage of the previous Essex Police website.

In addition, there is significant content which is not available on SOH, and this is having an impact on the public’s ability to find information and engage with the force.

As the new site has only 100 pages compared to over 500 on the previous website, some pages such as Coffee with Cops which included dates and times of public meetings were unavailable at launch in September 2019. Local (Essex Police) content which is unique to Essex is still being transferred over to the new site.

Work continues to upload pages which have not yet been switched-over, and the Coffee with Cops pages were made available to the public once again in late November. This work is being conducted by the Essex Police Media & Communications team.

The national DPC team are focused on implementing the transactional elements of the system such as crime reporting and road traffic collision reporting. The content and advice pages are considered by the DPC team to be a lower priority. Ironically, because Essex Police had good, detailed local content on the former Essex Police website, the implementation of the new SOH website has resulted in a more significant transition workstream than exists for other forces who have made the switch to SOH.

It should be remembered that SOH has good long-term potential due to its ability to interface with to Social Media and other content streams. However, it does not currently interface directly with all Essex Police systems. As an example, every contact from the public via the SOH website generates an email which must be opened, read, recorded on the correct system by re-keying the data and then drafting a response with a suitable service level back to the member of the public. This workflow is sub-optimal, although in some areas is a good solution for teams within the force, for example Firearms Licensing.

Further to this, crime data and social media feeds are currently being connected to the Your Area part of the site. Completion of this work will help improve the flow of information to the public and in turn assist in increasing public confidence.

Based on the evidence available as at December 2019, it is the considered view of the Media & Communications Team that it would best to publicly promote the SOH site when it is fully functional, and not before this time. It is anticipated that the resolution of transition problems, and the connection of data and content to the new platform will not be significantly advanced until 20th April 2020 at the earliest, for the reasons set out in section 2.0.

**6.0 Implications (Issues)**

Some of the main issues are referred to in the previous section and include the need for elements of SOH to be fully functioning before publicising to the public.

In addition:

-There is an ongoing commitment in resources and time to continue post-launch improvements, including continued work by 2x Grade PO3 colleagues in Media & Communications who are spending approximately 60% of their time on work to fully complete the transition to the new SOH website. In addition, Project Team time (within the Directorate of Strategic Change) is also being consumed on the project.

-Ongoing staff time re-keying data onto different systems from forms completed by members of the public. This is being addressed via the Essex Police Contact Management Board.

-From December 2020, European legislation will require that Police forces will be expected to accept intelligence and crime reports through multiple channels, to include social media. This issue is being examined by the National Police Chief’s Council’s Digital Lead. This issue is also being managed by the Essex Police Contact Management Board.

**6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities**

Both the PFCC and force plans confirm our commitment to support and protect victims of crime and building trust and confidence in our force.

**6.2 Demand**

The Crime Bureau deals with over 2,000 completed crime reports from SOH each month. The Bureau reports that the SOH triage has helped ensure a higher proportion of incoming reports are relevant to the team, which is positive. However, receiving emails which require re-typing into police systems remains the biggest issue.

The Quality of Service Team is dealing with 750 customer contacts from Single Online Home per month. The team have adopted multiple spreadsheets to keep track of contacts across the phone, email, SOH and live chat. There is scope to form a more effective liaison with other teams.

**6.3 Risks/Mitigation**

When the issues surrounding the interface between the SOH website and Essex Police are resolved, re-keying of data will cease, improving efficiency. Completion of this interface is an issue which is not unique to Essex Police.

Promoting the services available on the Essex Police SOH website will benefit the public when the site and the systems linked to it are fully functional. Current mitigation includes directing individuals straight to landing pages or social media feeds, rather than to the website home page. In addition, the Media & Communications and also the Engagement teams are using other channels of communication such as events and pro-active media campaigns, as well as supporting officers and staff in their approach to face-to-face contact with the public and partners.

The Public Engagement Team and Community Policing Teams have been proactive in identifying new communication channels and making better use of existing partnership channels.

Information is being displayed on GP surgery screens, library poster boards, the Essex Association of Local Councils is now working with the Public Engagement Team to produce a weekly e-bulletin for their members to disseminate to local communities.

There are risks attached to communicating prematurely about the services offered via Single Online Home before they have been fully signed off as functioning without issue.

**6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications**

The public sector equality duty 2011 requires the force to have due regard to the three general duties.

* Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
* Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
* Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the equality duty as part of the process of policy development and decision making. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions made by the organisation for example how we design, deliver and evaluate services.

Our ability to effectively and efficiently manage public contact is key to ensuring that we adhere to this duty by understanding the various protected characteristics of the people contacting us and adjusting our service accordingly.

**6.5 Health and Safety Implications**

None foreseen.

**7.0 Consultation/Engagement**

T/ACC Paul Wells Chief Officer and Force Command

Chief Supt. Ewen Wilson    Head of Contact Management

Supt. Craig Saunders         West LPA Command Team

Robin Punt                            Head of Corporate Communications

Claire Heath                          Head of Continuous Improvement

Jock Gibson                          Public Engagement Manager

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Kathryn Rout                         Operational Support Team Manager

Paul Anley                             Head of Crime Bureau

Lisa Scally                             Service Improvement Manager

David White                           Web Manager

**8.0 Actions for Improvement**

Single Online Home website functionality is overseen by the Essex Police Contact Management Board. The following areas for improvement have been identified.

**8.1 Services**

SOH improves our previous online forms by asking triage questions. This ensures users fill in the right forms and provides the correct content. Improvements required include the elimination of time-consuming downloadable PDF and Word document forms which require printing and posting. These need to be converted to web forms. Those web forms should funnel data directly into key policing IT systems, rather than generating more email traffic. Data received in email form results requires staff to re-key the data into police IT systems. In addition, email systems are not suited to sensitive content.

**8.2 Your Area section**

Work continues to get the social media feeds embedded along with events:

* Standardise 14 district Twitter and Facebook social media accounts to match level 2 of the SOH agreed structure.
* Configure these 28 accounts to provide a feed for SOH
* Place a ticket for the DPP content team to embed the feeds
* Align district engagement plans with services offered on SOH

**8.3 Accessibility**

We are in the hands of the national DPP project for the overall accessibility of the main Single Online Home site. They are making an analysis tool called 'Site Improve’ available to us which will enable us to monitor and correct editable content accessibility errors.

* Use ‘Site Improve’ on a regular basis to review accessibility, code and quality issues’ from January 31st, 2020.
* Use the ‘SiteMorse’ website to gauge quality compared to other forces.
* Actively engage the DPP SOH project team to ensure the site is accessible to legal standards.

**9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome**

In the short term, the website service provision and content is being restored and improved and is being overseen by the Contact Management Board.