

PFCC Decision Report

Report reference number: 126-20

Classification Not protectively marked

Title of report: Request for laptops for complex and sensitive case facilitators

Area of County/Stakeholders affected: Countywide

Report by: Nikki Essex

Date of report: 26 October 2020

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1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To seek approval for the allocation of £3,350 to purchase five laptops for our Restorative Justice (RJ) facilitators who deal with complex and sensitive cases.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. Approve the allocation of £3,350 to purchase five laptops for Restorative Justice volunteers facilitating complex and sensitive cases.

3. Benefits of the Proposal

- 3.1 If this option is chosen, the five volunteers would be allocated an Essex Police laptop in addition to their current mobile phones which would allow them to send and receive secure emails as needed and safely and securely store information.
- 3.2 Other benefits include:
- Ready access to secure emails
 - No need to impact the work of officers or RJ office staff in order to send and receive emails
 - Empowered, happy volunteers who will continue to perform to a high standard
 - Positive relationships with professionals from other organisations
 - Less delay in cases progressing, which limits the risk of satisfaction rates being reduced.
 - Far less risk of GDPR breaches when storing information due to ease of use and negating the need to forward information to home computers.

4. Background and proposal

4.1 In 2018, three Essex Restorative and Mediation Service (ERMS) volunteers were issued with Essex Police networked mobile phones in order to carry out the most serious and complex cases more effectively. This has been useful as they are able to send and receive sensitive information using a secure email in order to effectively manage their allocated cases.

4.2 Having trialled these phones for more than 12 months, feedback was sought from the volunteers. Although there was some benefit to the mobile phones, there were three main issues identified:

1. Security and data protection

Emails need to be uploaded into the secure case management system (MyRJ). Data protection guidelines say that notes on this system must not contain information relating to both victim and offender under the same note. This means volunteers having to redact emails using a small phone screen and buttons before forwarding this to their home laptops in order to upload notes and documents more easily. Redaction is time consuming and all emails have to be double-checked before sending to ensure that no personal or identifying data is forwarded. This causes immense frustration. It would be more secure (and quicker) if emails could be copied or uploaded directly from secure EP email accounts accessed from an EP laptop onto MyRJ. Being able to do the role quickly and easily is perhaps of higher importance to those who are giving up their own time to facilitate cases on behalf of the PFCC.

2. The ability to access, download and upload attachments

Volunteers are unable to open email attachments on their mobile phones. They are also unable to create documents on their mobiles. This is partially due to IT faults which prevent them from using the applications, but also practical as trying to create a letter on Microsoft Word using only a phone screen and keypad is extremely difficult and frustrating.

3. Ability to change systems passwords before they expire

Apart from security and time issues there is a problem when the phone system password expires. Passwords expire regularly and the only course of action is to phone IT for them to change the password. This takes anything from 20 – 60 minutes, longer if there is a wait to connect to 101 and then to IT. Password expiry reminders are sent to desktops / laptops operating the main IT systems and cannot be done on the mobile phone. Volunteers may be waiting for an important reply which can only be accessed by a long phone call to IT to reset their account. This means that delays are caused to the case.

4.3 During July and August one volunteer sent 22 sensitive emails regarding one case and received 22 replies to those emails. To ask the office to send these securely would have been complicated and time consuming.

4.4 The lengths these volunteers have to go to when initially establishing contact with a professional third party are onerous and having a laptop with a police e-mail address that would work automatically would simplify things immeasurably.

4.5 The volunteers who would access the laptops have over 12 years of experience, have logged 790 hours during 2018-19 and have received almost 100 hours of training.

5. Alternative options considered and rejected

5.1. The PFCC could chose to continue to work as we currently do but this poses many risks:

- Reputational damage to the Restorative and Mediation Service
- Risk of a GDPR breach which could result in the loss of the RSQM accreditation and / or a fine from the Information Commissioner's Office.
- Delays in the process which impacts on both victim and perpetrator and can negatively affect the outcome of a case.
- Negative impact on victim satisfaction
- Disempowerment of volunteers and lack of feeling valued
- More burden on office staff
- Volunteers could leave due to frustrations in not having the resources they need to complete the role and we would lose the experience and all the investment in them.

5.2 The alternative option considered was for facilitators to access secure emails from a police station but this also poses the following risks:

- Important and urgent emails may be missed
- Expenses will increase with extra travelling of up to a 30-mile round trip to the closest police station, plus parking.
- Facilitators will require PAC tags to access police stations
- Risk of volunteers becoming frustrated with having to travel to check for emails which may not be there.
- Facilitators may feel frustrated and disempowered without adequate equipment for the role and may choose to leave.
- There may not be a free workstation for the volunteer to use which will result in a wasted journey, causing further time loss and frustration.

6. Police and Crime Plan

6.1. This funding supports the commitments in the Police and Crime Plan to place victims at the heart of what we do, specifically giving victims access to restorative justice. Part of this plan is to promote the use of RJ across a variety of offences, including serious offences. The ERMS fulfils the Police and Crime Plan commitment to enable more people to play an active role in taking on these cases but they require the tools to allow them to do so successfully and efficiently.

7. Police Operational Implications

7.1. There are no direct operational impacts of allocating this funding.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. The PFCC already allocates an RJ budget. Due to COVID-19 we are likely to see fewer costs for conference rooms and expenses, therefore the £3,350 will come out of our existing budget for volunteer expenses, allocated at £9,000.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 Essex Police will provide terms and conditions for each user to sign and agree to upon laptop allocation.

10. Staffing and other resource implications

- 10.1. This allows for better case management as facilitators dealing with complex and sensitive cases will be able to deal with cases themselves rather than relying on staff from the office to carry out requests on their behalf, freeing RJ co-ordinators and the RJ manager to deal with other tasks.

11. Equality and Diversity implications

- 11.1. There are no direct equality and diversity implications.

12. Risks

- 12.1. There is a risk of EP hardware being damaged or lost.

13. Governance Boards

- 13.1. This decision has not been subject to discussion at any governance boards.

14. Background papers

None.

Report Approval

The report will be signed off by the PFCC Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer, prior to review and sign off by the PFCC / DPFCC .

Chief Executive/M.O

Sign:

Print: P. Brent-Isherwood

Date: 18 December 2020

Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer

Sign:

Print: Elizabeth Helm

Date: 21 December 2020

Publication

Is the report for publication?

YES

NO

If 'NO', please give reasons for non-publication (*state 'None' if applicable*)

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.....N/A.....

If the report is not for publication, the Chief Executive will decide if and how the public can be informed of the decision.

Redaction

If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

1. Of Decision Sheet

YES

2. Of Appendix

YES

NO

NO

If 'YES', please provide details of required redaction:

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.....N/A.....

Date redaction carried out:

Treasurer / Chief Executive Sign Off – for Redactions only

If redaction is required, Treasurer or Chief Executive are to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign:

Print:

Chief Executive/Treasurer

Date signed:

Decision and Final Sign Off

I agree the recommendations to this report;

Sign: 

Print: Roger Hirst

PFCC

Date signed: 22 December 2020

I do not agree the recommendations to this report because;

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Sign:

Print:

PFCC/Deputy PFCC