

PFCC Decision Report

Please ensure all sections below are completed

Report reference number: 056-21
Classification (e.g. Not protectively marked/restricted):
Title of report: Zoom licence for ERMS team
Area of county / stakeholders affected: Essex Restorative & Mediation Service
Report by: Emma Goddard
Date of report: 6 April 2021
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1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To approve the allocation of funding from the RJ budget to fund a Zoom licence for use by the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service staff and volunteers.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Approve the allocation of £360 from the 2021-22 RJ budget to fund a 'Pro' Zoom licence for 12 months.

3. Benefits of the proposal

- 3.1 The service will be able to respond more effectively to volunteer and participant preferences for online meeting platforms. Recognising that often participants are already feeling unsure and anxious in anticipation of a restorative meeting and being required to download additional software or use an unfamiliar platform such as Microsoft Teams can add to this.
- 3.2 This will allow ERMS volunteers more control and flexibility over their own participant meetings and reduces the necessity for ERMS staff to be available to allow access to the virtual MS Teams meeting, which is often out of hours.

4. Background and proposal

- 4.1 During the COVID pandemic and its associated lockdowns and requirements for social distancing, ERMS has adapted its process in order to continue to offer restorative work online.

Currently, the only option available to the team when setting up a video call with participants, is Microsoft Teams. While Teams has merits, the ERMS team has found the following to be barriers in effective RJ facilitation:

- As they do not have Essex Police IT account, volunteers are unable to set up Teams meetings themselves, which means a reliance on ERMS staff to set up and share the link, which at times can be required under a time pressure.
- Our current corporate MS Teams licence does not allow for a handover of 'host' control to another user. This means that the member of ERMS staff who created the meeting, is required to be there at the start to let attendees into the meeting. Due to the nature of the work, these meetings are often out of office hours, meaning a member of staff must log in on evenings and weekends. Not only is this inconvenient, it risks being forgotten, leaving volunteers and participants unable to attend the meeting causing frustration and disappointment.
- This lack of control over the meeting has caused some anxiety as volunteers are concerned if the internet connection is lost and they need to get back into the meeting, they may be unable to do so once the 'host' has left.
- Many volunteers (over 50%) and participants feel more comfortable using Zoom as they are more familiar with it. Functions such as breakout rooms are vital for a successful joint meeting between participants and Teams makes this difficult to impossible to manage without the volunteer having 'host' status.

4.2 ERMS propose to purchase a Pro Zoom licence, with 3 hosts. This would mean the ability to set up multiple meetings at the same time, with hosting responsibilities being transferred to volunteers. The office team can add and remove volunteers to the Zoom account, which would allow them a far greater level of control over their own meetings, and a reduced requirement for ERMS staff to be available at any time to begin the meeting. This licence also allows us to report on the usage of the Zoom system, so we can effectively monitor if it is still required after the year contract.

4.3 Having a Zoom account means that volunteers can set up Zoom meetings with participants quickly and maintain control over the meetings. Should a volunteer require the office team to set up a Zoom call, the 'host' control can be switched to another user, which means staff do not have to make themselves available for every meeting set up. It would avoid the unprofessional set up of having to share multiple links to a Zoom meeting to be switched every 40 minutes.

4.4 As the use of personal devices is already required for the use of Zoom, and as almost all volunteers use their own personal devices for their RJ work anyway, the use of Zoom for this purpose will not affect current working practices.

5. Alternative options considered and rejected

5.1 The PFCC could opt not to approve the use of the ERMS budget for this purpose. Staff and volunteers would have to continue to manage virtual meetings as described above, leading to feelings of frustration and a service which was less effective and not flexible to the needs of the volunteers or participants.

5.2 Volunteers could use their own Zoom accounts or other methods of virtual meetings. This, however, is not encouraged by the ERMS staff as it risks

volunteer personal contact information being shared with participants. ERMS could use the free version of Zoom but that would limit meetings to 40 minutes which can have a detrimental impact on the process (an average joint meeting lasts around 90 minutes).

6. Police and Crime Plan

- 6.1 This funding will support the delivery of an effective Restorative Justice service, which is prescribed under the Victims' Code of Practice.
- 6.2 The extended Police and Crime Plan promises to make greater use of RJ and to expand the service to focus on the needs of victim and enable more victim to have access. Allowing victims a range of choices in which platform they use for discussing these emotive and difficult subjects will help to reduce anxiety.
- 6.3 The Plan also lists volunteering as one of the building blocks of success. Volunteers are vital to the continued success of the RJ service and having the right tools will enable them to fulfil their role effectively and with pride.

7. Police operational implications

- 7.1 No operational implications for Essex Police.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The proposed Zoom licence will cost £360 and will be paid from the 2021-22 ERMS budget.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 No legal implications have been identified.

10. Staffing implications

- 10.1 The purchase of the Zoom licence will free up the ERMS team (in particular, the administrator) due to a reduced need to set up every video call on behalf of the volunteers.
- 10.2 TOIL/ split days will be reduced due to there being a reduced requirement for ERMS team to be available on evenings and weekends to open video calls and admit participants.
- 10.3 Volunteers will have increased confidence due to having the option of using a video platform that they are more familiar with and confident in.

11. Equality and Diversity implications

- 11.1 No equality and diversity implications have been identified

12. Risks

- 12.1 There is a small risk relating to the security of the Zoom platform, which is not accessible on Police devices for this reason. To mitigate this risk, we will:
 - Reinforce training for volunteers on the safety of information, and ensuring that they understand how to use Zoom effectively.
 - Ensure volunteers are checking with participants that they are not recording, and that they are in a location with a secure internet connection and are not able to be overheard by anyone not known to the volunteer. (This is true for all video conferencing software, including Teams)

12.2 Many RJ organisations around the country effectively and exclusively use Zoom and have assessed it as suitable for their needs.

13. Governance Boards

13.1 This decision has not been subject to any formal governance boards.

14. Background papers

None

Report Approval

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

Deputy M.O.

Sign: 

Print: Darren Horsman

Date: 14.4.2021

Chief Finance Officer | Treasurer

Sign: 

Print: Julia Berry

Date: 14 April 2021

Publication (double click box to add a tick)

Is the report for publication? Yes No

If 'NO', please give reasons for non-publication (Where relevant, cite the security classification of the document(s). State 'None' if applicable)

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

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If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

1. Of Decision Sheet? Yes No

2. Of Appendix? Yes No

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

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Treasurer/ Chief Executive Sign Off - for Redactions only

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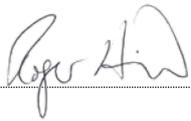
Sign: _____

Print: _____

Chief Executive/Treasurer

Decision and Final Sign Off

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign:  _____

Print: **ROGER HIRST** _____

PFCC/Deputy PFCC

Date Signed: **4 May 2021** _____

I do not agree the recommendations to this report because:

Sign: _____

Print: _____

PFCC/Deputy PFCC

Date Signed: _____