PFCC Decision Report

Please ensure all sections below are completed

Report reference number: **005-22**   Classification (eg. Not protectively marked/restricted): **Not protectively marked**
Title of report: **PFCC Website Technical Support**
Area of county / stakeholders affected: **Countywide**
Report by: **Darren Horsman**   Date of report: **07/01/2022**   Enquiries to: **darren.horsman@essex.police.uk**

1.   Purpose of the report

To gain agreement for Formation Media to provide hosting and ongoing support for the PFCC website, Violence and Vulnerability website and Restorative Justice website including regular testing, updates to maintain navigation functionality and ensuring the correct level of accessibility.

2.   Recommendations

It is recommended that the PFCC agrees to Formation Media providing website hosting and maintenance and support and rectification of issues to maintain functionality and accessibility levels of the PFCC website, Restorative Justice website and Violence and Vulnerability website for two years from April 1st 2022 at a cost of £11,604.

It is recommended that the PFCC agrees to Formation Media providing ongoing marketing and website improvement and development for the PFCC website, Restorative Justice website and Violence and Vulnerability website for two years from 1.4.2022 at a cost of £23,760.

It is recommended that the PFCC agrees to the allocation of £17,682 for this service from 1.4.2022 for twelve months from the 2022-2023 budget and a further £17,682 from the 2023-2024 budget to cover the twelve-month period from the 1.4.2023. The annual costs would be split between the Communications budget to cover the PFCC website (50%), the Restorative Justice Budget (25%) to cover the Restorative Justice website and the Violence and Vulnerability Budget (25%) to cover the Violence and Vulnerability website. Where these budgets are partially funded from grants from national government, should the grant not be provided in later years the full costs would be covered from within the PFCC's Communications budget.

3.   Benefits of the proposal

Prior to October 2021 the PFCC website, Violence and Vulnerability website and Restorative Justice website did not have any ongoing contractual support or maintenance/retainer package in place and any issues identified were handled on an ad hoc basis by Viewpoint Marketing. As such there are no contractual service standards in place. This created a risk that the website may fail and take a prolonged period to fix or the standards of accessibility and functionality would not be met with no guarantee that these would be identified and corrected.

This situation resulted in issues arising such as plugins not working, videos not playing and vital updates to the web platform not being installed. The proposal for Formation Media to take on hosting the website and delivering regular testing, updates and support will ensure the website is fully functional and facilitates a positive user journey that complies with our accessibility obligations.

An initial six-month agreement has been put in place with Formation Media to support the three sites and this has proved productive with a number of risks and vulnerabilities being identified and plans put in place to mitigate against these. The relationship has proven to be productive with a strong indication that significant improvement can be obtained by entering into a longer-term relationship and establishing a gradual, evidence-based improvement programme for the three sites.

The PFCC has recently agreed the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 (Decision Report 172-21) which includes a commitment to gradually improve the website both in terms of accessibility and user experience. Delivering against this will require a short-term increase in the level of development support required.

4.   Background and proposal

The PFCC website was built in 2015 and restructured and modified in 2017 to align more closely with the PFCC's strategic programme. Six years on it is due for a review as the site has developed and grown to include the Fire & Rescue Service as well as the addition of a considerable number of board papers, tables and transparency data. At the same time our existing supplier who had developed the site and was providing ad hoc support has moved away from website support and development and no longer provided the level or focus required to help further develop the site.

A Restorative Justice subsite was developed in 2019 which, while integrated into the PFCC website, sits on a separate platform and has a secondary direct URL to support direct engagement with victims of crime. In 2021 the Violence and Vulnerability Programme also developed their own website as part of their communications programme.

During 2020 the PFCC's office undertook a considerable amount of work to align the website to the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. This highlighted the need for ongoing regular maintenance, support and testing to ensure all websites relating to the Commissioner continue to deliver the levels of accessibility and functionality expected. At the time of completing this work it became evident that our existing supplier was not able to provide

this specialist support so external support was secured. This demonstrated the benefit of having a more specialist level of website support which is familiar with the statutory obligations of public sector organisations and PFCC sites.

During the six-month agreement with Formation Media several national website security concerns specifically relating to PFCC sites have been identified by the national cyber security service. These have been quickly identified, assessed, and managed by Formation Media on behalf of the various PFCC sites that they provide support for. The fact that Formation Media support several other PFCCs has proven to be a significant advantage.

Because the Essex PFCC site sits within the policing domain, ownership of the site is complex and was developed in partnership with the APCC. This meant ownership partially sat with the contracted website provider used by the APCC in 2017. The development of site domains following several PCCs taking on responsibility for fire and rescue services has not resulted in the development of a coherent or logical national network of websites. The PFCC Essex domain which was originally set up to provide a core address for future PFCCs has not been used as newer PFCCs have chosen to use a different URL formation. In this context it would be beneficial for Essex to take over full control of the PFCC Essex domain. This has proven to be a technically difficult activity that has required a level of specialist support.

As well as needing to provide ongoing updates and respond effectively to security concerns a key part of the proposal is around developing an ongoing improvement process for the websites. In this regard the provider will conduct regular UX (User Experience) reviews and accessibility reviews of the websites which would include a report from trained UX designers, developers and testing on functionality issues and required generic improvements to be made on the website. The test would include problem scenarios whereby the user will search and navigate the site to assess how easy it is to use. The findings from the review would then be used in the UI (User Interface) design of the homepages and structures of the websites. Formation Media would also undertake analytic reviews to look at the most popular pages to define the navigations hierarchy and information structure. This would enable us to significantly optimise the websites over a period of time allowing for improvements to be tested, incorporated, and then reviewed without the risk associated with a full rebuild.

Maintenance, recovery and security
There is currently no service level agreement in place meaning that regular technical maintenance of any of these websites is not being routinely carried out and if the websites were to suffer a significant fault there would be no contractual obligation on any provider to fix this. By having an agreement in place, it will provide the following:
- Check installed server updates
- Installation of additional software to help service provider perform maintenance and improve website performance and security
- Production of a dedicated maintenance pack
- Uninstalling plugins that risk potential security flaws
- Weekly Bug fixes
- Ticketed support within an agreed time frame of 0-2 hours during business hours

Hosting Site
Business Continuity/Security – all servers under Formation Media's hosting control have a backup procedure in place to reduce and safeguard against loss of data. By switching our current hosting site under Formation Media, daily backups have been performed which give us more security than is currently in place. By hosting the websites, it will also make it simpler for Formation Media to manage system maintenance and development. Formation Media are used by other PFCCs and there is a good level of reassurance around their data handling procedures.

Ongoing Development Maintenance
The Commissioner in their Communication and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 has set out to improve the accessibility and user experience of their website. To deliver this we will need ongoing support. The Formation Media proposal includes either four hours or twelve hours of web development each month which can be used to develop website pages, surveys for the Police and Crime Plan, precept and graphics which is currently paid for on an ad hoc basis. This can also be used to undertake testing, develop new functionality, and gradually improve the sites. This would contribute to our overall work as an office, delivery of the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2021-2024 and contribute to the costs anticipated on specific projects such as the development of our precept proposals.

5.   Alternative options considered and rejected

Prior to submitting this proposal, we talked to a number of similar PCC offices around the country as well as local partners to identify possible suppliers who could provide this service. We researched a number of these to understand the type of service they could offer and their suitability to this work. This included Viewpoint Marketing and other local firms. Formation Media came highly recommended from other PCC offices and understood our role and in particular the importance of providing open, transparent decision making. They were also the only organisation that were able to provide a full accessibility review without having to subcontract this to a specialist provider.

Since undertaking this review of our providers, we have contracted Formation Media to provide support for a six-month period as we resolved a number of immediate risks to the sites. We have also used them to undertake an accessibility review and fix several identified accessibility problems. This work was carried out well and we were satisfied with the product provided and the level of service.

In looking at a longer-term solution we identified two further providers to secure quotes from to compare the level of service available and cost. For comparison the costs are for a twelve-month period for all three sites.

Formation Media – Recommended
This company is a full-service marketing agency which specialises in website development and support. For hosting, technical support and updates, including ensuring a quick response to any identified security risk, the cost would be £5,802 per year or £11,604 for the two-year period.

They also offer a package that would enable us to undertake planned improvement work over the year and allow us to utilise their wider marketing services when required

such as design, PR and social media. This has been quoted for 4 hours per week (£3,885 per year or £7,770 for two years) or for 12 hours a week (£11,880 per year or £23,760 for two years).

Formation Media support several public sector organisations including two PFCCs. They are very familiar with the UK government security systems and have acted proactively in the six months we have been with them to identify relevant threats to the PFCC sites, undertake an assessment of the risk for our specific site and propose improvements. To put this in context, they had undertaken this work a full two weeks before the heightened risk was identified to us through our APCC and Policing networks.

Formation Media undertook significant work around preparing sites for the changes in legislation around accessibility which came into force in 2020 and have developed a recognised specialism in this area. They also have considerable experience in undertaking UX testing and developing sites to optimise the customer experience.

They provide a range of packages which can be tailored to the organisations.

████████████████████ **– Not recommended**
This company is a young, relatively new web design company based in Essex. They specialise in web design and do not offer other marketing services. Their customer base is largely SMEs, start-ups, and customer focused retail services. They offer a range of packages that provide technical support and updates, including hosting. The cost of hosting and technical support is £█████ per year. This is the cheapest option. However, in conversation with them they do not have experience in dealing with public sector organisation or with supporting sites to be compliant with accessibility legislation. They also lack experience in dealing with content that may be subject to specific cyber threats because of the topic the site focuses on.

███████████ **– Not recommended**
This company has started to do some work with Community Safety Partnerships in Essex. They offered a full range of marketing services including content development and PR. The website support is not their primary focus but is offered to clients as part of a wider package of marketing activity. They have offered a service which would include hosting and technical support including regular updates and basic reporting. This would cost £█████. Additional support for UX testing, design or marketing support would be provided separately on an ad hoc basis.

They have experience of working with local public sector organisations, however, much of this is based on event management or PR activity. They have a good reputation for content development and online marketing but do not have experience in supporting public sites to be compliant with their accessibility requirements and have very limited experience in dealing with content that may be subject to specific cyber threats because of the topic the site focuses on.

While looking at a number of providers we also considered a number of options for the structure of the support we wanted and the level and type of service we would enter into. We could have decided to continue without the UX (User Experience) review, hosting, SLA and maintenance/retainer package and continue on an ad hoc basis, but this would risk the website not benefiting from understanding the user journey and not being able to optimise the website navigation and content. It also presented the

significant risk that a problem would arise with the website and prove very costly to fix and take a considerable amount of time. Additionally, without an SLA to provide the technical support, updates would remain outstanding, the hosting platform would not be adequately supported, and the functionality of the website would risk becoming impaired with issues such as plugins and downloads no longer working.

We considered choosing an agency that was less specialist in website development and support but could provide a wider range of support, however this would again present a risk that we would not get the level of technical support we need.

6. Police and Crime Plan

The three websites communicate what we do, what we deliver and what we aspire to and are an important way for the Commissioner to engage with the public, stakeholders, and partners. This is vital for both the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024.

7. Police operational implications

There will be no impact on operational policing.

8. Financial implications

The financial costs of contracting this support for the two-year period is as follows:

The total for hosting 3 websites	£ 2,304
Quarterly Maintenance and support for 3 websites	£ 9,300
Ongoing development and access to other marketing expertise	£ 23,760
Total	**£ 35,364**

The costs are split between three budgets in recognition of the focus of the three sites, their size, complexity and anticipated required support work. 50% of the costs will be allocated to the PFCC's website and would come from the Communications and Engagement Budget, 25% would come from the Restorative Justice budget to cover the Restorative Justice website and the final 25% would come from the Violence and Vulnerability Unit for their website.

9. Legal implications

The impact of functionality issues could result in plugins and downloads not working which means users with impairments may not be able to access documents and downloads in line with the accessibility requirements that came into effect on September 23rd 2020.

A lack of ongoing contracted support leaves the Commissioner open to the risk of a prolonged period of website failure either caused by cyber security issues or technical faults. This would be mitigated by this decision as it would provide guaranteed immediate support.

10. Staffing implications

There are no direct staff implications involved in this proposal.

11. Equality and Diversity implications

This will have a direct positive impact on equality and diversity as ensuring the websites operate optimally so it can be used by as many people as possible in the way that adequately meets their needs.

12. Risks

If this decision is not agreed we risk failing to meet our obligation of being transparent, open and of fulfilling our commitment to keeping the people of Essex informed. This decision will also provide additional reassurance regarding our handling of data as having an ongoing agreement will ensure greater consistency and support for the management of the Content Management System.

13. Governance Boards

This suggestion was discussed at the Commissioner's Senior Management Team on January 20th 2022.
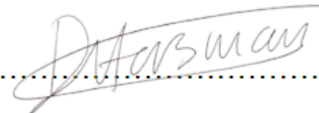
14. Background papers

Three email quotes

Report Approval

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

Chief Executive / M.O. Sign: ....

Print: Darren Horsman - Deputy MO .....

Date: 26.1.2022 ....

Chief Finance Officer / Treasurer Sign: ....

Print: Julia Berry ....

Date: 26 January 2022 ....

Publication

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.

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: We need to remove the names, and quotes of the three options put forward and not include these in the appendix as they are commercially sensitive.

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Date redaction carried out: 28 November 2022………………..

Treasurer / Chief Executive Sign Off – for Redactions only

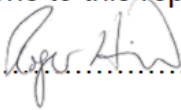If redaction is required, the Treasurer or Chief Executive is to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign: ………………………………………............

Print: …………………………………………………

Chief Executive/Treasurer

Decision and Final Sign Off

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign: ....

Print: Roger Hirst

PFCC

Date signed: 27 January 2022