



**Philip Seccombe
Police and Crime
Commissioner
for Warwickshire**

Decision Application WPCC20150

Application Date:	25/09/2020	Name of Applicant:	Abigail Simkin (OPCC DPL)
Application Decision Reference: WPCC20150 Witness Care Workload Covid19 Recovery Fund			
1. Summary of the application			
<p>This is an application for the OPCC to use Covid19 Recovery Funding to resource an additional Witness Care Officer for four months in order to manage significantly increased case load and complexity of case management in light of Covid19, the closure of criminal courts during lockdown, and a subsequent case backlog.</p>			
2. Background information:			
<p>An application was received from Dawn Hartland, Head of Criminal Justice for Warwickshire Police, requesting funding for additional human resource on behalf of the Witness Care unit.</p>			
<p>The context for this is that Covid19 has led to courts being closed for a significant period of time, and then reopening at a reduced capacity. As a result the Witness Care caseload has continued to grow and the rate of incoming cases is exceeding those the Unit is able to actively manage.</p>			
<p>To illustrate, between 22nd March and 22nd August in 2019, 2901 cases were closed by Witness Care. However in the same period in 2020 only 1690 were closed. Weekly cases have steadily increased week on week during lockdown and since.</p>			
<p>Due to the uncertainty facing courts and the wider criminal justice system as the Covid19 environment continually evolves, listings are volatile and subject to last minute cases, meaning that Witness Care Officers are often having to complete last minute work to cater for these adjustments. Further work is required by Witness Care Officers so that victims and witnesses appropriately attend court in a Covid-complaint manner.</p>			
<p>The courts new listing pattern is designed to clear the Covid backlog as quickly as possible, therefore the request is for a temporary additional resource for four months to assist the Witness Unit to cope with the interim period of heightened demand. This is critical to ensuring that the service offered to victims and witnesses is not compromised during this time.</p>			

In order to cover the additional caseload in line with the pre-Covid workload figures the team will need to expand by 1 additional Witness Care Officer for four months. This should give the Witness Care team the capacity to continue to provide an excellent service and manage caseloads down to more manageable levels.

Alternatives to additional recruitment have been considered. Overtime payments are already being offered to staff but the need for an additional resource remains necessary. There are no other vacancies in the Criminal Justice department of Warwickshire Police to resource this gap currently.

This request fits with the parameters of the OPCC Covid19 Recovery Fund in that funding awarded would help to address additional demand created as a direct result of the effects of Covid19 on the criminal justice system. As a result the decision has been made to fund an additional Witness Care Officer for 4 months.

3. Whether additional information/report is attached to support this decision application

NO

4. Expected benefits (non financial)

Additional human resource in the Witness Care Unit should help to ensure that cases are managed more promptly and effectively than if the existing level of resource is left to manage a significantly increased caseload due to Covid.

5. Impact of not approving the application

Witness Care Unit workload will not reduce without additional resource and this may negatively impact on the service Victims and Witnesses in Warwickshire receive. Ultimately this could increase victim/witness attrition rates and reduce the number willing to complete the criminal justice process.

6. Costs

Revenue: The total costs of this additional resource including salary related overheads is anticipated to be £10,177. This funding will be made available to the force from the Covid recovery fund created by the PCC.

Capital: N/a

7. Savings: There are no cashable savings arising from this investment.

8. Equality and Diversity Implications:

All relevant policies apply

9. Treasurer's comments

During the summer the PCC launched his Covid relief grant round which identified £100,000 of funding. This funding was intended for organisations to help them respond to the crisis and to assist with key work which may have faltered or been affected as a result of Covid. This application has been fully considered and the anticipated costs of £10,177 can be met from within this identified funding. All necessary transfers with the force will be undertaken as part of the regular budget monitoring process.

10. Legal/Monitoring Officer comments

The Witness Care Unit (WCU) provides a critical service to victims and witnesses in Warwickshire. The service provided helps to ensure that the force is compliant with both the Victim Code and the PCC's Witness Charter.

The OPCC has been closely monitoring demand in the WCU and is supportive that action needs to be taken to increase the resources required to address the current demand in the WCU.

This additional resource will provide much needed support to the WCU to ensure that a good service continues to be provided to the public as COVID recovery takes place. The allocation is in line with the overall purpose of the COVID recovery fund.

Decision of the Police and Crime Commissioner

To approve the £10,177 of funding for a total period of four months to deal with the increased witness care caseload as a result of the pandemic.



PCC Signature:

Date of Decision: 1.10.2020