

Chief Constables' Council

Update - Operation Hydrant

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Attachments @ paragraphs:

1. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

1.3 The purpose of this paper is to brief Chief Officers about the progress of Operation Hydrant, the national coordination operation for non-recent child sexual abuse and to provide details of the progress being made with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (the Goddard Inquiry) and its impact on police forces.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In July 2014, Chief Constables' Council agreed to establish Operation Hydrant as a means of providing coordination for and de-confliction of non-recent child sexual abuse investigations involving persons of public prominence and that, which took place within institutions. It also assumed the role as the single point of contact for the Goddard Inquiry.

2.3 The operation continues to be funded jointly through a Home Office Special Policing Grant and directly by the Goddard Inquiry. The operation is now fully resourced and operating to capacity.

3. THE SCALE OF DEMAND

3.1 Data that has been gathered since the commencement of the Operation now allows for the first time a more detailed understanding of the scale of the challenge facing police forces dealing with nonrecent child sexual abuse. Without doubt, demand is growing and it is likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

- 3.2 As of May 2016 there were a total of 2658 suspects recorded on the database that were being investigated for non-recent child sexual abuse fitting the Operation Hydrant criteria. (This does not include familial abuse or the majority child sexual exploitation cases.) This figure does not include investigations that are closed or where a person is no longer considered a suspect. It represents an 83% increase on the same period last year. The number of reports in relation to high profile offenders is reducing as a proportion of the overall total.
- 3.3 A more significant increase in victim numbers is apparent, this has increased by 339% to 2215. This increase is affected by the way the data was initially collected. In the earlier stages of the operation victim details were not requested of forces. This rate of increase is therefore expected to continue throughout 2016.
- 3.4 Data collected in relation to investigations into institutional offending shows a similar trend with a 170% increase in the number of institutions that have been subject of investigation. This now stands at 1038. Unsurprisingly, schools, children's homes and religious institutions make up the majority of this number.
- 3.5 Referrals into Operation Hydrant from other agencies and the Goddard Inquiry have shown a general upward trend over the past year. The Inquiry's Truth Project (further details below) is likely to increase referrals even more. The average number of referrals per month for the last six months has been 122 at this time last year that figure stood at 44.
- 3.6 These statistics demonstrate that the demand faced by police forces is increasing and shows no sign of abating.

4. OPERATIONAL COORDINATION

- 4.1 The core function of Operation Hydrant is the coordination of investigations nationally. This element of work is now mainstreamed and embedded within the operation's processes. In the last six months 138 pieces of intelligence have been de-conflicted where the named perpetrator is being dealt with by more than one force. On 121 occasions forces have made inquiries about a suspect they are investigating to establish if Operation Hydrant holds intelligence about that individual.
- 4.2 In more complex cases members of the Operation Hydrant Team are available to support investigations either at Senior Investigating Officer or Gold level, to provide advice, guidance and peer support. The operation is currently engaged with 15 Forces in this way.

- 4.3 The Operation now has the capacity to facilitate the formal review of investigations where this is of value to forces. Three have been undertaken already and a further two have been commissioned. These reviews can take the form of either direct support at the initiation of an investigation, a detailed investigative review with specific terms of reference or a peer review undertaken by a number of experienced SIO's. The latter has proved of significant benefit to the forces that have been involved to date. As an approach it assists a force in developing investigative strategy based on the learning of others, it may provide confidence to an SIO that he or she is managing the investigation correctly and it demonstrates the objectivity and openness of the investigation, which in high profile cases is often challenged.

5. THE GODDARD INQUIRY

- 5.1 In the first half of this year the work of the Inquiry has gathered momentum to the extent that it is engaged with 16 forces and actively seeking evidence from them in relation to the Public Hearings Project. Operation Hydrant assesses that the seven Public Hearings that have been timetabled to date have the potential to impact upon 24 police forces in total. Every police force in England and Wales has been involved in the scoping exercise for the wider-themed Public Hearings, such as the Catholic Church.
- 5.2 Operation Hydrant has briefed 12 police forces at senior leadership level with a further four planned in the near future. The point at which the Inquiry confirms that it is seeking material from a Force, Operation Hydrant will engage with the that Force to provide any support and guidance it requires.
- 5.3 A memorandum of understanding has now been agreed with the Inquiry that manages the transfer of material from forces to the Inquiry. This is achieved through cloud based technology and comes at no cost to forces. Operation Hydrant is able to offer support with this process where it is needed.
- 5.4 The Inquiry's Truth Project was launched earlier this year which saw a pilot centre in Liverpool receive a small cohort of victims. This centre goes live on a full time basis at the end of June. The next to follow shortly afterwards will be the North East Centre based in Darlington. Other locations will come on line towards the end of the year in London, Cardiff and Exeter.
- 5.5 Referrals from the Inquiry have so far been limited to the contact made with the Inquiry's Engagement Hub, principally this is through the Inquiry's website portal or helpline. It is anticipated that referrals

will increase beyond their current rate once the Truth Project is fully established and operating to maximum capacity. The past year has seen more than a doubling of referrals from the Inquiry and other referring organisations.

- 5.6 Importantly 58% of referrals made to Operation Hydrant in respect of non-recent reports of child abuse have a current safeguarding risk attached. This is primarily because the named perpetrator still has access to children. This underlines the importance of investigating non-recent reports of child sexual abuse robustly.

6. MEDIA

- 6.1 National news media coverage of cases of non-recent child sexual abuse remains significant. However, it tends to disproportionately focus on a very few cases involving high profile individuals. It is important to place this into context – almost every day across the country convictions take place of those who held positions of trust or authority and used that to access and sexually abuse children. These rarely make the national news media – although regional news media outlets do report on them. Local reporting of these cases serves to increase the confidence of victims who have not yet come forward to do so.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 As predicted at the beginning of the year demand has continued to increase and there is no sign that this will level off in the near future
- 7.2 The Goddard Inquiry, through its Public Hearings Project has started to gather significant amounts of material from police forces relevant to the seven Public Hearings that have commenced proper. The Truth Project Regional Centres will begin to come on-line throughout the remainder of this year, the first in Liverpool in June. This will undoubtedly see an increase in referrals into policing.

8. DECISIONS REQUIRED

- 8.1 Chief Officers are invited to note the contents of the paper. No decisions are required.

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Coordination Committee/Portfolio

Crime Operations/Violence and Public Protection (Child Protection and Abuse Investigation)