

Decision Notice

DN 17/2021 Date XX/XX/XXXX

Creation of a Sexual Assault and Rape Victims' Centre

The Commissioner has decided to establish a Sexual Assault and Rape Victims' Centre to house North Yorkshire's Sexual Assault Referral Centre and Child Sexual Assault Assessment Services and a dedicated Video-Recorded Interview suite for these victims, and to establish a separate Video-Recorded Interview suite in York for other vulnerable victims and witnesses, by purchasing two new commercial properties and disposing of the current accommodation.

Background

The purpose of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is to co-ordinate and simplify the pathway for victims of rape and sexual assault to access wider healthcare, social care and criminal justice processes to improve individual health and well-being, as well as criminal justice outcomes. Adult SARC and Child Sexual Assault Assessment Services (CSAAS) typically provide three main elements following disclosure of an offence: healthcare; forensic examinations; and visually recorded interviews, supporting Achieving Best Evidence (ABE).

The Commissioner currently jointly commissions CSAAS in North Yorkshire with NHS England; and jointly commissions a single Yorkshire and the Humber (YatH) regional Adult SARC service with NHS England and the other YatH Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) ensures that the provision of forensic science services across the criminal justice system including SARC/CSAAS is subject to an appropriate regime of scientific quality standards. In 2020 a new requirement was introduced by the FSR for all SARC/CSAAS to be accredited by the UK Accreditation Service against ISO 15189:2012 by October 2023. Failure to meet the accreditation standards must be disclosed in any subsequent criminal justice proceedings which increases the risk of unsuccessful prosecution of sexual offences and decreased public confidence which in turn may lead to fewer disclosures by victims of rape and sexual assault.

The SARC/CSAAS are currently delivered in North Yorkshire from a converted 2-storey detached house in a residential street in the York District. The forensic examination suite is located on the 1st floor and accessible only by stairs so it is not suitable for wheelchair users or those with mobility difficulties; anyone with mobility restrictions are offered an appointment at one of the other more accessible sites within the YatH region. The current premises also accommodate a VRI suite on the ground floor that is used exclusively by North Yorkshire Police. The premises are not soundproof and to avoid disruption to recordings when the VRI suite is in use, a shared calendar is in place for each service to have sole access to the premises without disturbance, but this is becoming more difficult to manage as demand for both services has increased considerably.

Two new commercial properties will be purchased to provide long-term sustainable and appropriate accommodation for these services to avoid overlap, mitigate these risk and manage

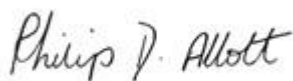
future demand. The expected overall financial implications of this decision have been provided to the Commissioner in making this decision, however they have not been included within this Decision Notice to ensure that the best commercial terms for the purchases can be achieved.

Relocation of the SARC/CSAAS & VRI facilities to 2x new premises will:

- ensure SARC/CSAAS will be able to achieve UKAS Accreditation and ensure continued delivery of SARC/CSAAS for victims of rape and sexual assault in North Yorkshire to support them to recover, heal and rebuild their lives;
- improve availability of fully accessible SARC/CSAAS & VRI facilities for those with mobility needs;
- improve the overall experience of all victims of sexual offences using these facilities;
- support the commissioned provider of SARC/CSAAS by offering larger, more adequate office space and dedicated staff changing rooms with staff showers and lockers or cabinets;
- support officers in achieving best evidence when interviewing victims and witnesses by helping them feel more assured and comfortable; and
- assist North Yorkshire Police in effectively meeting the requirements of Sections 27 and 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

Decision Record

The Commissioner has decided to establish a Sexual Assault and Rape Victims' Centre to house North Yorkshire's Sexual Assault Referral Centre and Child Sexual Assault Assessment Services and a dedicated Video-Recorded Interview suite for these victims, and to establish a separate Video-Recorded Interview suite in York for other vulnerable victims and witnesses by purchasing two new commercial properties and disposing of the current accommodation.



Philip Allott
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire

Statutory Officer Advice

Legal, Management and Equality Implications

The Commissioner's Interim Assistant Chief Executive and Deputy Monitoring Officer, on behalf of the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, having read this report and having considered such information as has been provided at the time of being asked to express this view, is satisfied that this report does not ask the Commissioner to make a decision which would (or would be likely to) give rise to a contravention of the law.

Financial and Commercial

The Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer and S151 Officer has advised that the funding to support these proposals are affordable within the Capital Earmarked Reserves that the Commissioner holds. The expected overall financial implications of this decision have been provided to the Commissioner in making this decision however they have not been included within this decision notice to ensure that the best commercial terms for the purchases can be achieved.