



Legal Aid
Agency

5th September 2019

To all Duty Solicitors on Huntingdon, Cambridge and Peterborough Duty Schemes

Dear Duty Solicitor

Response to Consultation with members of Huntingdon, Cambridge and Peterborough Duty Schemes following Cambridgeshire Police's decision to close Huntingdon Police Station to custody work.

On 16th August 2019, the Legal Aid Agency issued a consultation in response to Cambridgeshire Police's decision to close Huntingdon Police Station to custody work and the subsequent impact on the associated Duty schemes.

In Cambridgeshire the Police Station custody facilities for defendants is now closed at Huntingdon Police Station. Huntingdon custody may occasionally be used as an overflow or when either Cambridge (Parkside) or Peterborough (Thorpewood) custody suites are closed. It is also occasionally used for voluntary interviews.

Detention and interviews of clients from the Huntingdon area now primarily takes place at Cambridge or Peterborough, depending on the location of the arrest.

The Huntingdon Duty Scheme currently has one member.

The deadline for responses to the consultation was 30th August 2019.

The consultation paper provided two options:

Option1 – The current Huntingdon Police Station rota be converted to a panel scheme. This would allow the current scheme member to retain those cases that continue to be dealt with via Huntingdon Police Station.

However, in view of the very low number of Duty Solicitor members on the scheme it would be necessary to set up an arrangement whereby if the DSCC call is not accepted by the Huntingdon Duty Solicitor within normal timescales the case is referred to back-up from one of the neighbouring schemes (Cambridge or Peterborough).

Option 2 – The current Huntingdon Police Station scheme is merged with the Cambridge and Peterborough Police Station schemes. The Huntingdon scheme member would be allowed to elect which scheme they wished to join (either Peterborough or Cambridge). This would ensure that the existing Huntingdon Scheme provider does not lose access to matters arising from the area currently covered by that scheme.

Alongside this a panel scheme would operate for Huntingdon Police Station to ensure cover for occasions when it is being used for voluntary interviews. The panel membership would be the current membership of the Cambridge and Peterborough schemes.

Summary of responses received

We received 6 responses and we would like to thank everyone who took time to respond to the consultation.

The majority of respondents (5 out of 6) favoured **Option 2**, that is to merge the current Huntingdon Police Station scheme with the Cambridge and Peterborough Police Station schemes.

2 of the respondents expressed concern regarding the potential for a conflict of interest with just one scheme member and the associated difficulties this may cause.

An alternative suggestion was put forward that the Huntingdon Police Station scheme should merge with the Peterborough scheme only. However, after careful consideration this option was not considered viable in the light of the way that the Police currently deal with the detention and interview of clients from the Huntingdon area as clients are currently taken to Cambridge or Peterborough, depending upon the location of the arrest.

Consultation Outcome

After careful consideration of the responses the Legal Aid Agency has decided to proceed with Option 2. It is considered that merging the Huntingdon Police Station Scheme with the Cambridge and Peterborough Schemes will ensure that clients have continued access to a Duty Solicitor and allow providers access to duty work.

We will now take the necessary steps to implement this proposal with effect from 1st October 2019.

Alongside this a panel scheme will operate for Huntingdon Police Station with effect from 1st October 2019 to ensure cover for occasions when it is being used for voluntary interviews. The panel membership will be the current membership of the Cambridge and Peterborough schemes.

Next steps

New rotas to reflect the changes will be drawn up to take effect from 1st October 2019, and e-mailed to all Cambridgeshire scheme members as soon as possible.