

Children's Improvement Board Case Study – London Boroughs of Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham

October 2012

1.1 Summary

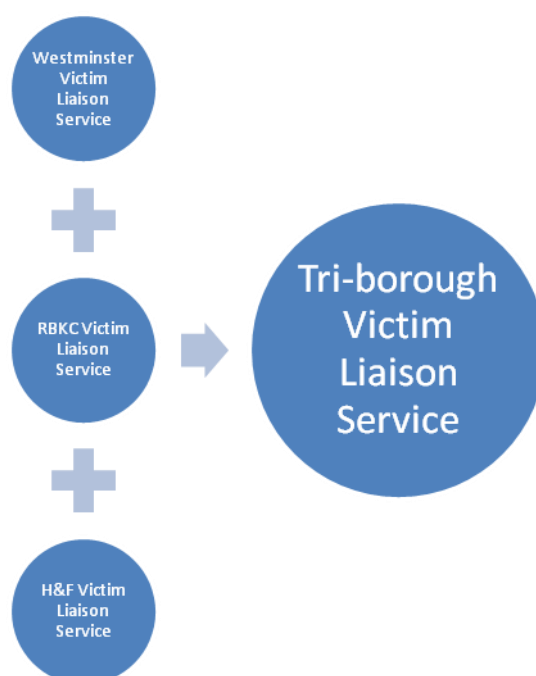
- **What they are doing:** City of Westminster, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC), and Hammersmith & Fulham reconfigured their Youth Offending Teams to have one single strategic lead with resources to deliver statutory services and share services. The new Tri-Borough Youth Offending Service consists of three local borough teams and a centralised shared service, including reparation, restorative justice, referral order coordination, court services, ISS and business support. This case study focuses on the sharing of the Victim Liaison Service across the three boroughs:
- **How they are doing it:** The three Victim Liaison Officer posts across the three boroughs were brought together into one role which is more streamlined to provide direct victim work across the tri-borough locality. Previous responsibilities (e.g. Restorative Justice) will be provided through capacity-building existing YOS professionals across each Local Authority, as well through building on existing and forging new relationships with key VCS partners in the locality.
- **Main benefits and outcomes:** The sharing of the service has led to a direct cost saving in the reduction of Victim Liaison Officer posts, as well as a number of softer outcomes. These include: the forging of new links with community organisations; capacity-building with existing YOS professionals; having one point of contact across all three boroughs (especially as often incidents can occur across LA boundaries); building on existing relationships with the Police to promote joint working; an opportunity to streamline systems and processes to make an effective and efficient service

1.2 How it works

Since April 2012, the Victim Liaison Services across the three boroughs of RBKC, Hammersmith & Fulham and Westminster have been brought together into one service, from the previous three. This has involved:

- Reducing the number of Victim Liaison Officer (VLO) posts from 3 (previously one in each borough) to one who spans the tri-borough area.
- Amending the job description so that the VLO is now only responsible for victim work, rather than reparation and/or casework.
- Using existing links and building new relationships with VCS organisations to provide complementary services to the Victim Liaison Service (e.g. restorative justice and mediation services and victim support).

- Working more closely with the Police to streamline the service across each local authority and move towards carrying out joint home visits to victims with a Police Officer.
- Drawing on skills of existing YOS professionals across all three local authorities who are currently undergoing YJB- and LA-funded Restorative Justice training for trainers – approximately 12 professionals, including 1 Police Officer and 1 community volunteer panel member, will be Restorative Justice Trainers and will be able to provide support in facilitating Restorative Justice conferences between victims and young offenders as well as training others to do so.
- The above RJ trainers will also contribute to Panel Member training. Shared recruitment and training of Community Panel Members (for Referral Orders) will provide cost and time savings plus flexibility across all 3 local authorities.



1.2.1 Main benefits

Apart from the direct cost savings that have been made in removing posts across the tri-borough, the re-configuring of the service has enabled there to be one clear point of access to the service, regardless of borough, which can be especially useful when criminal activity spills over LA boundaries. The creation of a specialist role, rather than shared VLO and Reparation/casework, has led to better service delivery for victims and young people.

1.2.2 Has the project improved outcomes?

The sharing of the service has offered opportunities to forge new links with the VCS sector and statutory partners to assist the service in the delivery of victim support through multi-agency working. In addition, the new streamlined service can capitalise on the existing links present in each borough before the merger took place. Furthermore victims and young people are receiving a dedicated Restorative Justice service.

1.2.3 Has the project led to cost-savings?

There has been a direct cost saving in sharing the services as there has been a reduction in the number of posts still in existence. However, in this early stage of service development, it is unclear if the service will continue to make cost savings in relation to its future work with victims and perpetrators through activity such as Restorative Justice and reparation.

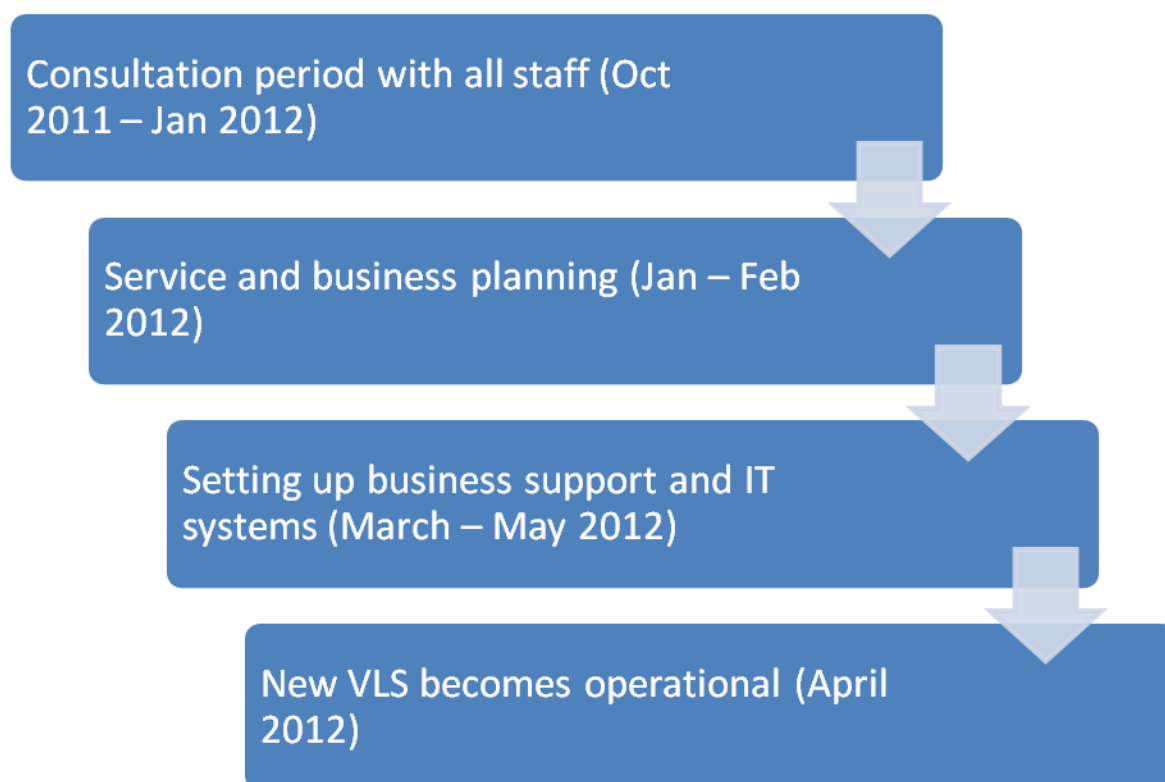
1.3 How it was achieved

1.3.1 Why did the three boroughs merge their YOTs?

The wider context to the sharing of the Victim Liaison Service was each of the three boroughs trying to identify significant cost savings in their authority budgets for 2012 onwards. As such, the proposed bringing together of the three Youth Offending Shared Services with one strategic lead was put forward and consulted on, to provide a leaner and more streamlined service, operational across all 3 local authority areas. The Victim Liaison Service was also shared as part of this wider reconfiguration.

1.3.2 Key steps towards integration with time-frames?

The wider process of the YOS reconfiguration, as well as the Victim Liaison Service involved a Consultation period which commenced in October 2011. The diagram below highlights the key steps involved in reconfiguring and sharing the Victim Liaison Service.



1.3.3 What were the key challenges, and how were they overcome?

Whilst the service is still in its relative infancy, there have been some initial challenges in becoming fully operational:

- **IT Issues:** Ensuring the new VLO had access to all local authority IT systems and databases took much longer than anticipated and also was not in place for the start of service delivery. This created initial barriers for working across the tri-borough as the VLO could not easily access data pertaining to all cases. The situation has now been resolved through organising shared access to remote working for all 3 LAs on the Officer's laptop. There are still some teething problems but these continue to be examined and addressed.
- **Losing access to historic relationships and intelligence:** The reduction of posts has meant a corresponding reduction in local intelligence and respective established partner relationships within local communities. However, the VLO now in post is working hard to rebuild these as well as forging new links, and believes that the streamlining of the service has provided a good opportunity to do this, as well as fostering an atmosphere where other stakeholders are generally supportive.

Learning is also built on and addressed through tri-borough training days where staff can bring up any issues in relation to the reconfiguration which are impacting their practice.

1.4 Learning points

The following are early learning points for the Victim Liaison service with respect to their re-configuring:

- Ensure that IT systems are in place before the service becomes operational
- More time could have been spent in the planning stage to ensure that practical issues were anticipated fully and the appropriate support was put in place
- Tri-borough respective HR processes need to incorporate tri-borough management across the three local authorities, e.g. a Westminster contracted member of staff managed by a RBKC manager will not be able to complete an online appraisal with their RBKC manager as only a contracted Westminster member of staff will have access to this system.
- It is critical to have adequate administrative and business support given the increase in caseload and bureaucracy working across 3 local authority areas.

1.5 Key contact

For further information, contact Marcia Walker, Victim Liaison Officer for the Tri-Borough Youth Offending Service on mwalker2@westminster.gov.uk.