

Volunteer fraud prevention programme (VFPP)

A volunteer programme to provide victims with tailored fraud prevention information on local events and support services.

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Key details

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| Stage of practice | Evaluated locally |
| Purpose | Prevention |
| Topic | Community engagement Fraud Cybercrime |
| Organisation | Sussex Police Surrey Police |
| HMICFRS report | <u>PEEL 2023–25 Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy: An inspection of Sussex Police</u> |
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| Region | South East |
| Partners | Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation |

Key details

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|--------------------------------|--|
| Stage of implementation | The practice is implemented. |
| Start date | November 2019 |
| Scale of initiative | Regional |
| Target group | Adults Communities Disability General public Victims |

Aim

The aim of the volunteer fraud prevention programme (VFPP) is to:

- ensure all victims of fraud within Surrey and Sussex receive relevant advice from their local force
- identify, protect, and support vulnerable victims of fraud
- organise fraud prevention events and provide advice to communities

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the VFPP are to:

- improve public knowledge of fraud
- increase public resilience to fraud
- increase the number of fraud cases reported
- reduce the financial and emotional loss because of fraud
- improve public confidence in local policing relating to fraud

Description

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 2018 report 'Fraud: Time to choose' identified Operation Signature, a standardised reporting and recording process to protect victims of fraud, as 'best practice'.

Within the report, HMICFRS also highlighted a need for non-vulnerable victims to receive guidance. In response, Sussex Police launched the VFPP in 2019, which was later launched in Surrey in 2021.

Recruitment and staffing

Sussex Police created a role profile for volunteers and recruited individuals with diverse backgrounds and skill sets. These roles are promoted through:

- Sussex and Surrey Police websites
- a monthly fraud newsletter
- job websites
- social media

After the application deadline, an initial sift is conducted, followed by formal professional discussions where applicants are invited to discuss the role, suitability, and requirements. All volunteers who accept the role are fully vetted to non-police personnel vetting 2 (NPPV 2).

The VFPP consists of a team of police support volunteers. The volunteers are recruited by the Operation Signature team, which includes one police constable, one community engagement staff member, and one admin support officer.

The volunteers are integrated with the neighbourhood policing teams (NPTs) at local police stations. The recruitment, training, and work management are provided centrally by the Operation Signature team. Volunteers are line-managed locally by the NPT sergeant.

Training

A one-day in-person training session is delivered to the volunteers. The training includes an overview of the requirements of police volunteers, as well as specific training on fraud and access to the force's IT systems. Additionally, volunteers are expected to complete College of Policing training packages on College Learn, such as professional standards and the Code of Ethics.

Volunteers who deliver fraud presentations to the community receive enhanced training on public speaking and event planning.

Victim contact

VFPP identifies fraud victims via the weekly victim list and aims to contact them within three weeks. The majority of victims are contacted by email or post. If an email is returned as undeliverable, the victim is added to the postal list for the following week.

VFPP considered contacting victims by telephone. However, this was dismissed because of:

- becoming more outdated as a method of communication
- reliability, the phone number may be recorded incorrectly
- the number of phone call attempts, and the length of the conversation
- whether victims trust that the call is genuine and not a scam
- time and cost to train volunteers in fraud crime prevention advice

Fraud prevention advice

When self-reporting fraud crimes, Sussex Police identified that 'none of the above' was the most common reason selected for action fraud. This resulted in non-specific fraud prevention advice being made available to victims.

To counteract this, the VFPP uses a bespoke keyword searching process that analyses each victim report to categorise the incident based on tactics, techniques, and victim behaviours. These are then matched to tailored advice packages relevant to the circumstances described within the victim report.

There are currently nine advice packages, that cover areas such as:

- social engineering
- online safety
- banking
- investment
- telephone

The victim's contact data is provided to the volunteers using a heat mapping technique which indicates the most suitable package(s) of advice to offer to the individual.

The report is then read manually to confirm accuracy, before the package is sent out with a templated cover letter containing the victim's unique national fraud reporting centre (NFRC) number. The package also contains a selection of relevant leaflets, website links, and attachments, which are categorised accordingly. This includes information from Home Office Stop, Think Fraud Campaign, The 'Little Book' suite of products, and local multi-agency partner leaflets.

Victims contacted by the VFPP are also signposted to a local directory of services and invited to attend events on fraud prevention.

System access

The volunteers do not work remotely, and victim data is only accessed from a workstation in a police station. Volunteers can only access Microsoft, the force's intranet and the S-Drive. There is typically no requirement for Niche or STORM (force record management software) access. Any data processed is uploaded weekly by both forces to Microsoft Teams using the Power BI dashboard.

WhatsApp is used to communicate externally with volunteers and the Operation Signature team. While some volunteers do not have the opportunity to attend meetings, WhatsApp provides a platform where they can stay connected, share ideas, provide workload updates and collaborate to resolve IT issues. For community engagement work, WhatsApp is used to enquire about the availability to attend events, logistics of equipment, and travel arrangements.

The volunteers use Power BI and intelligence to identify opportunities to support hard-to-reach and vulnerable communities.

Community events

As part of the fraud prevention strategy within Sussex and Surrey, both forces are offering in-person talks. The contents of the sessions include:

- how to stay safe from fraud and scams
- what to look for

- how to keep yourself safe
- how to report fraud and scams

These sessions are aimed at any groups who would like to learn more about fraud prevention. The free talks are delivered by the fraud prevention volunteers alongside police community support officers (PCSOs) from the NPTs.

Preparation

The forces recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for every audience. Both forces developed a joint pre-event questionnaire, which is sent to the organiser in advance. This ensures the session is tailored to the audience's needs and that the most relevant topics are covered. The questionnaire requests the following details:

- the type and size of the audience
- the aim and content of the presentation
- any special factors or considerations
- equipment
- availability
- other important information

Delivery

To ensure the sessions are delivered effectively, the VFPP:

- identify suitable locations to hold sessions
- co-work with partners such as:
 - Crime Stoppers
 - Trading Standards
 - Age UK
 - banks
 - supermarkets
- work alongside PCSOs and PCs from the NPTs
- support and align with local and national campaigns, such as adult safeguarding week and world romance fraud day

- prepare a PowerPoint tailored to the audience
- ensure the equipment is available to take to the session

Post event feedback

Attendees are provided with a feedback form to submit information. This feedback informs continuous refinement of messages, content, and delivery methods.

Cost

Sussex and Surrey Police have funded the sourcing of leaflets and materials for the postal advice packages from the internal Proceeds of Crime fund.

Overall impact

The VFPP process in Sussex has been reviewed by the citizen focus team, which found:

- 93% of victims said the fraud prevention package from VFPP was easy to understand
- 69% of victims said the fraud prevention package from VFPP was relevant to their needs
- 75% of victims said the fraud prevention package from VFPP was useful
- 64% of VFPP victim users have talked to family and friends about the risks of fraud or cyber-crime after receiving support

VFPP has demonstrated a sustained, measurable impact on policing capacity and community wellbeing.

- In its first year, over 150 formal fraud prevention engagements were delivered, reaching almost 6,000 residents, including 62% from identified vulnerable communities.
- The initiative has reduced demand on local NPTs, whilst delivering increased policing visibility in the communities.
- Using feedback from the sessions, the volunteers have adapted their presentations and delivery styles making them more accessible.

Public feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, consistently highlighting the team's professional and engaging delivery styles. 100% of attendees surveyed confirmed they now feel better-equipped to stay safe from fraud.

The Sussex VFPP team were runners up in the 2023 Lord Ferrers Awards.

Each member of the Surrey team has recently been provided with a chiefs commendation.

In 2025, the Sussex team were shortlisted for a chief constable award.

Learning

- Both forces have been effective in integrating volunteers into NPTs. Embedding volunteers into local teams ensures that there are minimal travel expenses and their local knowledge is an advantage.
- The team brings together volunteers with varied professional and personal backgrounds. Each volunteer contributes their unique delivery styles, extensive local community connections, and partnership networks. This diversity is a major strength of the team, allowing for the creation of customised materials and the provision of practical advice to numerous locations.
- The team reaches their audiences in formal and informal settings. This utilises the volunteer's own approaches to present distinctive, personable, and professional representations of policing.
- Volunteers are essential to the success of the programme. Encouraging their broader utilisation in policing is beneficial, especially in areas such as fraud prevention and community engagement.

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