

## **Frequently asked questions about the new premises for the Sexual Assault Referral Centre in the north of the Thames Valley**

### **What services do the Thames Valley Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) provide?**

The Thames Valley SARCs provide services in line with the national Service Specification No. 30 Sexual Assault Referral Centres (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/public-health-national-service-specifications/>), which outlines the public health functions to be exercised by NHS England in regards to the commissioning of SARCs.

The SARCs provide survivors of sexual assault and abuse living in the Thames Valley, or those who have been sexually assaulted and abused while in the area, with a discreet and confidential service, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Clients can access health and forensic medical services, as well as crisis support.

The service employs specially trained doctors and crisis workers to care for clients and, if the client wishes to report the assault to the police, they can arrange for an informal talk with a specially trained police officer.

### **Which geographies do the two Thames Valley SARCS cover?**

The Thames Valley SARCs cover Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. The SARC in Slough generally supports clients from Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire, while the SARC in Bicester generally supports clients from North Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. However, there are no geographical restrictions.

### **Why has the service moved from Bletchley, Buckinghamshire to Bicester, Oxfordshire?**

The service was previously based within Bletchley Police Station, however, due to the Government's decision to close a number of police stations across England, including Bletchley (which will close in October 2019), an alternative premise was required for the SARC.

The Thames Valley is one of a small number of areas in the country where more than one SARC is commissioned, to ensure fair service provision within a large geographical area.

In considering the geography of the north of the Thames Valley, patient access and the requirements of the national service specification, Bicester was identified as the best location in terms of equitable provision for future service users.

### **Why was Bicester Police Station chosen as the new location? It's over 20 miles from Bletchley.**

The SARC is a regional facility that covers the northern part of the Thames Valley area (North Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire). To help ensure equity of access for service users, we looked at possible locations within Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and Bicester before jointly agreeing a new location within the grounds of Bicester police station. The new location means that the SARC service can now be provided in a stand-alone fit for purpose building that provides the necessary facilities and supports the requirements of the national service specification. This supports calls from service users to offer a discreet service that is centrally located and easily accessible by transport.

## **What are the benefits of locating the SARC at Police House, Bicester?**

Moving the service to its new premises in Bicester provides a number of benefits:

- These premises support the key findings of the engagement undertaken with the victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse who called for an anonymous looking service, which is centrally located and easily accessible by public transport.
- Police House is a dedicated, forensically-approved premise. This is a requirement set out in the national commissioning framework. Police House has been refurbished to ensure it meets this requirement.
- The national commissioning framework also sets out that it is preferable for premises to be used solely as a SARC service. The SARC is the only service located within the building.
- There is no geographical restriction to the service: clients can attend an appointment regardless of where they live or where the offense took place. Bicester is more centrally located within the north of the Thames Valley, making it easier and quicker to access for many residents from across the area and ensuring equitable service provision, as per national requirements.

## **What requirements does the SARC need to meet?**

There are a number of requirements that SARCs must meet, including:

- A dedicated, forensically-secure facility that offers secure storage of medical records and forensic samples.
- Availability of forensic examination 24 hours a day, within four hours in cases where there is immediate need.
- Facilities for self-referrals, including the opportunity to have a forensic examination.
- Immediate on-site access to emergency contraception and drugs to prevent sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

## **Who did you engage with about the service move?**

As the lead commissioners, NHS England and Thames Valley Police engaged with the Thames Valley SARC Partnership Board, which consists of representatives from: Oxfordshire Adults Safeguarding Board (representing the adult and children's safeguarding boards in the Thames Valley); Care UK, the provider; The Survivors Trust and Refuge, which provide counselling and advocacy services to clients and support the client voice.

Engagement was also undertaken to help inform the new arrangements in Bicester. We asked The Survivors Trust to speak to individuals with lived experience about what they expect from the Thames Valley SARCs. Their feedback highlighted that it is important for the SARCs to be located in an anonymous building that is centrally located for people across the Thames Valley and is easily accessible by public transport.

## **How does the new location reflect the patient feedback on the need for privacy?**

The new premises are for sole use by the SARC service, meaning there is no shared access to the building by any other service.

## **Where can victims from the Milton Keynes area receive support now?**

The Thames Valley Sexual Assault Referral Centres, based in Slough and Bicester, are available to clients who either live in the area, or who have been the victim of sexual assault and abuse that has taken place in the area.

The service in Bicester is the nearest SARC for residents living in the Milton Keynes area to access both forensic and therapeutic healthcare services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If an individual has been sexually assaulted or abused in the Thames Valley, they can attend an appointment at either of the two SARCs. Most people will attend an appointment at the SARC that is closest to them. However, in some circumstances they may attend the SARC that is further away. For example, if another client is already at the SARC, they will be offered a choice of waiting until the service is available or travelling to the other SARC.

Clients may travel to the SARC with the police, or they can contact the SARC directly without police involvement.

Residents can also access therapeutic support from local organisations such as Rape Crisis, Victim Support and The Survivors Trust.

## **How can people access the service in Bicester?**

Anyone who has or thinks they have been a victim of sexual assault or sexual abuse can and should access the SARC. They can do this by self-referring using one of the following methods:

- Telephoning the SARC on 0300 130 3036, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Sending a secure message via the website ([www.solacesarc.org.uk](http://www.solacesarc.org.uk)). Messages received via the website will be answered during office hours.

Details on how to self-refer are advertised on social media and the SARC has its own website.

Other ways to access the SARC may be through the police, or via a health or social care professional, a third party organisation (for example a third sector organisation that supports victims of sexual assault or abuse), or by an anonymous referral.

## **Bicester SARC contact details:**

Solace Centre  
Police House  
Queens Avenue  
Bicester  
OX26 2NT

Telephone: 0300 130 3036

[www.solacesarc.org.uk](http://www.solacesarc.org.uk)