

## Reflecting on the Effectiveness of Mental Health Street Triage in Northamptonshire: Briefing Paper

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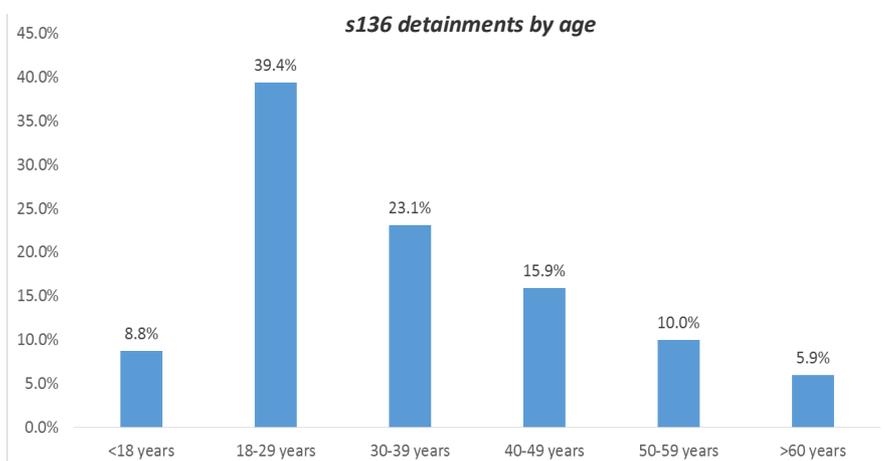
### Evaluation Headlines:

- There has been significant progress, since 2016, that has considerably improved the overall effectiveness and importance of mental health street triage in Northamptonshire.
- The perceived value of Op. Alloy, as it is known locally, as a service for the police to utilise in their decision-making processes has greatly improved.
- The evidence suggested that Op. Alloy is achieving its stated aim of avoiding unnecessary detainments to people under s136 and evidence in the evaluation demonstrates how some service users were diverted from a criminalising pathway to the support they require.
- Young people are a key demographic group contributing to a significant volume of demand within street triage. This is reflective of key trends and patterns within Northamptonshire's documented profile, especially in terms of substance misuse and self-harm.
- The analysis suggested that a series of opportunities are missed before an individual reaches mental health crisis point. This contributes to the demand faced by the Police, reflected in the volume of s136s in the county.
- The evaluation documented how some individuals were detained under s136 on multiple occasions throughout 2017. This brings into question the sustainability of care provided, either before or following interaction with specialised mental health services.

Op. Alloy is an initiative involving a partnership between police officers and mental health professionals to deliver street triage services direct to people experiencing mental health distress within police incidents. Following the initial evaluation in 2016, the evaluation completed in 2018 provides a comprehensive review of the operation which has been achieved through (i) a literature review, (ii) statistical analysis of s136 records, (iii) statistical analysis of Op. Alloy records, (iv) semi-structured interviews with control room staff, police officers, and mental health professionals and (v) qualitative interviews in two triage schemes in other areas.

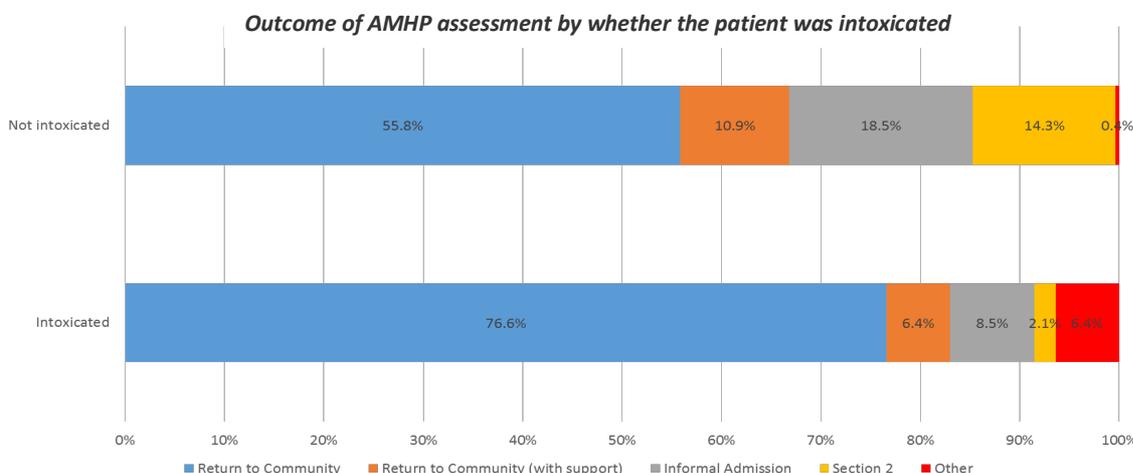
The national picture illustrates that Northamptonshire has one of the highest proportional amounts of s136 detainments, which broadly reflects the pattern for Most Suitable Forces (MSFs). Northamptonshire had the 5<sup>th</sup> highest proportion of s136 detainments in 2016/17 with a rate of 59.2 per 100,000 population, with 434 s136 detainments. It was projected in the evaluation that the number of detainments should decrease by 24.4% for the 2017/18 year to an estimated 328 detainments.

The demographic profile of individuals detained under s136 shows that under 18s and 19-29 years combined accounts for nearly half (48.2%) of the entire s136 demand. Whilst not reflective of the age demographic in the county, it is, however, potentially reflective of the needs of this demographic group, with the rates of hospital admissions for substance misuse and self-harm being significantly above the national average and MSF localities.



Reasons provided in the data to justify the use of s136 show that 'suicidal behaviour' is the main justification for detainment, representing 68% of incidents. This is followed by self-harm, which was documented in 14% of incidents. A longer-term measurement of previous s136 detainments would be useful for understanding the individuals who encounter street triage. It was noted that several individuals were identified in the data as being detained under s136 on multiple occasions over several months. These individuals represent a disproportionately high demand on services.

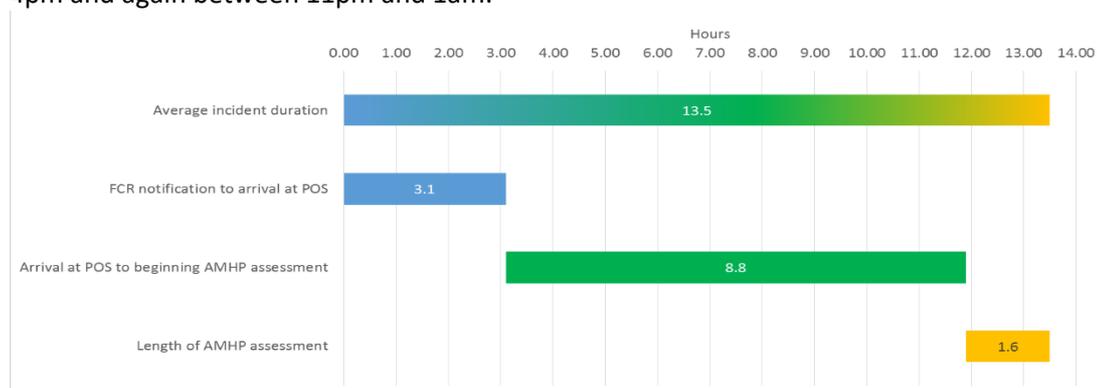
One of the complicating issues around s136 detainments involves detaining members of the public who are intoxicated. In 14.2% of recorded detainments, patients were intoxicated, and evidence



demonstrates that intoxication impacted upon the likelihood of the detainee meeting the level of clinical need to be admitted to hospital. This suggests that officers are less able to identify genuine mental health distress when a person is intoxicated and often misinterpret intoxication for mental ill health.

Conveyance of the patient to the Place of Safety has been a high-profile issue in the national debate around the use of s136 powers of detainment. The Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat (2014) is explicit with regards to the preferred method of transportation for people detained under s136 and that police vehicles should not be used unless in exceptional circumstances, such as in cases of extreme urgency, or where there is risk of violence. In 53.9% of detainments in Northamptonshire, the patient was conveyed by Police. This is above the national average for 2016/17 of 41.2%. However, East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS) were involved in conveying 44% of detainees to the Place of Safety, which is above the national average of 36.1% using an ambulance or other health vehicle.

Demand experienced by services in relation to s136 detainments is consistent throughout the week, and suggests that arguments for a greater need for Op. Alloy cover on particular days/nights are without basis. There appears to be a sustained increase in demand for incidents within the Force Control Room (FCR) that result in a s136 detainment from 2pm through to 3am, with a peak in demand at around 11pm. The demand for the Place of Safety in terms of arrivals of detained patients is similar, with a sustained increase in demand between 3pm and 5am following a logical pattern of being about 1 - 2 hour behind the FCR demand. The Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) demand is observably different to the FCR and Place of Safety demand, with two periods of higher activity between midday and 4pm and again between 11pm and 1am.



The average incident length was 13.5 hours, with an average wait for an AMHP assessment at the Place of Safety being 8.8 hours. Incident length ranged between 3 hours to 31 hours.

**The qualitative analysis of interviews with police officers, CPNs and strategic group members revealed 4 themes:**

**Theme 1 - A Step in the Right Direction: Overall Operational Perspectives:** The first theme that emerged in the analysis was that the operation had taken 'a step in the right direction', with frequent positive comments on its value in serving people in crisis. The improvement was linked to the expansion of operating hours and consistency of CPNs within the FCR. The CPNs, by working more closely and regularly with FCR staff, have moved from being an outsider to a trusted colleague, providing critical advice and support in meeting the demand faced within Northamptonshire.

**Theme 2 - Calls for Expansion: 24/7 Model:** The second theme was a recognition of value and the desire to expand the operation to a 24/7 model. Those involved in the day-to-day functioning of the operation expressed a strong desire to increase the investment and scope of Op. Alloy. All were, however, understanding that the financial implications of a 24/7 model might not allow this to happen. Outside of Northamptonshire, the provision of 24/7 models is limited. Thus, there is a need to modify the dominant '24/7' narrative in Northamptonshire to implement actions and strategy which maximise the existing provision and resource for greatest effect.

**Theme 3 - Drifting Over Time: Strategic and Operational Development:** The third theme related to a lack of strategic and operational development, with participants articulating a sense of drifting over time. The evaluation illustrated a lack of ownership at a senior level that prevents Op. Alloy from making the impact it should. Inconsistencies in staffing arrangements severely hampers any prospect of real multi-agency service development and ownership.

**Theme 4 - Trusting Outsiders: Trust and Confidence in Decision-Making:** The final theme centred on issues of trust and confidence which affected practice and decision-making. Some officers had difficulty accepting the advice of the CPN – a critical factor when one considers the control room-based model Northamptonshire has opted for. Outside of Northamptonshire, officers were more comfortable taking the CPN's advice when they are deployed to the incident to assess the individual. Officers might see s136 as a precaution against future recriminations if they don't take that advice and an individual commits suicide, rather than a genuine belief that an individual has an underlying mental health condition.



## Implications for Policy

1. **Young people** are a key demographic group contributing to a significant volume of demand within street triage. A comprehensive strategy to prevent and reduce the demand created by young people is critical, as future demand, if following the same trend, has the potential to become unsustainable.
2. **Intoxicated individuals**, whilst comprising only a small volume of s136 detainments, intoxicated individuals account for a disproportionate level of demand within the service user profile. Alternative courses of action should be developed to enable Officers to manage incidents involving intoxicated individuals.
3. Officers would benefit from a broader understanding of the **wider crisis context** and access to health-related provisions for people in crisis to reduce the use of s136 powers. Crisis Cafes, set up by the mental health charity Mind, are an example of alternative pathways to which Officers might divert individuals.
4. A series of **opportunities are missed** to intervene before an individual reaches mental health crisis point. This contributes to the demand faced by the Police, reflected in the volume of s136s in the county.
5. Some individuals were detained under s136 on multiple occasions in 2017. This brings into question the **sustainability of care** provided, either before or following interaction with specialised mental health services.