



Beyond the call

A thematic inspection of police
contact centres' contribution
to incident management



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Preface

The first, and perhaps the most important, contact that the general public has with the Police Service is when individuals seek assistance. In England and Wales, this amounts to over 67 million calls every year, and the way in which police forces respond to such calls – both at initial contact and during any subsequent visit, where appropriate – shapes both the public view of the Service as a whole and the degree of confidence that communities have in their local police force.

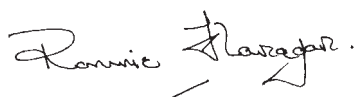
In 2005, in recognition of the core importance of call handling and subsequent response, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) commenced a two-phased inspection of the end-to-end process of police contact management. Phase one examined the way in which police contact centres receive and deal with the initial calls from the public. The resultant thematic report, *First contact*, was published in November 2005 and has formed the basis of substantial progress by the Service in the area of call handling.

This report, *Beyond the call*, presents the findings of the second phase of inspection, which has focused on the contribution of police contact centres to delivering effective incident management and resolution. In particular, it highlights the importance of incident grading, proportionate response, clear resolution and capturing meaningful customer feedback.

For too long, contact centres and their staff have been regarded as an adjunct to operational policing rather than a core element of service delivery. The role of controller or dispatcher is pivotal to achieving the appropriate response and effectively resolving every incident. Their decisions can result in either a positive outcome – with a highly satisfied and reassured customer – or a poor response – with a failure to meet expectations and the consequent degradation of public support for policing. In an environment where forces face increasing pressures on scarce operational resources, good judgements made by contact centre staff can also help ensure that resources are used efficiently, thereby avoiding inordinate delays in response and relieving pressure on individual operational staff. Poor decision making by contact centre staff presents a threat to forces' ability to continue to deal with issues at neighbourhood, command unit and force level.

I am confident that implementation of the recommendations in this report will help forces build on the progress achieved since the publication of *First contact*. They represent a further enhancement of the best practice framework and self-assessment matrix, which have been core to that progress and remain core to sustainable improvements. To move the Service forward, it is important that chief officers and senior managers recognise and support the valuable contribution of contact centre staff in achieving high-quality operational service delivery.

My personal thanks are extended to the inspection team, police forces, and many individuals who have helped to identify current good practice and areas requiring improvement. I am particularly grateful for the critical contribution of the Inspection Reference Group, whose experience and knowledge have been invaluable to this inspection.



Sir Ronnie Flanagan GBE QPM
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

Executive summary

1. A major and enduring strength of British policing is that it is undertaken with the consent and support of the public at large. Absolutely key to retaining public consent and support is the maintenance of the public's confidence that when they call for assistance, the police will respond effectively and quickly. Police forces in England and Wales receive over 80 million such calls for assistance each year and the first point of success or failure in dealing with these calls is the police contact centre.
2. Reflecting the key importance of contact management, in 2005 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) carried out a comprehensive thematic inspection of this business area. In keeping with the principle of examining end-to-end processes, the scope of this scrutiny included both the initial call handling and the role of contact centres subsequently in the resolution of the incident. In light of the scale of this task, HMIC approached it in two phases: Phase 1 examined initial contact management while Phase 2 focuses on incident management – taking account of initial grading, resource deployment, incident resolution and feedback to the customer.
3. The final report from Phase 1 – *First contact: A thematic inspection of police contact management* – was published by HMIC in November 2005. It provided a catalyst for police forces to improve their handling of telephone calls and other forms of contact from the public. Many forces reported that the self-assessment matrix and good practice framework included in *First contact* helped them to identify areas for improvement and to formulate plans for achievement.
4. Between 2004 and 2006, HMIC's baseline assessment of the 43 forces in England and Wales revealed a significant improvement in contact management performance, from a position where no forces were graded 'Excellent' and just 16 were graded 'Good' in 2003/04 to having four forces recognised as 'Excellent' and 20 as 'Good' in 2005/06. Despite the progress to date, there is clearly still room for further improvement.
5. This report – *Beyond the call* – covers Phase 2 of the inspection and focuses on the way that dispatch or control staff within contact centres manage and resolve the incidents that result from the calls they receive. The report does not, however, seek to evaluate how individual incidents have been specifically managed within forces from a strategic, tactical or operational perspective.
6. With the exception of 'location and facilities', the same key business drivers discussed in *First contact* have been addressed in this report (Chapters 2 to 8). The self-assessment matrix and the good practice framework from *First contact* have both been further enhanced to help forces make the changes needed to improve performance across the whole spectrum of contact and incident management.

CUSTOMER FOCUS

7. Since the publication of *First contact*, forces have improved their collection and use of customer feedback at the call-handling stage, but this now needs to be extended more consistently 'beyond the call'. Some forces have made good use of customer surveys to assess satisfaction with the response to and resolution of their contacts

with the police. Such surveys consistently reflect that, while response to emergencies is well regarded, action following non-emergency calls often leaves callers' expectations unfulfilled.

8. Effective use of a scheduled response – ie attendance by agreed appointment – can significantly reduce the queue of unattended incidents and ease caller dissatisfaction. Application of clear criteria for grading of response greatly assists in establishing realistic customer expectations, helps to ensure the appropriate and proportionate response and thereby improves satisfaction levels. Despite commitment from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to implement the grading criteria set out in the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS), almost half of forces have yet to make these criteria the sole method of grading incidents. It is important that all Chief Constables now adopt and implement these standard criteria.
9. Providing customers with accurate and timely information about the progress of reported incidents is also still an important issue for the Police Service, as indicated by results reported in the 2005/06 Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). While there have been some improvements in this area, forces need to establish clear standards for ongoing contact with callers and to adopt national good practice in respect of victims and witnesses, as set out in guidance developed by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform, in conjunction with the Police and Crime Standards Directorate.

OPERATING CULTURE

10. The right operating culture is a key element in service delivery and improving performance. Central to achieving such a culture is the effectiveness of front-line supervisors, both in directing resources and, importantly, in making sure that staff availability is notified to controllers. Staff can also play a core role in identifying areas for improvement to operating practices, and should be actively encouraged to do so.
11. Another absolutely key factor is the effectiveness of joint working between control and response staff. Any conflict or disconnect between these functions directly affects service consistency and quality. It is important that senior managers for the two disciplines overtly share accountability for the full range of service delivery and that this is reflected in the application of National Intelligence Model processes and in personal development reviews.
12. Undoubtedly, to achieve corporate cohesion in service delivery, it is important that each force adopts a single corporate approach to incident management. In some forces, there is a 'mix and match' approach between different command units and this can create confusion and inefficiency.
13. Perhaps the most enduring cultural debate in respect of control room environments, however, is the search for the ideal balance of police officers and police staff. The evidence of this inspection is that, while typically the ratio in most forces is 20:80, the important factor is that every member of staff has the requisite skills – only a very few specialist roles, such as duty officer, definitively require a police officer.

STRATEGY AND STRUCTURES

14. A number of forces rightly consider their contact centres a strategic part of service delivery, acknowledging that they are integral to operational policing. They have developed strategies around telephone resolution, thereby releasing valuable resources to engage in emergency response or in longer-term, proactive problem-solving initiatives. Some 8 million incidents per year are being resolved without officer attendance; information collated from these incidents is used to identify and target areas and trends. Every force should proactively seek to increase the use of telephone resolution in a way that meets quality standards and customer satisfaction and as a means to efficiently and effectively manage demand.
15. Although the creation of strategic forces is not currently high on the Government's agenda, some forces are still examining options to improve their capacity and capability by entering into collaborative agreements. ACPO has a key role to play in setting visionary goals that will nurture the development of a shared national approach to service delivery, and contact management should be considered as part of this approach.
16. Nationally, most forces have adopted either centralised or locally distributed structures for their contact centres; some have wavered between the two. The key to effective working does not lie in the exact structure of contact centres but in how the functions are managed, supervised and resourced, and in their policies, practices and information flows. The four forces identified as 'Excellent' in the latest baseline assessment use four different models.

PEOPLE

17. It is important that the Police Service explicitly recognises the increasing need for professionalism for all roles within contact centres. The role of the dispatcher or controller has become highly technical and complex. It is important, therefore, that the staff recruitment process incorporates an appropriate range of skill sets and competencies to ensure that staff have the requisite ability to deliver a high-quality service.
18. Good forces are now deploying or developing scientific staffing models to ensure that the right number of appropriately skilled staff are scheduled for duty at the correct time. Evidence suggests that such models need to include both the dispatch or control function and patrolling officers.
19. Forces must also acknowledge that contact centre staff abstraction, and how this is managed, can have a considerable impact on the organisation's staffing levels and costs. Some forces have recognised this and have implemented initiatives to improve the situation, but it is still proving a challenge for many because of the intensive nature of the work.

TRAINING, SKILLS AND EDUCATION

20. Training is a vital element in developing and empowering contact centre staff so that they contribute directly to effective incident management. Their training needs include gathering accurate intelligence at the outset, making the right decisions on incident gradings and either resolving incidents there and then or deploying resources to incidents. Induction training for staff entering the contact centre is generally good; however, there is a disturbing lack of refresher training in some forces for staff in all roles. This omission needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
21. A general lack of formal professional qualifications in the dispatch or control function is problematic. It is encouraging that individual forces are developing their own training modules and some have had them formally accredited. The dispatch or control function is fundamental to service delivery and a national approach to the development of formal professional qualifications is required. Skills for Justice has been working with forces to develop a model for the dispatch or control function, but this is still awaiting accreditation. There is an opportunity for this to be developed as part of the National Contact Management Programme (NCMP).

TECHNOLOGY

22. The two most important technological enablers for incident management are the command and control system – to aid incident logging, grading and resource allocation – and the radio. In English and Welsh forces, the Airwave digital radio system is standardised and allows communications across force borders. Conversely, command and control systems vary from force to force and are generally mutually incompatible. A previous project to rectify incompatibility has lost its funding; with the increasing need to expand cross-border collaboration, consideration should be given by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Home Office to funding this.
23. The further development of automatic vehicle location and geographic information facilities, in conjunction with command and control systems, would maximise the availability and deployment of scarce resources. A wider availability of mobile data solutions is being tested across several forces and, if successful, could have a significant impact on both the control function and patrols, as access to incident information becomes more timely and accurate.
24. Technology can also be exploited in the drive to keep customers informed of the progress of reported incidents. Some forces already use their command and control and crime management systems to prompt officers, dispatchers or controllers to deliver progress updates and to record when contact has been made. Some improvement in performance in this area is indicated in the 2005/06 PPAF results. However, forces should consider using new and existing technologies to support and monitor key standards at the follow-up phase of customer service.

USING INFORMATION TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

25. An increasing number of national performance measures relate to incident management. Historically the focus has been on call answering and patrol response times, but more recently the Quality of Service Commitment (QoS) and PPAF have embraced a broader range of national indicators.
26. At force level, however, measures remain highly inconsistent, despite the emergence of local quality management teams in some forces. Local capture of appropriate performance and management information would support far better demand prediction and improve subsequent resource deployment. Better performing forces use workforce management products or Excel spreadsheets to schedule staffing profiles for both contact centre staff and patrolling officers.
27. A clear need exists to introduce a standard suite of measures that are relevant both nationally and locally. The expanded NCHS provide an opportunity to do so for all aspects of contact and incident management.

NATIONAL CONTACT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

28. The recent work undertaken through the NCHS, PPAF, the National Standards for Incident Recording (NSIR) and the QoS has supported significant improvement in police contact management. However, these standards are essentially about call handling and data recording rather than managing incidents. To extend the focus across the full spectrum of contact management, the NPIA is to set up an NCMP that will incorporate NCHS, NSIR and the National Crime Recording Standards.
29. HMIC fully supports the NCMP and emphasises the importance of implementation of all recommendations from both *First contact* and *Beyond the call*, further development of the good practice framework and assessment matrix, and development of a national contact management strategy.
30. The Service should grasp this opportunity to transform police contact management, based on the considerable good practice highlighted in forces across the country. If it fails to rise to this challenge, recommendations from the recent HM Treasury report¹ will enforce changes that could challenge the unique relationships between locally based police and their public.

¹ *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, Sir David Varney, HM Treasury, December 2006.

Recommendations and suggestions

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

All forces should adopt and implement fully the national incident grading criteria set out in the National Call Handling Standards, supplemented, where appropriate, by their own local response times.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Forces should develop local measures to support or explain Policing Performance Assessment Framework data and to gauge which part of the customer experience is good, and why. Customer satisfaction information should be used to improve performance.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Forces should establish and publish standard processes to gather relevant information at the first point of contact and should agree with customers the appropriate means and timescale for providing timely, meaningful information and feedback on the progress of incidents.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Forces should ensure that front-line supervisors have access to relevant support and training to ensure that the impact of their proactive leadership on overall service delivery is enhanced.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Basic command unit commanders and heads of contact centres should be jointly accountable for incident management, making it an integral part of their commitment to providing customer service. This should be reinforced through the force's personal development review process.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Forces should adopt a single corporate incident management model, which is championed at chief officer level.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Operational supervisors should ensure that information on patrolling officers' availability status is accurate and up to date, in order to achieve the force's organisational objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Forces should take the earliest opportunity to explain options whereby part or all of the contact centre service could be delivered or procured collaboratively.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency, supported by the national forum introduced following the recommendations of *First contact*, should collate and use good practice from regional fora. This should include incident management and call-handling practices and should be developed into national customer service standards.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Forces should use a selection procedure for contact centre staff that tests the full range of skill sets and competencies for all roles.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Forces should use staffing models for contact centres and patrolling officers, to ensure that resources involved in incident response and management are effectively aligned to demand.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Forces should monitor the impact of contact centre abstraction rates and adopt robust processes to manage abstractions.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Forces should ensure that dispatch or control staff use Airwave radio-speak standards developed by the National Policing Improvement Agency and then test them for competency as part of their personal development reviews.

RECOMMENDATION 14

Forces should provide all contact centre staff with effective, relevant induction, refresher and regular ongoing training, tailored to the needs of their role.

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency should work together to develop a business case to enable forces to procure the technology needed to share data with each other and with other agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 16

Forces should review their fleetmap² on a regular basis to gain full benefit from Airwave capability and functionality, in collaboration with neighbouring forces, to support core policing duties and business continuity.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The National Policing Improvement Agency should, through the National Contact Management Programme, further develop the National Call Handling Standards suite of performance indicators to incorporate incident management, thus providing complete contact management information.

RECOMMENDATION 18

The National Policing Improvement Agency should develop a national contact management strategy, building on the National Call Handling Standards, *First contact*, *Beyond the call* and HMIC baseline assessments, and covering all aspects of police contact management.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The National Policing Improvement Agency, through the National Contact Management Programme, should further develop the existing centralised repository for good practice in contact centre management, ensuring that the element of incident management is incorporated.

SUGGESTIONS**SUGGESTION A**

Forces should ensure that processes are in place to quality check incident details and information, to ensure accuracy and appropriate response.

SUGGESTION B

Forces should have processes in place to ensure that front-line staff are aware of customer feedback results, helping them to understand the importance of their role in setting customer expectations at the first point of contact.

SUGGESTION C

When implementing and updating systems and new technology, consideration should be given to key standards for the follow-up phase of customer service.

² The configuration plan of radio terminals, talk-groups' associated functionality, users' rights and identities on the system, access to external telephony and other control room systems.

SUGGESTION D

Forces should ensure that staff delivering front-line services have the opportunity to contribute to improvement in processes and systems, to enhance overall service delivery.

SUGGESTION E

All forces should ensure that their contact centres apply National Intelligence Model disciplines and use the flow of intelligence to develop and meet individual and corporate strategies.

SUGGESTION F

Forces should create a forum or process whereby contact centre and front-line staff meet to discuss and resolve issues that affect their contributions to incident response and management.

SUGGESTION G

Forces should evaluate the benefits from their attendance or non-attendance policies and realign them with the results from customer satisfaction feedback.

SUGGESTION H

Forces should put mechanisms in place to keep customers informed at timely intervals using first contact as an opportunity to explain and set realistic expectations for callers on how and when they will be updated.

SUGGESTION J

A senior management team member from the contact centre should attend any force strategic communication meeting, to achieve a corporate approach to media and marketing.

SUGGESTION K

Forces should evaluate the full cost, benefits and return on investment before embarking on any major change to their service delivery model.

SUGGESTION L

To support robust succession planning, forces should maintain a recent list of people who passed an interview and assessment for contact centre positions but could not be offered a post; this would allow prompt replacement of leavers by people who could take up employment at the earliest opportunity. People on the list should only remain on it for a maximum period of 12 months before having to reapply.

SUGGESTION M

Forces should ensure that staff with a tutoring or mentoring role have been selected to do this and have received appropriate training.

SUGGESTION N

Forces using mapping systems to dispatch resources need a system that keeps command and control system data as up to date and accurate as possible. It is recognised that there may be cost implications, but forces could work together on a regional or collaborative basis to put such systems in place.

SUGGESTION P

Forces should use the results from the forthcoming mobile data pilots to evaluate the full impact of mobile data and the benefits it can achieve. They should consider collaborating on a regional or national basis to develop a solution that supports front-line service delivery.

SUGGESTION R

Training for staff and supervisors should include a module explaining the full range of services available through the Airwave package and highlighting the potential benefits.

SUGGESTION S

Forces' working practices should take full advantage of all Airwave functionality. Forces should also implement a marketing strategy to increase staff awareness of that functionality in order to fully exploit the system.

SUGGESTION T

Forces should develop local management information on incident response and management, to ensure that customers receive a quality service throughout the life of the incident, from taking the call, through grading, deployment, resolution and feedback.

1. The context for inspection

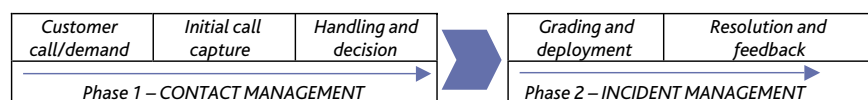


1. The context for inspection

BEYOND THE CALL

- 1.1 In 2004, a baseline assessment by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) carried out across 27 areas of policing business, graded police contact management as the second poorest area of performance in the 43 forces of England and Wales. This finding confirmed widely-held concerns about the quality of police call handling and led HMIC to embark upon a full thematic inspection of contact management.
- 1.2 This inspection was designed in two phases: Phase 1, 'First contact', looked at the management of initial contact, while Phase 2, 'Beyond the call', focuses on the management of the subsequent incident (Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1: INSPECTION OVERVIEW



- 1.3 Phase 1 examined the accessibility of police contact centres, capturing the reasons behind calls for assistance and making the initial decision on handling. The findings from Phase 1 were published in November 2005 in *First contact: A thematic inspection of police contact management* (www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic).
- 1.4 Phase 2 of the inspection looks at how the Police Service grades calls for resource deployment or telephone resolution; the role of the contact centre in ensuring an appropriate response; the timeliness of scene attendance; how incidents are dealt with; and, where appropriate, the quality of the feedback provided to the originator of the call.
- 1.5 The primary focus of this report is the customer experience, but it also examines how contact centres interact with the rest of the service and the internal processes that support a high standard of incident management by the contact centre. It does not cover the operational management of incidents on the ground or of specialist units or critical incidents. *Beyond the call* concentrates on the role of dispatchers, controllers, crime desks and public assistance desks in contributing to the management of incidents by staff in basic command units (BCUs).
- 1.6 The scope of the inspection was informed by a number of documents from the Home Office, HMIC, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities and staff associations. These identified the following areas of concern for the police, the public and the Government:
 - inconsistencies in grading policies and their implementation;
 - lack of ownership of incidents at both control room and BCU levels;
 - absence of supervision and leadership to co-ordinate and direct responses;
 - the need to balance increasing detections with maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction;
 - inadequate processes to capture customer information, with a consequent impact on intelligence;

- internal conflicts between call-handlers and dispatch staff;
- conflicts between dispatchers and front-line officers;
- the quality of performance measurement and management;
- a lack of processes to keep customers informed of the progress of the incidents they reported; and
- human resource issues such as training, sickness, stress, retention, personal development and progression.

- 1.7 The findings from *First contact* added concerns about identifying and achieving common standards; sharing and implementing good practice; and meeting the challenges presented by elements of the national landscape such as citizen focus, the Quality of Service Commitment (QoSC) and National Call Handling Standards (NCHS). Recommendations from *Beyond the call* seek to build upon these standards and contribute to overall improvement in end-to-end service provision.

THE OPERATIONAL POLICING LANDSCAPE

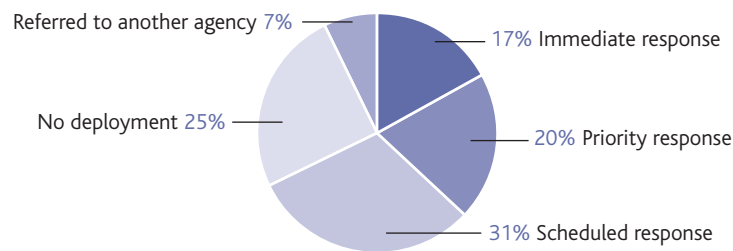
- 1.8 The operational policing landscape has been particularly volatile in recent years, affected by major strands of government reform that have been targeted across the public sector as a whole. For example, the Government is seeking far greater focus on providing the customer or citizen with improved service outcomes that meet their expectations. The thrust of 'citizen focus' within policing is to improve how forces communicate, understand and engage with their communities, whether as direct users of services or as members of the wider public. Its ultimate aim is to embed a greater citizen perspective into all aspects of policing to increase the public's confidence in, and satisfaction with, the Police Service.
- 1.9 A number of initiatives are particularly relevant to, and intrinsically linked with, the management of incidents by police contact centres, in particular:
- the QoSC;
 - the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime;
 - neighbourhood policing;
 - the national single non-emergency telephone number (101);
 - National Standards for Incident Recording;
 - National Crime Recording Standards;
 - the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF); and
 - the creation of the National Policing Improvement Agency.
- 1.10 These initiatives significantly influence the way in which forces manage and respond to incidents. They are each explained in more detail in Appendix F. Cumulatively, they provide the context within which the Police Service delivers incident management.

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT IN THE POLICE SERVICE

The scale of activity

- 1.11 Police forces currently deal with around 33 million incidents per year. Of these, on average 17 per cent are classified as emergencies requiring an 'immediate' response and another 20 per cent as requiring a 'priority' response – ie within one hour. A further 31 per cent receive a scheduled response – that is, where the police and the caller agree that the police will attend at a mutually agreeable time – some 25 per cent are resolved without deploying officers and 7 per cent are referred to other agencies (Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2: INCIDENT GRADES



- 1.12 Unsurprisingly, some forces report variations to the average percentage distribution, but generally immediate responses range between 13 and 25 per cent and the overall total of immediate and priority responses, taken together, remain consistently around 37 per cent.
- 1.13 Variations in the balance suggest some possible differences based on factors such as urban/rural split, but mostly they reveal persisting variations in how the grading criteria are being applied. It is important that the criteria used and the resultant split in types of response are valid because they set the rationale for resourcing decisions.
- 1.14 While the percentages shown in Figure 1.2 are reasonably consistent across forces, it is acknowledged that the picture presented is not absolutely accurate. Some dispatch or control staff admit that occasionally incidents are regraded or even consciously graded incorrectly to match resource availability; for example, at peak times, a relatively high-priority call may be allocated a scheduled response as a patrol cannot attend immediately.
- 1.15 Identifying the exact scale of such incorrect grading is difficult, and most forces report that they cannot afford the time or resources to fully analyse error rates, because it would entail manually checking as many as 40,000 incident logs per month. However, the issue is acknowledged as central to both incident management and response and so, to address this issue, many forces have put in place quality assurance mechanisms to dip sample a proportion of incident gradings and use the information gathered to improve overall accuracy. Forces employing such dip sampling are generally reporting an error rate of less than 1 per cent, but there remain concerns over the validity of limited dip-sampling exercises and the issues that might lie unnoticed within the unchecked majority of incidents.
- 1.16 Possible action to check and validate error rates is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2. It is impossible to overstate the importance of understanding the scale and nature of the workload in incident management if the required quality of response is to be achieved and maintained. It is also vital in ensuring that expensive resources are being used efficiently and economically.

The quality of response

- 1.17 Most customers rate the police response to emergency and priority incidents as good or excellent, with satisfaction rates standing at between 84 and 96 per cent. Although specific figures are not available for attendance to non-urgent incidents, evidence from seven of the 12 fieldwork forces revealed that response can be very slow, ranging from four to 24 hours, and in some cases customers have to wait several days for attendance.
- 1.18 In order to balance the resources available with the level of demand, most forces have policies of not deploying a patrol to every incident. Some 8 million incidents are resolved without a police response, but forces use information collated from these incidents – such as break-ins to garden sheds and stolen vehicles, where there are no offenders nearby – to target proactively vulnerable areas and offending trends. A few chief officers, however, take the view that customers are better served by an officer attending every incident, thereby enhancing visibility and public reassurance. Evidence indicates that the latter approach is difficult to sustain in the current climate of budgetary constraints and has a significant impact on front-line patrolling officers' ability to service all incidents.

Key issues in incident management

- 1.19 While debates over resource availability are common to all areas of policing, there are three specific issues of persistent debate that are particularly relevant to incident management. These are:
- command and control versus dispatch only;
 - central versus local control; and
 - police staff and police officers – getting the right balance.
- 1.20 Each of these issues is covered within later chapters of this report, but it is worth outlining the key elements of each issue at this stage to understand their importance in the context of contact management.

Command and control versus dispatch only

- 1.21 The Police Service uses two main methods of incident management: 'command and control', where radio operators take control of resources, supervise their movements and control their allocation to incidents; and 'dispatch only', where radio operators allocate resources but do not supervise subsequent actions. There is evidence that each model can work effectively. The command and control style is the one used by most UK police forces and is derived from the model used by the military; the dispatch style of incident management has been used for many years by police departments in the United States, and only more recently has it emerged in some parts of the UK.
- 1.22 The two approaches place different degrees of reliance on first-level supervisors and managers. Dispatch only requires a higher degree of intrusive BCU-level management, whereas the command and control method provides support centrally. Response officers are often the least experienced staff and so clear lines of supervision and availability of advice are important.

- 1.23 Both approaches also depend on having processes and procedures in place that everyone with a part to play, both in the contact centre and at BCU level, understands and implements. The major issue in this regard is that both styles are used in some forces, causing confusion and lack of ownership for the dispatchers or controllers and patrolling officers. To illustrate the diversity of approach, of the fieldwork forces, six adopt the command and control style of incident management, five mix both styles, and only one uses dispatch only. This issue is considered further in Chapter 3.

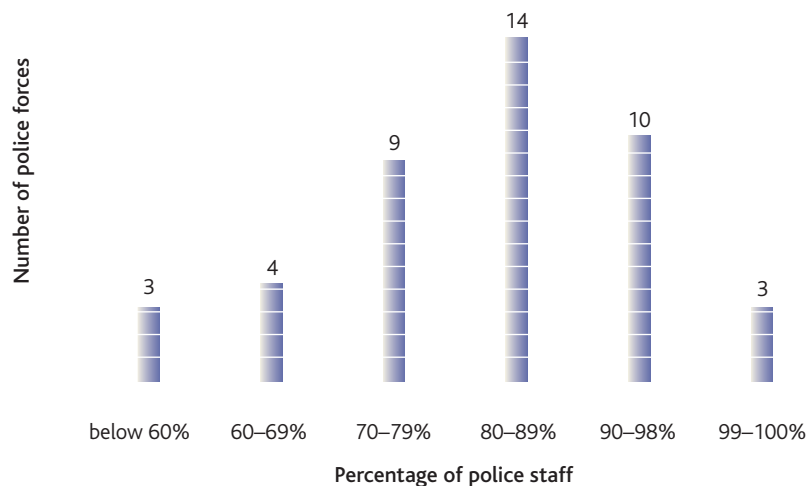
Central versus local control

- 1.24 Some 88 per cent of forces in England and Wales have a centralised contact centre function, either within a single centre or at multiple centres linked by technology. The remaining 12 per cent provide the contact centre function at BCU level. Most forces separate call-handling and dispatch functions, although staff are usually co-located. More than half of forces have a crime desk included in the contact management centre to receive crime input and updates by telephone.
- 1.25 Over the last ten years, police contact centres have seen a general move towards centralised models and away from divisional control rooms. The drivers for change have been new technology, such as Airwave, pressure to achieve economies of scale, and standardising the approach to contact management force-wide. In this same period, however, at least three forces changed their structure from local to central but have subsequently reverted back to local control. Clearly, the change in whichever direction consumes significant effort and resource and so the reasons for change need to be financially and operationally valid. The main reasons cited for reversion to local control include:
- BCU commanders wanting greater autonomy and ownership of the dispatch or control room; and
 - poor processes and lack of support for the centralised function resulting in poor performance in managing incidents.
- 1.26 Interestingly, no forces were able to produce clear evidence that employment of either a centralised or dispersed structure resulted in improved performance, nor could they provide a documented evaluation to compare performance under the different regimes. Evidence from the fieldwork suggests that effective working does not rely on the structure itself; the key elements are strong support from chief officer level, effective management and supervision, being properly resourced and having clear policies and practices. The cultural aspect of this issue is discussed in Chapter 3. The debate around structures is considered further in Chapter 4.

The balance between police staff and police officers

- 1.27 Perhaps the most perennial of the control room debates is how to strike the most appropriate balance between police staff and police officers. The ratio deployed in contact centres is typically around 80 per cent police staff to 20 per cent police officers, with the proportion of police staff generally having increased over the last five years. Individually, however, forces vary quite widely – three forces have 99 per cent police staff, while three have less than 50 per cent. The single largest cluster of forces is 14 with between 80 and 89 per cent police staff (Figure 1.3).

FIGURE 1.3: PERCENTAGE OF POLICE STAFF EMPLOYED IN CONTACT CENTRES IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Source: HMIC thematic research – *Beyond the call*, 2006.

- 1.28** A reasonable conclusion is that there is no perfect or ideal split that should apply to all forces. Individually, forces take into account factors such as a requirement to provide posts for officers on restricted duties – for example, those recovering from injury or long-term illness – as well as the opportunities to release police officers to operational patrol, thereby enhancing visibility and reassurance to the public. Undoubtedly, another key factor is finance – the cost of providing police officers in this role is substantially higher than for police staff.
- 1.29** Despite the historical debate centring on respective policing experience and cost, it is clear that most forces are now signed up to the principle of employing the right people with the right skills and competencies – whether they are sworn or unsworn members of staff. This issue is covered further in Chapter 5.

Citizen focus – keeping customers informed

- 1.30** In returning to the primary focus of the thematic, the final contextual issue in incident management is the importance of keeping the customer engaged and informed – an area where the Police Service has significant room for improvement.
- 1.31** The PPAF measurement on 'keeping the customer informed' (1c) scored significantly below the other citizen focus categories for forces in 2005/06, with an overall satisfaction rating of 62 per cent compared with between 75 and 90 per cent in other areas. There is scope for adapting current strategies and operational practices to be more responsive to customers. Additionally, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime sets out clear standards on keeping victims of crime informed and updated at various stages of an incident or crime.
- 1.32** Undoubtedly, citizen or customer focus is accepted across the public sector as an essential element of service delivery and assessment of performance. It is no coincidence, therefore, that this forms the first and arguably the most important of the key drivers considered in this report.

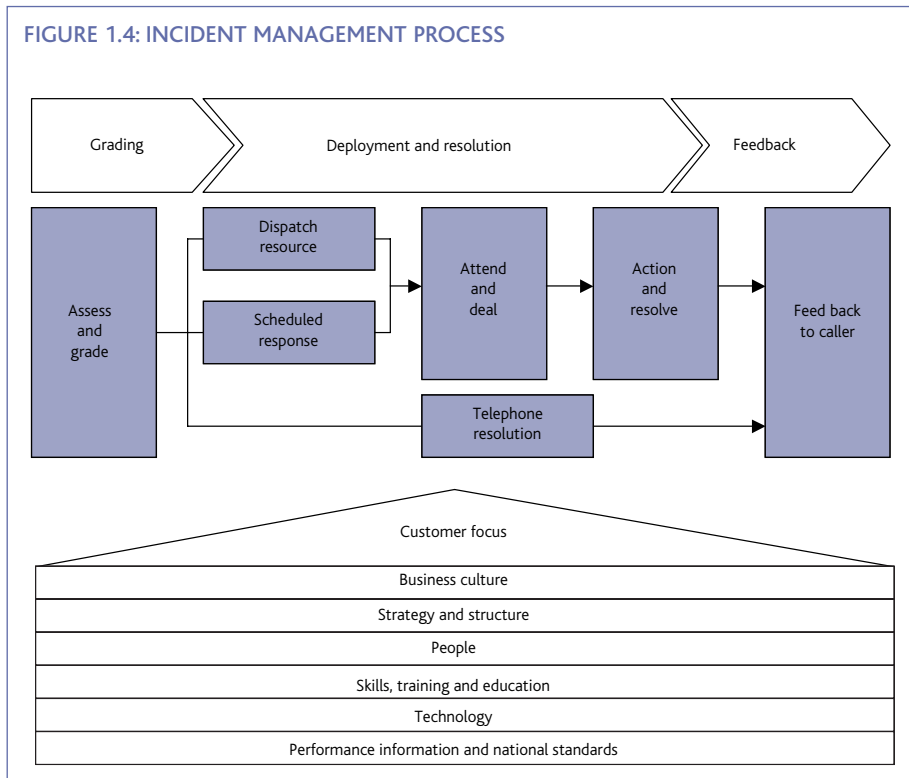
- 1.33 Reform of public services will continue to be a major thrust in the Government's programme of investment. This has been further emphasised in a report by Sir David Varney, in which he lays out the steps required in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review to lift substantially service performance in interacting with citizens and businesses.³ This could have a major impact on the way in which police forces provide contact management services to their customers.

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

- 1.34 This report complements and builds on *First contact* and on previous work carried out in relation to the NCHS and the QoSC. Through the use of case studies, good practice and recommendations and suggestions, this report aims to assist forces in making improvements in incident management through consideration of the seven key drivers to performance, namely:
- customers;
 - culture;
 - strategy and organisational structure;
 - human resources;
 - skills, training and education;
 - technology; and
 - management information systems.
- 1.35 The actual process of incident management incorporates a relatively small number of sub-activities and decision points, namely:
- grading;
 - deployment;
 - resolution; and
 - feedback.

Each decision point is individually affected by virtually all of the business drivers (see Figure 1.4 below).

³ *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, Sir David Varney, HM Treasury, December 2006.



1.36 The seven key drivers are examined individually in Chapters 2 to 8. Each chapter includes:

- an introduction – putting the key driver into context;
- a bulleted summary of what 'good' performance looks like;
- the reality of current police performance; and
- recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

1.37 Finally, in Chapter 9, the findings of the inspection are brought together to propose further enhancements to the NCHS, as previously amended after *First contact*, and a consolidated framework for good practice and assessment extended to the whole contact management process.

2. Putting the customer first



2. Putting the customer first

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Police Service relies on information and intelligence from citizens, which flow more smoothly where there is good will and support from the public as customers. The way the police respond to public calls for assistance, and manage the ensuing incident, is an integral part of the customer experience. A genuinely responsive customer service culture is one where people feel encouraged every time they engage with an organisation, in this case the police, and believe that the service provided makes a worthwhile contribution to the solution of problems.
- 2.2 In *First contact* the concept of the 'total customer experience' was applied to police call handling. The cycle, set out in Figure 2.1, follows the experience from initial contact through decision making, action and resolution.

FIGURE 2.1: THE 'TOTAL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE' IN CONTACT MANAGEMENT



Source: Nicola Millard, BT.

- 2.3 *First contact* dealt with the first two elements of the cycle in full and elements 3 and 4 in respect of the initial call handling. This chapter, in focusing on incident management, examines elements 3 and 4 in respect of action taken and 5 to 7 in full.

WHAT DOES 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 2.4 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS), as enhanced by *First contact* to demonstrate that they value the customer experience, a force should:
- place customers at the centre of organisational thinking and planning;
 - adopt the national incident grading criteria and definitions from the NCHS and ensure that they are clearly communicated to callers and all staff;⁴
 - ensure that a variety of processes are in place to consult regularly with customers and use these results to improve services; and
 - provide methods for keeping customers informed on the progress of particular incidents or enquiries.

⁴ The highlighted element represents a new addition to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and is relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

- 2.5 The Police Service has not traditionally been good at engaging with its 'customer base' or in seeking specific and meaningful feedback on service quality. More recently, to different degrees, forces have established many more channels of communication and methods for surveying public opinion. There is now a greater understanding of the importance of setting achievable expectations (assisted by effective incident grading), recognising the value of honest feedback and keeping customers informed.
- 2.6 There are, however, numerous reports of customers waiting many hours or even days for an incident response. Forces recognise that nearly every incident is a customer waiting for service and every unserved incident has the potential to result in an unhappy customer. As one leading customer service expert, Mary Gober, comments, every interaction can lead to either service or disservice. By placing the customer at the centre of the organisation and using a joined-up approach to incident management, some forces have made a significant difference to performance in this area.

Placing the customer at the heart of the organisation

- 2.7 Forces are beginning to use customer and staff feedback to improve their performance (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – USING CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Lancashire Constabulary is using an approach named PROBE to provide managers with information from survey-based data to support them in improving user satisfaction. The data is gathered by means of a questionnaire covering three areas of the interaction between attending officers and the public – behaviour, actions and follow-up.

The data facilitates monitoring of performance below basic command unit (BCU) level and helps to identify training needs at the team and individual level.

This approach has enabled Lancashire to maintain and improve performance in its customer service.

- 2.8 It is also more widely accepted that when a customer experience relies on the workflow across more than one function within the organisation – for example, call taking, incident management and patrol attendance – each function must make it a priority to gather and collate good-quality customer feedback, and, working together to respond appropriately to incident requests, BCU commanders and the head of the contact centre need to have a shared vision on how they will achieve service delivery. It is also essential that all staff involved in delivering the service understand what makes a good experience from the customer's point of view.

2.9 Efficient, effective contact and incident management requires a systematic approach based on a vision that is shared by the whole team. It means using customer feedback to improve performance, and making sure that the customer is at the heart of how the organisation thinks and acts. The evidence of current police performance in this area is set out under the headings that reflect the sub-activities and decision points of incident management, namely:

- grading;
- deployment;
- resolution; and
- feedback to and from customers.

Grading – achieving a standard approach

2.10 Effective grading of calls for assistance is vital to the efficient deployment of scarce resources, and allows call-handlers to establish a realistic expectation in the mind of individual callers about the speed and nature of response.

2.11 Before the implementation of the NCHS, there was no standard approach to the management or grading of incidents across the country. To improve the quality and consistency of response, the Home Office, together with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Association of Police Authorities (APA), commissioned the NCHS project to develop common standards across four business areas, including incident grading.

2.12 The NCHS established standard criteria for incident grading that all forces were expected to introduce by April 2006, using four grades:

- **immediate** – where a patrolling officer is required to attend straight away;
- **priority** – where a patrolling officer is required to attend within a set time period – in some forces within an hour of the call;
- **scheduled response** – where a time for attendance is agreed between the caller and the force; and
- **non-attendance** – where callers are given advice or information which satisfies their needs, and in some cases information from the call is used to track trends and analyse crime patterns (see Appendix G).

2.13 While the main aim was to improve consistency across the country, the standard grades give forces the flexibility to tailor their target times to local needs and circumstances, in line with the Neighbourhood Policing Programme. Of the 12 fieldwork forces visited, five have clear call management policies. These are designed around communities' needs and priorities, which are communicated to, and understood by, contact centre staff at all levels, assisting staff in setting and managing customer expectations.

2.14 Actual incident grading is affected by the overall vision of the force and the policies that are used to respond to incidents. A few forces with relatively low call volumes have a policy of attending every call for assistance; others expect staff (after appropriate training) to resolve a significant proportion of calls without deployment. For example, one force meets the needs of many callers through the provision of advice over the telephone, using a database of frequently asked questions or involving another, more appropriate agency.

- 2.15 Many fieldwork visits to the forces that incorporate non-attendance as part of their policies revealed that, on average, they allocated resources to 68 per cent of incidents. This varied slightly from force to force as policies are designed around specific issues, but on average 25 per cent of incidents were resolved without deployment and 7 per cent were referred to other agencies. One force resolved as many as 50 per cent of incidents over the telephone without the need to dispatch a resource. Although this force made no formal evaluation of its approach, related indicators do not show any increase in complaints or repeat calls, and customer satisfaction levels remain in the region of 95 per cent.
- 2.16 While attending all calls for assistance is an option, there is no evidence from these forces to suggest that this approach is more efficient and effective than targeting resources to specific incidents. Some forces did, however, find that it led to an increase in open incidents on their command and control systems and poor customer service. Realistically, the ever-growing volume of calls for service, combined with resource constraints, make this approach unviable in all but isolated instances.
- 2.17 The HMIC baseline assessment in 2005/06 showed that over half of forces are now using the NCHS standard grades as the sole method of grading incidents. However, others are using variations, which can send a confusing message to the public. This is not to say that forces cannot tailor their response times in the light of the resources available and local priorities, but forces should retain the basic elements of each incident grading category to give a clear understanding of what response can be expected. As the NCHS grading criteria were agreed by ACPO in April 2005, forces should strive to implement them at the earliest possible opportunity.

RECOMMENDATION 1

All forces should adopt and implement fully the national incident grading criteria set out in the National Call Handling Standards, supplemented, where appropriate, by their own local response times.

- 2.18 Applying the appropriate initial criteria, although important, does not necessarily guarantee an effective response. Some dispatch or control staff report difficulties when patrol officers question being sent to particular jobs, even when there is compliance with force grading policies. In some cases, where patrols do not respond or make themselves unavailable, dispatch or control staff admit that they downgrade incidents in order to alleviate the pressure on themselves. In other cases, they upgrade non-emergency incidents in the knowledge that only immediate and priority calls will have any chance of being resourced. In one force, dispatch or control staff tried to alleviate the pressure on patrolling officers by sending incidents back for telephone resolution when in fact they should have deployed a resource.
- 2.19 The inspection found that this practice of regrading incidents is relatively infrequent as staff realise that there is a quality monitoring process in place to assess compliance with the grading policy.

- 2.20** Incorrect grading of incidents risks inappropriate response, but it also results in inaccurate management information and is a drain on the financial resources of forces. It undermines the confidence of police officers and contact centre staff in each other's ability to do their jobs efficiently and effectively and precludes accurate trend analysis and proactive management.
- 2.21** While inappropriate grading is acknowledged as a reality, identifying the full scale of the problem is difficult and can be resource intensive as it can only be checked through a manual process. In October 2006, Merseyside Police carried out a comprehensive quality assurance exercise and evaluated it against the NCHS grading criteria. A police sergeant and two senior support members of staff, over a period of a month, read a totally random sample of 1,000 incident logs – 2 per cent of their monthly total. Analysis suggested that less than 1 per cent of those logs had been incorrectly graded, and none had resulted in any significant adverse outcome, which is reflected in the force's Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) result for 2005/06 (they achieved a grading of 'Good' and 'Improved').
- 2.22** The analysis indicated that the initial grading given by call-takers and dispatchers or controllers was correct from the perspective of customers, responding officers and supervisors on the ground. The exercise, although relatively costly, was considered very worthwhile as it demonstrated the force's professional approach to ensuring that incidents are graded appropriately for the benefit all concerned, not least the customers, and it helped to validate their daily, routine, quality-assurance checking.
- 2.23** In view of the effort required, most forces report that they do not spend time analysing error rates because it would require manually going through as many as 40,000 incident logs per month. While it is a good way to baseline performance as a one-off exercise, a more cost-effective option would be to put in place a structured but more limited process to quality assess a representative sample of incident logs, preferably on a daily basis, and use the information to improve service straight away.
- 2.24** In fact, many forces do have in place mechanisms to carry out varying degrees of dip sampling of incident grading and use the resulting information to improve accuracy. North Wales Police contact centre supervisors carry out real-time checks; dispatchers or controllers carry out secondary checks; incidents are then checked again at closure stage by a supervisor or sergeant; and finally they carry out a monthly dip sample. They are confident that, with the processes they have in place, grading of incidents is reasonably accurate. However, the force is continually seeking ways of enhancing this process to ensure continued accuracy. Forces that carry out a quality dip-sampling exercise are finding that they have an error rate of less than 1 per cent.

SUGGESTION A

Forces should ensure that processes are in place to quality check incident details and information, to ensure accuracy and appropriate response.

Deployment and resolution

- 2.25 From a customer perspective, the deployment and incident resolution is about answering questions 3 to 7 on the total customer experience cycle (Figure 2.1), namely:
- Do I get who or what I expect?
 - Do I feel reassured and confident?
 - Does anything happen?
 - Did it resolve my issue?
 - What do I think about the Police Service?
- 2.26 During the inspection fieldwork, five of 12 forces highlighted problems of customer satisfaction with incident attendance. Their surveys showed that customers were satisfied or very satisfied with police responses to immediate and priority incidents – in one force, satisfaction levels stood at 96 per cent. However, satisfaction levels were significantly lower for all other incident categories, in one force standing at 76 per cent. These incidents nevertheless have a significant impact on people's quality of life.
- “Our customers tell us, again and again, that we are very good at attending and dealing with immediate and priority incidents, but we are not so hot at the rest and could improve drastically.”** *An operational superintendent*
- 2.27 To address this issue, some forces have analysed feedback from customer surveys and have found that the time taken to attend an incident is a particular issue of public concern. Further analysis of the range of incidents revealed that many of them could have been dealt with by an appointment system, an option that some forces have since introduced. Forces report that this has helped reduce the number of unresourced open command and control incidents and has relieved pressure on dispatch or control staff.
- 2.28 Some forces have made BCUs responsible for allocating resources to attend scheduled incidents and deal with them appropriately, and have made the contact centre responsible for ensuring that, when an appointment is made, it is kept. Although forces conclude that this has led to a reduction in the number of open incidents on command and control systems, as yet there is no definitive evidence to suggest increased levels of customer satisfaction as a direct result. Placing the customer at the centre of the organisation furthers understanding that servicing incidents is not about a ‘clear screen mentality’⁵ but rather about customers not waiting for service, public reassurance and building public confidence.
- 2.29 One force found that 90 per cent of the appointments made were kept by the police. In cases where an appointment was or could not be made, the caller was re-contacted to arrange another appointment time. The main reasons cited for not being able to keep an appointment were sickness and serious incidents occurring at the time. Disappointingly, 25 per cent of callers who had agreed appointment times failed to

⁵ 24/7 response policing in the modern police organisation: A view from the beat, M Chatterton and E Bingham, Home Office, January 2006.

keep them. On all occasions officers left call-back cards for the caller to re-contact the force and make another appointment. The force stated that the system of appointments has proved to be a significant improvement on the previous system of turning up and hoping that the caller would be available.

2.30 There is, however, a clearly acknowledged link between scheduled incident management and setting customer expectations at the first point of contact. Where forces have implemented a scheduling process, call-handlers, at the first point of contact, arrange for a patrol officer to visit the customer at a mutually convenient time. This reduces the number of incidents held on the dispatcher's or controller's queue, and attracts positive feedback from contact centre staff and patrol officers. It is obviously important that the appointment time is met, or that it is rearranged to the caller's satisfaction, or the system will not result in a quality service. As an alternative, some forces take initial contact details at the contact centre and then pass them to divisional staff at BCU, who re-contact the caller to arrange the appointment. But this approach adds another step in the process and can, in some cases, cause additional delays in attendance.

2.31 Police forces need to manage customer expectations consistently and in a corporate manner. *Citizen focus: A good practice guide*⁶ advises forces to consider the following areas:

- setting policies, including standard operating procedures;
- marketing, including messages and assurances given by senior officers – for example, to the media and at public meetings;
- policy implementation – for example, call-handlers setting consistent expectations for investigation; and
- compliance checking and audits, to ensure that policy and procedures are being followed.

SUGGESTION B

Forces should have processes in place to ensure that front-line staff are aware of customer feedback results, helping them to understand the importance of their role in setting customer expectations at the first point of contact.

2.32 All staff share responsibility for managing expectations throughout the incident management process. It is vital that messages are consistent and that police officers and police staff do not promise anything that cannot be delivered. Two forces visited include front-line staff in the customer feedback loop, to ensure that their staff understand the importance of their role in setting realistic expectations at every stage of the process. In both forces, customer satisfaction levels are currently running at over 90 per cent.

Consulting customers to improve service

2.33 Some forces have adopted a more structured and comprehensive approach to collating and using customer feedback to improve their services. Many are now in the early stages of redesigning their business processes based on this information, using a variety of methods to test and triangulate information from all sources.

⁶ *Citizen focus: A good practice guide*, Home Office, April 2006.

- 2.34** Measurements are currently limited in the area of incident management, but it is clear from inspection focus groups, individual feedback and site visits that a greater customer focus – particularly for non-emergency incidents – would have a positive impact on levels of public reassurance. The Government’s police reform programme is already beginning to address customer satisfaction measurements through the PPAF, and forces have signed up to the Quality of Service Commitment, the Victim’s Code, and the principles of neighbourhood policing. These initiatives are all designed to improve the delivery of citizen-focused policing.
- 2.35** Using a combination of national PPAF data and local information enables forces to identify any trends in their area relating to satisfaction of victims (Box 2.2). Any issues arising from the national data analysis should be researched further at a local level using forces’ own survey methods. The resulting analysis will enable forces to target specific groups and give a better understanding of the issues than is currently achievable using national surveys alone.

Box 2.2: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASURES

Lancashire Constabulary has designed customer satisfaction measures relating to the ‘conveyor belt of contact’, which includes incident management. The measures are based on:

- initial contact;
- quality of initial answer;
- speed of initial response;
- quality of officer interaction;
- overall customer satisfaction; and
- learning points.

It has recently conducted another survey which covers officer behaviour, actions and follow-up when attending vehicle, violent, burglary and racist incidents. The survey is structured in such a way that the results are broken down into 28 geographical areas and are used by BCU inspectors to drive customer satisfaction at a local level in relation to incident management.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Forces should develop local measures to support or explain Policing Performance Assessment Framework data and to gauge which part of the customer experience is good, and why. Customer satisfaction information should be used to improve performance.

Keeping customers informed

- 2.36** The second important aspect of feedback is keeping customers informed. The customer experience is a journey that includes initial contact, response and incident resolution, but one of the key determinants of customer satisfaction is how well they have been kept informed of progress and updated. Accurate, timely information comes out consistently as a key driver of public satisfaction with all public services.

2. Putting the customer first

A research study conducted by MORI for the Office of Public Services Reform found that information was among the top five drivers of satisfaction with public services. The public wants the information they receive to be accurate and comprehensive, and they want to be informed about progress in dealing with their particular issue.⁷

- 2.37** Within policing, there is scope for adapting current strategies and operational practices to be more responsive to customers. Additionally, the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime sets out clear standards to which the Police Service is expected to adhere in relation to keeping victims of crime informed and updated at various stages of an incident or crime.
- 2.38** Some forces have recently introduced new processes for informing customers about the progress of their enquiry. In one London borough, the Metropolitan Police Service is piloting a scheme where police community support officers make face-to-face contact within ten days of an incident or enquiry. Cleveland Police uses technology in its contact centre to programme in contact details from its customers in order to provide regular feedback and updates on incidents at timely intervals.
- 2.39** The Home Office has published a performance position on PPAF measures of user satisfaction and public confidence. The report, which highlights changes between 2004/05 and 2005/06, suggests that the national picture is relatively encouraging, with improvements in all areas (Figure 2.2).

FIGURE 2.2: PPAF USER SATISFACTION RESULTS

	National average 2004/05	National average 2005/06
1a User satisfaction – Access	87.9%	89.1%
1b User satisfaction – Actions	76.8%	77.9%
1c User satisfaction – Being kept informed	60.0%	61.6%
1d User satisfaction – Treatment	88.3%	89.5%
1e User satisfaction – Whole experience	78.4%	79.8%
3a User satisfaction – Racist incident whole experience	71.2%	74.5%
3b User satisfaction – Black and minority ethnic whole experience	72.5%	75.0%
3b User satisfaction – White whole experience	77.6%	78.7%
2a Public confidence	49.0%	50.0%

Source: *Police performance assessments 2005/06*, Home Office, October 2006.

⁷ *The drivers of satisfaction with public services*, MORI, 2004.

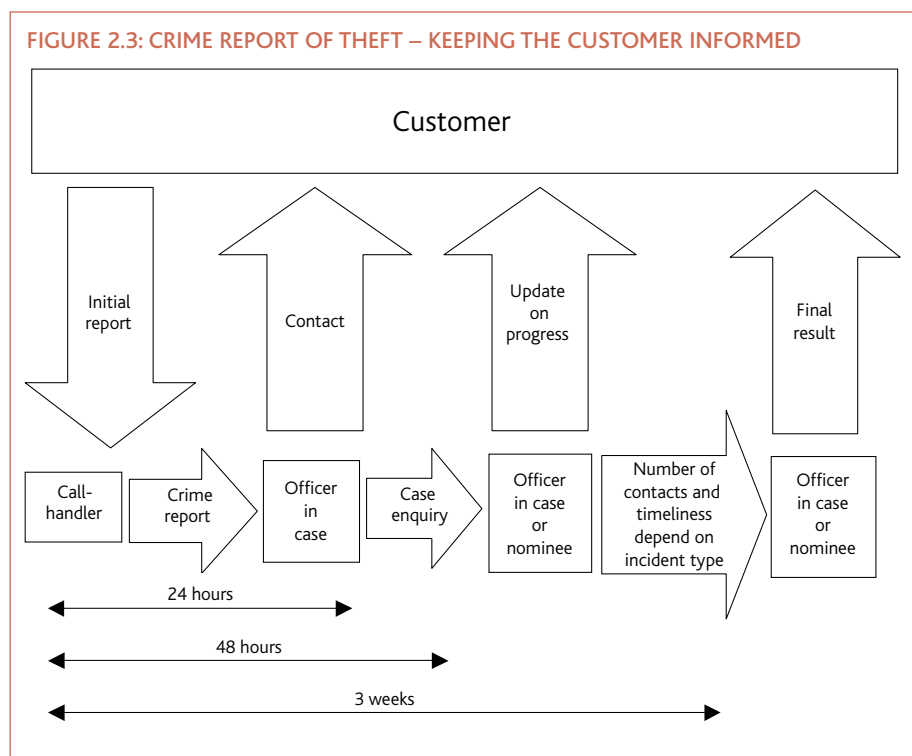
2.40 It is clear that, while all areas have improved, forces still need to pay more attention to 'keeping the customer informed' (1c), which scored significantly below the other categories. Forces will need to put in place processes for capturing detailed incident updates and then agree who will take responsibility for contacting customers. In addition, people's views on how and when they should be contacted need to be factored in to keeping customers informed. Some may prefer to seek information updates themselves rather than wait to be contacted.

2.41 There is a range of methods that forces could use to keep customers informed, such as:

- telephone contact by:
 - the officer in the case; or
 - the contact centre; or
 - another designated officer;
- face to face;
- letter;
- email;
- SMS texting;
- local media;
- newsletter;
- focus group; and
- self-service internet facilities.

The choice of method needs to be influenced by the type of incident reported.

Figure 2.3 illustrates, with timescales, a process that forces could consider as a method of keeping customers informed after the report of a theft. Where the call-takers are fully aware of this process, they can inform the customer and set realistic expectations at the first point of contact.



- 2.42 In this example, the timescales for each point of contact could be set as 'standards' and both the caller and police personnel involved would have a shared understanding of expectations. This provides a far greater chance of appropriate and timely contact being maintained.
- 2.43 There is, of course, a delicate balance to be achieved between meeting customers' expectations and raising them beyond what forces can reasonably deliver. Officers and contact centre staff should not make promises they know cannot be kept. Contact centre staff should have a good understanding of what services the police are able to provide and officers attending incidents also have a role to play in managing expectations.
- 2.44 While the adage of 'under-promise and over-deliver' is a safe default position, a study of residential burglary investigations in West Midlands Police shows that officers should not be negative during the initial contact about the chances of detecting a crime or of bringing the offender to justice, since this suggests that there will be little or even no attempt to investigate the crime.⁸
- 2.45 There is much more that can be done to establish agreed expectations at the outset and to make adherence to promised timings for feedback more transparent to all concerned (Box 2.3).

Box 2.3: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – MANAGING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Sussex Police has embedded a system of victim contracts into its investigative processes. The following considerations are negotiated between the police and victims:

- whether the person wishes to be updated;
- how they want to be updated;
- when they want to be updated; and
- how often they want to be updated.

Crime files are then dip sampled by supervisors to monitor the terms of each contract.

Source: *A practical guide to improving police follow-up with victims and witnesses*, Office for Criminal Justice Reform and Police and Crime Standards Directorate, February 2007.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Forces should establish and publish standard processes to gather relevant information at the first point of contact and should agree with customers the appropriate means and timescale for providing timely, meaningful information and feedback on the progress of incidents.

⁸ *Solving residential burglary*, Home Office Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 77, T Coupe and M Griffiths, 1996.

- 2.46** Clearly, application of national standards for response and feedback would make expectations far more consistent. Work on a national good practice guide to improving police follow-up with victims and witnesses has been commenced and is being led by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform in conjunction with the Police and Crime Standards Directorate. There is also a steering group with representatives from ACPO, APA and the National Policing Improvement Agency, and work to date has involved:
- selection of forces, based on analysis of PPAF user satisfaction data and HMIC baseline assessments, that are either performing well on follow-up compared with their most similar force (MSF) average, or that have seen significant improvements in performance over the last 12 to 18 months;
 - visits to forces to interview key staff involved with follow-up (both at front-line and managerial level) to seek their views on what lies behind their performance; and
 - analysis of PPAF user satisfaction data to establish key drivers of satisfaction with follow-up.
- 2.47** The good practice guide currently being drafted for publication in early 2007 is intended for use as a self-assessment tool that will allow forces and BCUs to diagnose strengths and areas for improvement. As with the last guide, it will be accompanied by a CD-ROM of tools and other useful documents.

Using technology to keep customers informed

- 2.48** Receipt of accurate, timely information comes out consistently as a key driver of public satisfaction with all public services. Consideration should be given as to how IT systems might be amended to support delivery and monitor follow-up contacts. Crime management and command and control systems can be used both to prompt officers to deliver progress updates and to record contact made with victims by officers following key stages of the investigation. As being kept informed has the lowest performance in the PPAF performance indicator (1c), several forces are beginning to develop systems to help keep the customer informed at relevant stages of their incident (Box 2.4).

SUGGESTION C

When implementing and updating systems and new technology, consideration should be given to key standards for the follow-up phase of customer service.

Box 2.4: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – USING TECHNOLOGY TO ASSIST IN FOLLOW-UP

Dorset Police's crime management system sends automated messages to officers to remind them when they have to update their victims – for instance, if a suspect is given bail. If the action is not completed within one day, it is highlighted in red. Sergeants look at all outstanding actions and chase them with the officer. The system has a contact log that shows all actions or updates completed by the officer in the case. The system also has an electronic data transfer to Victim Support. It is being updated to allow the use of Bluetooth so that officers can update files remotely.

Dorset Police is also developing a website that will allow victims to track their case online using their crime reference number and a password. The call-handling centre will also have access to the site information, so if a victim does not have internet access and rings the contact centre, they will be able to give them the most up-to-date information. Dorset Police's PPAF assessment in 2005/06 for providing assistance is 'Good' and 'Improved'.

Source: *A practical guide to improving police follow-up with victims and witnesses*, Office for Criminal Justice Reform and Police and Crime Standards Directorate, February 2007.

- 2.49 Customer focus is not a new area of business or a stand-alone project. It should underpin much of what police forces do, and the way they do it, at all levels. Keeping victims informed of the progress of their case not only reassures them that they are being taken seriously and increases their confidence in the police, it can also lead to the emergence of vital evidence and increase the likelihood of victims and witnesses attending court.⁹

CONCLUSION

- 2.50 The Police Service is making good progress towards putting the customer first. Since the publication of *First contact*, forces have improved the way they collect and use customer feedback at the call-handling stage. This now needs to extend 'beyond the call': creating a good overall customer experience is dependent on all stages of the interaction between the customer and the force. Forces should ensure that customers' expectations are met; that action is taken to resolve problems; and that responsibility is shared among all functions and departments involved in service delivery.
- 2.51 A major customer satisfaction challenge for forces is to keep customers informed. Although some improvements have been made, this remains the lowest-scoring PPAF satisfaction measure. Forces should continue to work with the Home Office to develop a toolkit to support improvement in this important area.

⁹ *Citizen focus: A good practice guide*, Home Office, April 2006.

- 2.52** Many forces are beginning to use technology to keep customers informed, developing existing command and control and crime systems to support this process. Although using technology in this way is relatively new, the impact on customer satisfaction is positive. The Service should continue to develop and exploit technology to ensure that customers are kept informed of incident progress.

3. Getting the operating culture right



3. Getting the operating culture right

INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The operating culture of an organisation sets the context within which it delivers its business products or services. It also, either explicitly or implicitly, demonstrates the value it places on its component functions and its staff.
- 3.2 For contact management, including the element relating to incident management, to contribute effectively to improving policing services, it is important that its value is fully and overtly recognised. This chapter explores organisational and strategic issues that, at a national and force level, are impacted by organisational culture.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 3.3 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards, as enhanced by *First contact*, an appropriate operating culture in a force would embody:
- proactive leadership at chief officer and departmental head levels;
 - processes to regularly consult, engage and survey employees, using the results to improve service delivery;
 - mechanisms to foster and encourage corporacy, co-ordination and shared accountability between the contact centre and other policing functions that are key to delivering customer service;¹⁰
 - contact management being recognised as a core element of operational service delivery and supporting organisational objectives; and
 - function-specific issues of operational culture being positively addressed and subject to evaluated policy decisions.

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

Management and leadership

- 3.4 Unsurprisingly, a key cultural issue in this area is leadership, and in particular the emphasis given to incident management by the most senior leaders. The improvements described in HMIC's 2005/06 baseline assessment of forces suggest that strong commitment and support at chief officer level has a positive impact on performance and is imperative to the success of any contact centre (see Appendix D for the 2005/06 baseline results).
- 3.5 Forces themselves have identified the correlation between this support and improved performance.



“In the past, the contact centre function was regarded as a back-room facilitation department with limited support from senior managers. We now have strong support from our ACC [Assistant Chief Constable] and the contact centre is at the forefront of operational policing – this has led to a significant improvement in performance.”

Police superintendent and contact centre head

¹⁰ The highlighted elements represent new additions to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and are relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

- 3.6** There is also a clear need for many basic command unit (BCU) commanders to make changes to local structures and processes to ensure a co-ordinated and corporate approach between the BCU and the contact centre. For some forces this will mean taking steps to change the culture, considering restructure, reallocating resources and, possibly, retraining staff.
- 3.7** Increasingly, senior managers recognise that valuing and supporting staff has a positive impact on performance and morale and reduces levels of sickness and attrition. They are therefore taking steps to involve staff in shaping the service – for example, Lothian and Borders Police has a programme of work to ensure full involvement, including strategy days for senior managers; suggestion schemes and action plans for all staff; and divisional and contact centre meetings to work on process improvements. All of these activities are supported at chief officer level.
- 3.8** One key to good performance, both in the contact centre and on the ground, is the quality of leadership exercised by inspectors and sergeants. All forces visited during fieldwork provided anecdotal evidence suggesting that members of this middle tier of management are either unable or unwilling to accept the supervisory responsibility that their roles demand. The main criticism was that supervisors still appeared to want to be shift or team members rather than make the hard supervisory decisions demanded of them on a day-to-day basis. But this problem can be overcome (Box 3.1).
- 3.9** Without sufficient direction from their sergeants, some front-line officers will not make positive use of unsupervised downtime. Research suggests that 42 per cent of patrol officers' time on duty is spent on vehicle patrol that is not committed to an incident.¹¹ During this time, they are not being directed to patrol-specific locations or asked to carry out specific activities. Patrol officers' failure to make constructive use of this time is a highly inefficient use of scarce resources and directly impacts on the dispatcher's or controller's ability to allocate incidents. Supervision is key to ensuring that resources are fully and effectively utilised.

¹¹ *Discretion or direction?: An analysis of patrol officer downtime*, Christine N Famega, PhD dissertation, 2003.

Box 3.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

Sergeants at Bedfordshire Police provide strong direction for front-line officers. They do so by ensuring that they understand their role, are briefed and debriefed on each shift and are empowered to manage their own daily workload in a way that best meets the needs of the public. Success is measured by the number of open or unserviced incidents at the end of each shift.

Officers proactively use their 'downtime' to service the scheduled incidents on the command and control system. In some instances they commence duty with over 50 unserviced incidents and leave at the end of the shift with none.

However, there is always scope for further improvement: officers in a focus group suggested that fitting mobile data sets in vehicles would enable them to have direct access to accurate incident information and be better able to service outstanding jobs in a more structured way. They identified that this would alleviate the pressure on control room staff and be a more effective and efficient use of their own downtime.

- 3.10** Forces that have invested in developing, supporting and training staff, particularly at sergeant and inspector level, have realised the benefits in terms of improved performance and staff morale. Staff appreciate that the force is providing investment in their professional and personal development. For example, Merseyside Police supervisors have a two-week course on resource management, which includes working time directives, health and welfare, sickness absence, the psychological effects of working in a police environment, the physiological effects of shift work, employment law and shift patterns. It has moved the force to the forefront of applying scientifically accurate staffing models, positively impacting on its ability to respond effectively to incidents.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Forces should ensure that front-line supervisors have access to relevant support and training to ensure that the impact of their proactive leadership on overall service delivery is enhanced.

Engaging with staff to improve service delivery

- 3.11** Working in a contact centre environment can be highly stressful, resulting in low morale and leading to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. More than three-quarters of commercial contact centres are run using an intrusive management style. Such centres tend to focus on efficiency, set tight targets and exclude staff from the decision-making process. One way to reduce abstraction and attrition rates is to engage staff in decision making; this is also acknowledged as a key element in successful operation.
- 3.12** Several police forces have acknowledged this and are using the systems approach to engage staff (Box 3.2). A better way to think about managing people is to lead them in understanding and acting on the system or the process. This approach harnesses

service agents' ingenuity towards learning and improving service delivery. Just as service agents are best placed to understand and work with demand, they are best placed to understand and address the issues – the nature of the call or incident, procedures, availability of information and staff knowledge.¹²

Box 3.2: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – USING A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Greater Manchester Police has trained eight operational control staff to conduct a systems approach to demand analysis. They studied radio transmissions made and received throughout a 24-hour period. The staff have been able to gauge exactly what activity takes place and have been able to assess the impact of any procedural, technical or organisational changes to the method or style of the radio dispatch process. They identified that 45 per cent of the calls being made on the radio were non-value transmissions, such as “what’s happening?”, “where are you?” or “can you do this for me?”. Reducing this traffic or using mobile data in a co-ordinated and joined-up manner is more cost effective and allows suppressed demand to be serviced. Prior to this study, the force was unsure as to the nature of radio demand, but it now has a detailed action plan to improve incident and call management.

- 3.13** Cumbria Constabulary is in the process of redesigning contact centre workflow and has included input from staff in all areas to secure improvements (see also Box 3.3). This has galvanised the whole project, has helped with their change programme and has led to improvements in current performance and staff morale.

Box 3.3: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – USING STAFF TO IMPROVE PROCESSES

Police officers and staff in Suffolk Constabulary’s Southern Area have been working on a six-month project to turn their ideas for improvement into reality. With the support of the Home Office, they have been analysing basic processes and developing ways of working more efficiently and effectively.

Now, officers and staff have established a more effective system for dealing with less urgent calls, which also frees up response and patrol teams to concentrate on urgent calls. This includes an ‘events diary’ that allows members of the public to make timed appointments for non-urgent police attendance. Callers know when to expect a visit, and the police can avoid wasted journeys.

At the beginning of the project, an average of 130 ‘less severe’ calls were not being dealt with on the same day. This put significant pressure on officers and police, who were constantly fighting to clear the backlog, and led to customer dissatisfaction.

A survey carried out at the end of the project showed that levels of customer satisfaction had risen by 10 per cent to over 84 per cent.

Source: *Rebalancing the criminal justice system in favour of the law-abiding majority: Cutting crime, reducing reoffending and protecting the public*, Home Office, July 2006.

SUGGESTION D

Forces should ensure that staff delivering front-line services have the opportunity to contribute to improvement in processes and systems, to enhance overall service delivery.

¹² *Freedom from command and control: A better way to make the work work*, John Seddon, Vanguard, 2003.

Shared accountability for service delivery

- 3.14 Contact centres are usually responsible for dispatching patrols to incidents, whether working with a dispatch-only or a command and control system of deployment. However, the contact centre relies on the number and quality of incident response patrols made available by the BCUs at the commencement of each shift, and so it is essential that BCU commanders are held accountable for providing the correct staffing levels to service incidents.
- 3.15 When provision falls short of requirements, a high number of incidents are left unresourced on command and control systems, sometimes for many days. One force reported that it regularly has over 200 unserved non-urgent incidents on one neighbourhood policing area and, unsurprisingly therefore, regularly receives complaints about the time taken to respond to incidents. The force's executive team has set up a project to address the matter.

“In my force, incident response units are only allocated to immediate or priority incidents, resulting in large numbers of scheduled incidents being left unserved for many days. Incident management is made more difficult as some officers fail to recognise the importance of the dispatcher or controller in allocating resources to incidents; they refuse to answer their radios when available for deployment or to update their status.” Senior police officer in a rural force

- 3.16 In contrast, other forces are sharing accountability and ownership for service delivery between the contact centre and BCU commanders and are seeing positive results (Boxes 3.4 and 3.5).

Box 3.4: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

Northumbria Police has developed management information on patrol resource availability, including the number of patrols that **should** be on duty; the actual number that **are** on duty; those that are allocated to incident response; and those available to send at certain points of each shift.

BCU commanders have incident-related objectives in their personal development reviews (PDRs) – such as the number of scheduled incidents left open and the number of response patrols available per shift – and they share responsibility for performance with the head of the contact centre. The contact centre works closely with BCUs and produces this information for them. This management information is used to identify good practice and measure the number of unserved incidents. It also appears as a performance agenda item at force level.

This approach has resulted in reducing unserved incidents and has ensured that more patrols are available for the incident manager, which reduces pressure on both patrolling officers and dispatch or control staff.

Box 3.5: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – SHARED APPROACH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Humberside Police has made contact management a priority within the force. The Chief Constable commissioned an incident management project and tasked BCUs and contact centre staff to work together to improve their performance.

The force has a switchboard, command centre, public assistance desk (PAD) and four BCU helpdesks. Before the project started, all calls went into the command centre, there was no filter on incident response types and control room staff tried to allocate patrols to each request for service. This created a problematic bottleneck at the control function of the contact centre, leaving many incidents open on dispatchers' screens for days on end.

The project led to three major changes. Calls that needed a response were split into those requiring an immediate response and those requiring a scheduled response. Alongside this, a sergeant worked with the PAD to classify calls that could be dealt with over the telephone. Second, the way calls were taken was redesigned, to manage and concentrate more on incident management. And third, the switchboard was used as a filtering system, whereby caller details were noted and the PAD was set a target of four hours to call them back. In the event, however, this streamlined process resulted in the PAD usually making contact within an hour.

Feedback from both customers and staff has been positive. The force now feels it is better able to 'deal with today's jobs today', and accountability for incident management is shared between BCUs and the contact centre.

Performance improvements

Pre-project	Post-project
60 incidents per day per dispatcher	20 incidents per day per dispatcher
8,260 calls to the PSD	3,210 calls and 840 emails
37 complaints over three months	18 complaints over three months
Immediate response times:	
Average 47 minutes (Target: 15 minutes (urban), 20 minutes (rural))	Average 18 minutes
20 per cent arrests from scene	29 per cent increase in one month

Through the contact centre and BCU working together in this way, Humberside Police has made significant improvements in the way in which it manages and services incidents. It plans to continue this approach to incident management.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Basic command unit commanders and heads of contact centres should be jointly accountable for incident management, making it an integral part of their commitment to providing customer service. This should be reinforced through the force's personal development review process.

- 3.17 In trying to build and foster a good working relationship between BCUs and the centrally managed contact centre, Staffordshire Police has developed the concept of a virtual divisional control room. Although the contact centre is spread over multiple sites, consultation with BCU commanders enabled the force to align its dispatch or control staff with each local policing unit wherever possible. This has strengthened the relationship between dispatch or control staff and supervision and patrolling officers, while helping to enhance local knowledge and priorities.

Recognising contact management's core role

- 3.18 The contact centre can play a significant role in delivering and supporting organisational objectives. With ever-decreasing budgets, increases in demand and high public expectations, delivering good customer service and achieving targets is a major challenge for the Police Service. Telephone resolution, training staff to explain and set realistic expectations, and informing callers of the next step in the process can all help to release valuable resources to respond more effectively.
- 3.19 In six of the 12 forces visited, contact management is regarded as a core element of operational policing, with established formal links between contact centres and BCUs. In addition, contact centre representatives are now included in local National Intelligence Model (NIM) processes. For example, contact centre managers attend tasking and co-ordinating meetings at BCUs to ensure that all staff are aware of prolific offender details, hot spots for crime patterns and local initiatives. This ensures a two-way flow of intelligence and develops complementary activity to achieve common objectives.
- 3.20 Northumbria Police has a team within the contact centre that specialises in intelligence dissemination and development. Contact centre and BCU staff have welcomed this support because it helps them significantly in using the intelligence and information better to manage and deal with incidents. This is commendable and other forces may wish to consider building on this approach.
- 3.21 Increasingly, service delivery relies on more than one approach, and many organisations are now using partners in service delivery. The contact centre has a significant role to play in this approach. At first point of contact they can signpost callers to another agency or partner or use partnership information and guidance to resolve issues without the need to deploy a police resource. This ensures that the responses to incidents and calls for service are channelled through the most appropriate agency to deliver the service required.

SUGGESTION E

All forces should ensure that their contact centres apply National Intelligence Model disciplines and use the flow of intelligence to develop and meet individual and corporate strategies.

- 3.22** One shared approach to incident management that focuses on partnership working is the introduction of the 101 single non-emergency number, which offers a joined-up approach between the Police Service and local authority to tackling anti-social behaviour and promoting work relating to quality of life issues.
- 3.23** South Wales Police and Cardiff City Council have included in their model a tasking and co-ordinating unit that uses a proactive approach to problem solving, such as a proactive operation based on information collected by 101 call-handlers to combat the anti-social use of motorcycles. The operation resulted in ten motorcycles being seized, 17 people given warnings and four people reported for road traffic offences. This approach allows partners to utilise their resources effectively and increase their capacity to manage demand.

Specific issues of operating culture

- 3.24** As with many areas of specialised work, a small number of organisational culture issues are specific to the function. In terms of contact management, and in particular incident management, there are three perennial issues of contention, namely:
- command and control or dispatch only;
 - resourcing an appropriate response; and
 - police staff and police officers – getting the right balance.

Command and control or dispatch only

- 3.25** The police command and control model is derived from military practice, with radio operators responsible for the control of incidents, allocating patrolling officers to deal with them, and supervising their ongoing activity and availability. Radio operators performing this function are often referred to as controllers and work in control rooms.
- 3.26** The dispatch-only model was developed by police departments in the United States and has been used there for over 50 years. In this model, the role of the contact centre is to receive calls, identify availability and dispatch patrols. The management and supervision of patrolling officers and incidents is then carried out by locally based officers.
- 3.27** The two approaches place different degrees of reliance on first-level supervisors and managers. The dispatch-only approach requires a higher degree of intrusive BCU-level oversight and management, whereas the command and control method provides support centrally. Response officers are often among the least experienced of staff and so clear lines of supervision and availability of advice are important.
- 3.28** Both models have their merits and can be applied effectively. However, in practice, the actual models used in individual forces vary widely, and in some forces dispatchers or controllers are expected to change between the command and control model and the dispatch model from BCU to BCU, as the contact centre matches the style preferred by individual BCU commanders. This causes confusion and, in some cases, lack of any ownership and effective incident management. By choosing one style and using a corporate approach, several forces have realised a positive impact on service delivery, as training is given in just one style and staff on the ground have a clear focus on which role they are trying to fulfil.

- 3.29** One way to ensure that all incidents are managed effectively is by appointing a duty officer or critical incident manager within the contact centre. This role is best pitched at inspector level and, by having clear strategic direction and support at chief officer level, ensures a corporate approach to the incident management model used. This makes ownership and accountability explicit and gives the post-holder an overall view of how incidents should be responded to and managed (Box 3.6). This is an important role and it is vital that the selection process takes full account of the competencies required and comprehensive training and support should be provided.

Box 3.6: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – EFFECTIVE COMMAND AND CONTROL

Northumbria Police identified that neither the contact centre nor supervisors on the ground were taking control or managing incidents, resulting in many incidents not being serviced. It embarked on a programme to restore the balance by introducing the command and control style of managing patrolling officers and supervision at BCU level. The programme included recruiting critical incident managers, to ensure effective servicing of incidents, and a same-day service from patrols to meet local targets. To date, the force has achieved significant improvements in service, as evidenced by reduced response times and better management of the time taken to respond to a number of firearms incidents in the first months of implementation. Customer feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction and support.

Resourcing an appropriate response

- 3.30** Some forces successfully apply elements of command and control at the contact centre in relation to grade 1 and 2 calls (priority and immediate), but deal with grade 3 incidents (scheduled) at BCU level. This is a legitimate separation of responsibilities but requires close liaison and communication between the contact centre and BCUs.
- 3.31** Too often, grade 3 incidents are not well managed, leading to a backlog of cases. In one force, patrol officers were told by their sergeant to ignore outstanding scheduled incidents that were unrelated to key performance indicators, to focus effort on other targets, including sanction detections. This has had a detrimental impact on levels of service to the public. Four of the 12 forces visited have explicitly recognised that this situation is untenable and have taken steps to change the way in which they deal with incidents.

“I am accountable for meeting a range of government targets on crime and sanction detections but nothing relating to the general servicing of incidents. What would you expect me to focus on?” BCU commander

“There are so many demands on BCU commanders to reduce and detect crime that focusing on response to incidents has been stripped out, leaving us and a few response patrols to deal with them.”

Chief inspector and head of communications

- 3.32 Appendix E of *First contact* described the 'directed communication' model employed by Lancashire Constabulary. The system puts contact centre radio operators in charge of controlling resource allocation, but BCU supervisors are still responsible for command of incidents and officers on the ground. This approach has proven to be effective. Supervisors cannot abdicate responsibility for their front-line duties, but the contact centre is also involved in supervising and controlling incidents. Both parties clearly understand their roles and how they should work together.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Forces should adopt a single corporate incident management model, which is championed at chief officer level.

- 3.33 Another factor affecting the capacity of dispatch or control staff to allocate resources is response officers' availability. Virtually all forces now have specialist teams, such as neighbourhood policing teams, across the force area, ring-fenced to prevent them being distracted from their core role. This can lead to a backlog of calls and has a detrimental impact on customers, and on dispatch or control staff, who find themselves under increasing amounts of pressure.

“Experienced controllers are going sick because of the pressure caused because they don’t have enough patrols to send to incidents.” Chief inspector and head of communications

- 3.34 In one force, 50 officers were booked on duty but only three were allocated to incident management. In another force, management information indicated that 800 officers were on duty during an afternoon shift in a command area, but only 20 of those officers were allocated to response duties. In both forces they now use this information at force level to allocate more officers to response. The information is also used by chief officers in setting BCU commanders' PDR objectives.
- 3.35 Some forces have interpreted national guidelines on neighbourhood policing to preclude neighbourhood policing teams from attending any response incidents, including scheduled responses. This interpretation is incorrect: neighbourhood policing teams are expected to attend scheduled incidents in their particular neighbourhood area.
- 3.36 In one force, neighbourhood policing teams handle scheduled incidents in their own neighbourhoods, in addition to their core role of working with partners and communities to prioritise and target local issues. Despite fears of a dilution of their core role, the force has identified that in a typical week this means that each neighbourhood officer may deal with only three or four additional incidents. This approach has contributed to reducing unserved incidents and has proved to be another mechanism in building confidence and reassurance for local communities. The feedback has been positive and the force is better able to manage its scheduled incident demand and reduce pressure on dispatch or control staff. They are now investigating the development of a deployment model to share responsibility for incident attendance across all operational functions, including neighbourhood policing teams, CID, roads policing units and proactive teams.

- 3.37 Dispatchers or controllers regularly manage over 50 patrol officers on a radio channel; their ability to service incidents is impeded when patrol officers do not book on duty or update their status when arriving or leaving an incident scene. This creates an avoidable need to hail individual patrols, wasting radio airtime and valuable time in responding to incidents. In one force, 53 per cent of outbound radio traffic was spent asking for status updates or why patrols were not booked on duty, or seeking 'any patrol' to attend incidents. To effectively manage incidents, dispatchers or controllers must have real-time information on resource availability.
- 3.38 The most effective way to get this information is from the patrols themselves. This can be achieved by voice radio contact or by automatic vehicle or person location systems, or through the Airwave radio status update facility, which can update a patrol's availability directly to the command and control system at the press of a button.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Operational supervisors should ensure that information on patrolling officers' availability status is accurate and up to date, in order to achieve the force's organisational objectives.

Police staff and police officers – getting the right balance

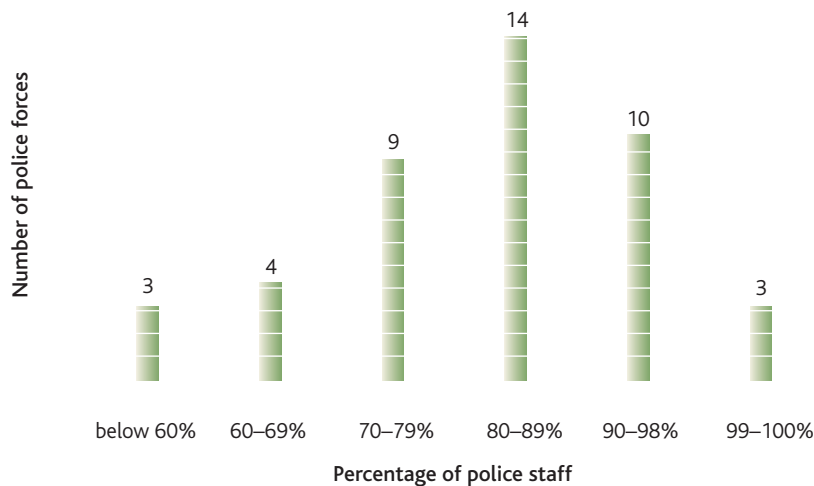
- 3.39 There is an ongoing debate as to the balance of police officers and staff in the dispatch or control function. Since 1996 there has been a clear trend towards an increasing number of police staff, as forces have sought to release operational officers to concentrate on front-line tasks.
- 3.40 A recent survey found that nearly all forces employ both police staff and police officers in all areas of their contact centres: call handling, dispatch or control, switchboard and crime desks.¹³ Only one force employs police staff only throughout, with the single exception of the duty officer role. In all the forces surveyed, there was a variety of supervisory models in place, with police officers being supervised by police staff at all levels and vice versa.
- 3.41 Call-handling units employ more police staff than dispatch units. In 13 forces (30 per cent of those surveyed by the Home Office) all call-handling staff were police staff; but in only one of these forces were all the dispatchers also police staff. In ten forces staff were multi-skilled and able to perform both call-handling and dispatch or control functions. Of the 15 forces with crime desks, ten employed both police staff and uniformed officers. Switchboards tend to exclusively employ police staff.
- 3.42 Typically, the ratio of police staff to police officers in a contact centre is around 80:20, with over 75 per cent of forces operating at about this ratio (see Figure 3.1).

¹³ Call-handling survey, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office, 2005.

- 3.43** Historically, those opposed to the increasing deployment of police staff in control rooms have pointed to their lack of police experience and operational knowledge. During the inspection, some individuals did raise these concerns, but this is increasingly a minority view because there is widespread recognition in the majority of forces that contact centre staff are a professional body of people with specialist skills and are more than capable of carrying out the role to the highest standards.

“As a patrolling officer I had only experienced the contact centre from the front line. It wasn’t until I was appointed duty officer that I fully appreciated and realised the professionalism and expertise that police staff within the centre demonstrate on a day-to-day basis.” A duty officer in a force contact centre

FIGURE 3.1: PERCENTAGE OF POLICE STAFF EMPLOYED IN CONTACT CENTRES IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Source: HMIC thematic research – *Beyond the call*, 2006.

- 3.44** Despite a few individual misgivings, every force consulted stated that police staff are as effective as police officers in dispatch or control, and no force argued that the dispatch or control function should be staffed exclusively by police officers. Forces have recognised that having the right people with the right skills and competencies, whether they are sworn or unsworn members of staff, is key to delivering effective incident management.
- 3.45** Equally, despite the increasing introduction of police staff operatives, it is acknowledged that a small number of specialised roles – such as that of duty officer and deputy duty officer – do require the powers of a sworn officer in the management of critical incidents and are therefore not suitable for police staff. More generally, contact centres also benefit from being able to tap into the knowledge and experience that can only come from ‘having been there’ on operational duty as a police officer. In one force they have one police officer per shift, who is trained as a tutor and is utilised on induction training to help staff put new learning into context.

3. Getting the operating culture right

SUGGESTION F

Forces should create a forum or process whereby contact centre and front-line staff meet to discuss and resolve issues that affect their contributions to incident response and management.

3.46 A different way of providing operational context was highlighted during a visit to Bedfordshire Police, where patrol officers proposed a programme that would allow police officers and police staff to shadow each other in order to gain a better understanding of each other's roles and the respective pressures they face. Several other forces state that they have successfully used this approach and that staff feedback has been positive.

3.47 With the increasing mix of police officers and police staff, it is important to achieve effective integration, and to avoid the emergence of an 'us and them' culture. Many police staff, including those at very senior levels, still consider themselves to be 'the biggest minority group in the Service'. Some forces also reported tensions arising when police staff are asked to supervise police officers, while many others, through their approach and attitude, have firmly supported this professional role and have experienced much better integration and working relationships.

CONCLUSION

3.48 The right operating culture is a key driver for better performance and service delivery. Police forces must recognise the contribution that all staff, whether sworn or unsworn, can make, and engage with them to ensure that they have the skills, abilities and knowledge they need to deliver a professional service to the customer.

3.49 It is also important, in terms of operating culture, to have absolute clarity as to expectations of dispatchers or controllers and to ensure corporacy of approach. Undoubtedly, as in most areas of policing service delivery, strong leadership and shared accountability will help create an organisational culture that supports effective incident management.

4. Effective strategy and structures



4. Effective strategy and structures

INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 The contact centre is fundamental to customer service delivery for policing and its strategy and structures need to reflect the vision of the force. The strategy must be communicated to staff and stakeholders, and be 'unpacked' and translated into operational realities, which will then dictate how people, processes and systems are organised and developed. Good overall service delivery relies on the contact centre working in partnership with those functions and units that impact on its ability to deliver a good customer experience. The structure should fully meet the business needs of the force and be supported by robust leadership and processes.
- 4.2 This chapter looks at how the contact centre, through its strategy, can support and deliver the organisational strategy and be part of overall service delivery. It also looks at how contact centre structures impact on incident response and patrol deployment and can help contact centres meet customers' needs.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 4.3 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards, as enhanced by *First contact*, a contact centre needs a **strategy** that covers:
- a clear vision and strategic objectives, customer-focused and with clear links to national, force and basic command unit (BCU)/department strategies;
 - a collaborative approach to delivering strategic objectives across forces;¹⁴ and
 - an effective marketing and communication strategy to influence and, where appropriate, reduce demand.

The centre's **structure** needs to encompass:

- a cost-effective and flexible departmental structure that meets the business needs, encourages corporate working and shared accountability and achieves optimum customer and staff satisfaction.

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

Strategy

- 4.4 The Government, police and police authorities have embarked on a major programme of police workforce reform and modernisation designed to deliver more visible, responsive and locally accountable policing.

“We are introducing a set of service standards which all forces will have in place by November 2006, to make sure that everyone who comes into contact with the police is treated as well as they should be. We know that the key test is how well and quickly the police deal with initial contact from the public. We will raise the standards by making it easy to contact the police by phone or email, and ensuring that if the incident is not an emergency but does require a visit, a suitable time is arranged quickly.”¹⁵

¹⁴ The highlighted element represents a new addition to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and is relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

¹⁵ *Rebalancing the criminal justice system in favour of the law-abiding majority: Cutting crime, reducing reoffending and protecting the public*, Home Office, July 2006.

- 4.5 The Government's vision for the police is of a service which is clearly defined in the public's perception, has 'easy to use' communication interfaces and responds to individual and community needs. Police contact centres have a major part to play in achieving this vision, so it is important that their strategies reflect and support the wider force strategy and that this in turn supports the Government's vision. Evidence suggests that contact centres are linking these strategies to the force strategy and to the overall Quality of Service Commitment (QoSC).

Customer-focused strategic objectives

- 4.6 Police forces constantly need to balance competing demands, trying to respond quickly to emergencies while also deploying resources to longer-term problem-solving and crime prevention activities. It is a consistent priority to manage efficiently the limited resources available with significant pressure to resolve calls over the telephone without the need to commit a patrol.
- 4.7 The main advantage of a strategy of sending a police resource to every incident is in higher visibility and reassurance to the customer. Very few forces can afford this strategy – those that do find that it is difficult to sustain and creates a high number of incidents waiting for service. As all calls for resourcing must go through the control room, this approach puts high volumes of work onto both the dispatcher or controller and the attending patrol.
- 4.8 The majority of forces have strategies that use the contact centre as a filter for achieving telephone resolution, thereby releasing officers for emergency response or to engage in proactive, long-term problem-solving initiatives in their neighbourhoods. The number of incidents resolved by telephone varies between forces but is between 20 and 30 per cent of incidents. Some 8 million incidents per year are resolved by telephone at the first point of contact without a police response. Incidents that can be dealt with by telephone resolution are invariably of a lower priority, such as criminal damage, various auto-related offences, such as thefts of or from vehicles, or thefts from garden sheds. In many forces an overriding qualifier is that if there is an identified line of enquiry to even the most minor of crimes, then the incident will be resourced. An additional benefit to this approach is that incident information is used proactively to identify problems and target areas and trends.
- 4.9 Evidence from a number of forces, including those that have reverted from a policy of attending all calls, suggests that an appropriate telephone resolution strategy provides a much better customer service because it enables better management of limited resources and contributes directly to effectively delivering force objectives, including incident management, neighbourhood policing and keeping customers informed. Forces should therefore consider ways of increasing the extent of telephone resolution without detracting from customer satisfaction. This can be achieved by having clear incident attendance policies and training contact centre staff in proactive telephone investigation. The *Management of Volume Crime Manual* states that investment in the right training and introducing crime-specific prompts to assist in verifying and recording reports will be well rewarded.

SUGGESTION G

Forces should evaluate the benefits from their attendance or non-attendance policies and realign them with the results from customer satisfaction feedback.

SUGGESTION H

Forces should put mechanisms in place to keep customers informed at timely intervals using first contact as an opportunity to explain and set realistic expectations for callers on how and when they will be updated.

- 4.10 This is particularly important in delivering neighbourhood policing. By directly involving call-handlers and dispatchers in this area of work, it helps them understand what is required and how they can support operational staff in delivering this model. For example, one force involved the contact centre and neighbourhood policing teams in the redesign of its switchboard database, to identify the neighbourhood officer by street name and thus allow increased access for customers to neighbourhood teams. Feedback from customers and officers has been very positive.
- 4.11 Another opportunity for contact centres to support force strategies on keeping customers informed is by ringing back customers at appropriate and pre-arranged times. This approach is used by some of the forces that have achieved good Policing Performance Assessment Framework results (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – KEEPING CUSTOMERS INFORMED

Call-handling staff from Kent Police have a script when dealing with people reporting crime, which includes questions to help identify vulnerable and intimidated victims or witnesses. The computer system also prompts staff to obtain the caller's preferred means and time of contact and enter it into a free-text box, and prompts for any language requirements. Officers continue to update the computer system with all contacts they make with the victim, prefixing each entry with '**victim**', which allows them to search the system and check on Victims' Code compliance.

A collaborative approach

- 4.12 The benefits of collaborative working are easier to evidence in relation to the provision of infrastructure or support. The Chiltern Transport Consortium has been successful in providing cost-effective and reliable transport services for both the Thames Valley Police and Bedfordshire Police.¹⁶
- 4.13 A collaborative approach to incident management is adopted by the Central Motorway Police Group in delivering consolidated motorway policing services across four West Midland forces. Other forces have attempted to implement joint control rooms with limited success.
- 4.14 Sir David Varney's report, *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, makes recommendations in relation to reducing costs in all public service contact centres by at least 25 per cent by the end of 2007. By using a collaborative approach across all contact centre functions, forces could reduce operating costs, particularly in relation to shared technological systems to enable the exchange of cross-border intelligence and information, and play a part in delivering protective services.

¹⁶ *Closing the gap: A review of the 'fitness for purpose' of the current structure of policing in England and Wales*, HMIC, September 2005.

“Over the next ten years, there is an opportunity to provide better public services for citizens and businesses and to do so at a lower cost to the taxpayer.”¹⁷

- 4.15 Another example of this approach is the Isle of Man Government’s tri-services control room. It assists the emergency services to respond to people in distress as quickly and efficiently as possible and has taken over the control room functions of the Isle of Man Constabulary, Fire Service and Ambulance Service. It handles over 2,500 incidents and 32,000 calls each month, of which 1,200 are 999 emergencies. This represents an increase of 14 per cent since the control room was set up. Despite the growth in the number of calls, the average time taken to answer a 999 emergency is currently 2.47 seconds.
- 4.16 In 2005, the Isle of Man Constabulary conducted a customer satisfaction survey that demonstrated extremely high levels of satisfaction: 100 per cent of callers stated that they were satisfied with the service they received by telephone, while 96 per cent described the service as competent, polite and professional.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Forces should take the earliest opportunity to explain options whereby part or all of the contact centre service could be delivered or procured collaboratively.

- 4.17 One way to encourage collaboration is through local, regional and national best practice networks; this is true not only for contact management but for many policing services, in particular in protective services such as tackling organised crime and strategic roads policing. Collaboration will be a priority area for HMIC scrutiny in 2007 and 2008 and there are clear advantages for forces in addressing issues around contact management collectively.
- 4.18 Hampshire Constabulary and Thames Valley Police have taken a major step towards sharing services by seeking to appoint a joint Chief Information Officer to make better use of resources and skills in all areas of policing. Similar approaches by other forces on human resources, finance and training may herald a wave of changes.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency, supported by the national forum introduced following the recommendations of *First contact*, should collate and use good practice from regional fora. This should include incident management and call-handling practices and should be developed into national customer service standards.

¹⁷ *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, Sir David Varney, HM Treasury, December 2006.

Marketing and communication

- 4.19 Some forces have developed a media and marketing strategy as part of their overall contact centre strategy in order to raise awareness of their services and how to access them and to manage demand. They have implemented campaigns, such as 'Do not leave items on show in vehicles, this area is known to be notorious for vehicle crime' and 999 abuse campaigns. These campaigns directly impact on incident volumes, with forces reporting that when used strategically – for example at Christmas or bonfire night – they have helped increase overall performance for the contact centre. However, they highlighted how difficult it is to measure what would have occurred if a media and marketing plan were not in place. To ensure that the strategy is effective in incident and demand management, in one force the head of the contact centre sits on the force corporate communications steering group.
- 4.20 The QoS published in November 2006 is driven by the police reform and citizen focus agendas. It sets out clearly what the public can expect from the Police Service, including significant promises in respect of call answering and being kept informed (see Appendix F). In view of this, it is incumbent on police forces to establish a clear marketing and communication strategy to ensure expectations are met and/or the public understands any variation from the standards promised.
- 4.21 Public expectation, and therefore levels of satisfaction, are influenced by the media (reinforcing the need for an external communication strategy) and the first impressions from contact with police call-takers (highlighting the need for an internal focus). In the latter regard, it is important that call-takers contribute by avoiding over-promising – making sure the caller understands the process and clearly explaining what will happen next.
- 4.22 The Police Service relies on the good will of the public to report incidents and intelligence. Managers in the contact centre have a role to play in ensuring that staff understand the part they play in reassuring the public. Sounding disinterested, or not taking situations seriously, will damage any future interaction with the public.

“I don’t know why you are bothering to report this; you will never see that white van again.” Call handler

- 4.23 Other relatively simple but highly effective processes can greatly assist this interaction. The frequently asked questions section (FAQ) on the www.askthe.police.uk website is a facility that provides access to the Police National Legal Database (PNLD). By using this self-service approach, the public can access information more quickly, getting a standard answer to queries and alleviating pressure on call-handlers, thereby giving them more time to resolve incidents over the telephone, fully explaining to callers the next steps in the process and the action that will be taken. To give an example of the type of question being submitted, the most popular one in 2006 was:

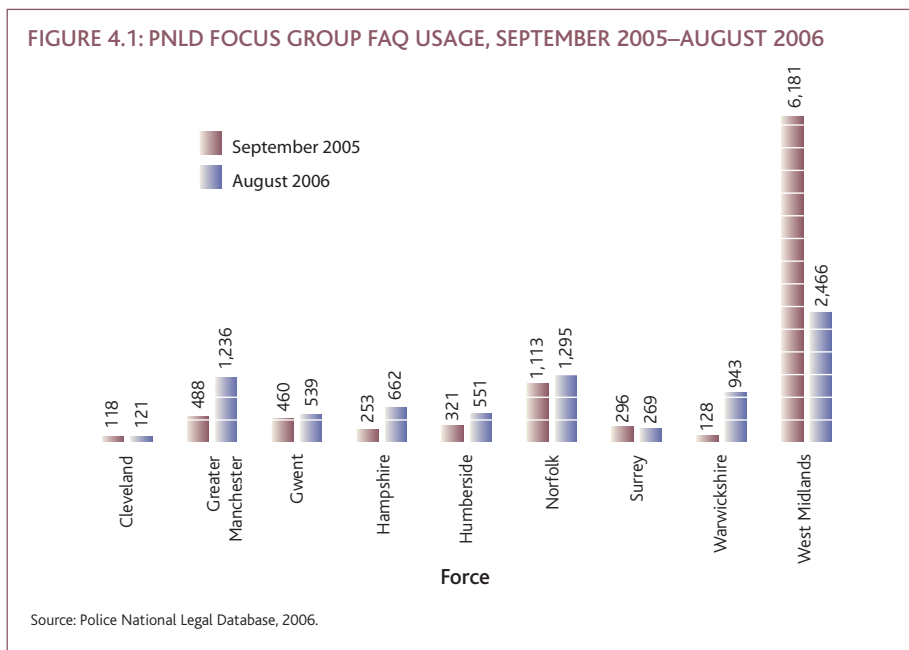
Q368 – How long will points stay on my licence?

Answer – The points are valid for three years but need to remain on your licence for four years. After four years, if you wish you may apply for a new counterpart licence that will not have any record of the points on it. You will need form D1 (previously D750) and a fee of £19.

SUGGESTION J

A senior management team member from the contact centre should attend any force strategic communication meeting, to achieve a corporate approach to media and marketing.

- 4.24 As well as providing a search facility, www.askthe.police.uk allows members of the public to submit a question and get a reply from the PNLD within 24 hours. Both initiatives have been successful: hits on the FAQ database rose from less than 20,000 in May 2005 to over 95,000 in April 2006, and www.askthe.police.uk has received over 500 online questions from members of the public worldwide during the same period.
- 4.25 Following minimal marketing, West Yorkshire Police, which manages the PNLD, has seen usage rise from an initial 200 hits per month to over 3,000 hits in May 2006. Overall figures for the year to August 2006 indicate that 1.22 million people visited the site and the force responded to 9,315 emails. PNLD now plans to make the service more accessible by providing a voice-to-text service for people with hearing impairments and a text-to-voice service for blind and partially sighted people.

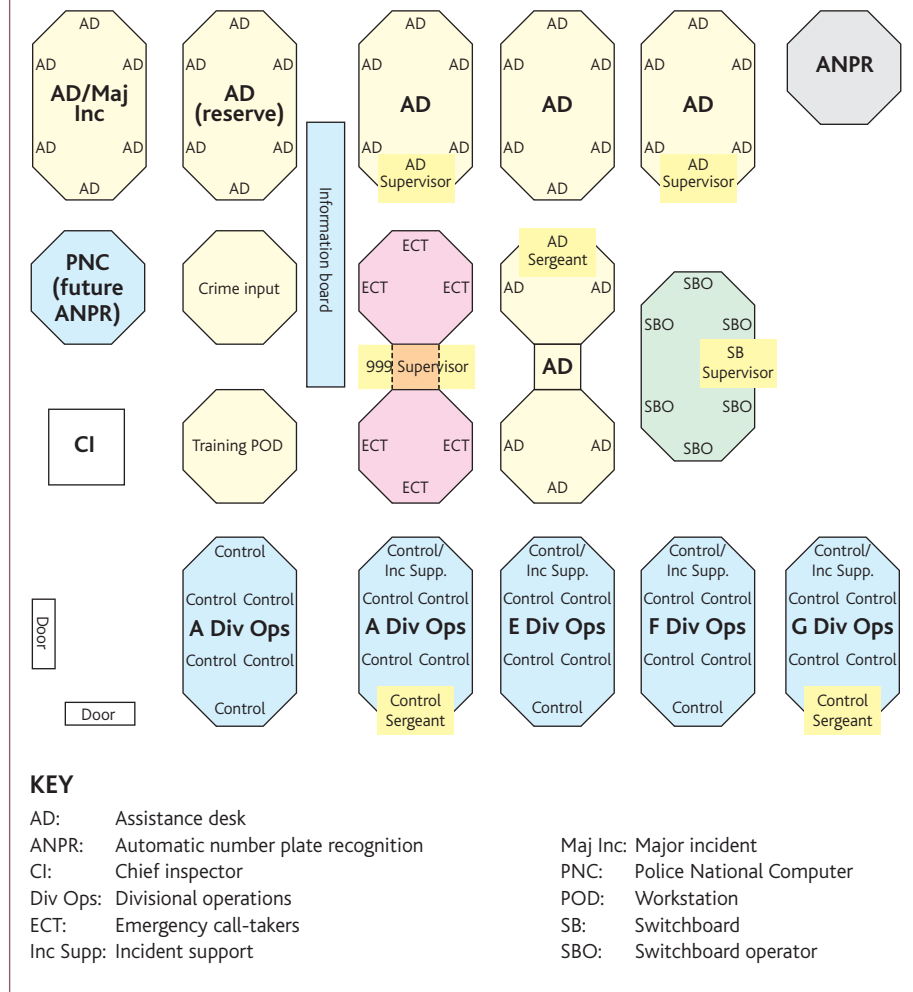


Structure

- 4.26 Nationally, police contact centres are a patchwork of different structures that can be either centralised or locally distributed, and variously include all or some of the following functions:
- **call handling;**
 - **control and/or dispatch;**
 - **crime desk; and**
 - **public service (or assistance) desk.**

One contact centre has flexibility built in to create spare dispatch or control positions, to help in managing major incidents or changes in contact centre service delivery (Figure 4.2).

FIGURE 4.2: LOTHIAN AND BORDERS CONTACT CENTRE FLOOR PLAN



- 4.27** Some 38 forces have a centralised contact centre function, either actual or virtual, with a number of different locations connected by technology. Most forces separate call-handling and dispatch staff, although the functions are usually co-located in the same building, or even in the same room – this is especially true of emergency call handling. More than half of forces have a crime desk as part of the contact management function. However, there is a distinct trend towards incorporating a crime-screening function into the public service or public assistance desk section of the contact centre.
- 4.28** Public service or public assistance desks handle non-emergency calls, using force policies and crime pattern analysis to manage demand rather than reactively deploying patrols to incidents. The way they operate can vary, depending on the force's strategic objectives and its approach to customer service. They can have a significant impact on relieving pressure on both the dispatch or control function and patrolling officers, as incidents can be resolved at the first point of contact. Forces report that they handle 25 per cent of their demand, equating to some 8 million incidents nationally per year.

Flexible structures to encourage corporate working

- 4.29 When contact centre design or redesign is considered, a flexible attitude to structure and approach is beneficial. Flexibility in structure means being able to increase or decrease the number of positions, and being able to support Silver or Gold control of critical incidents. Being flexible in service delivery relies on a good information flow from divisions to contact centre staff, whether they are located at division or remotely. Call-handlers and dispatch or control staff need access to up-to-date local information on a daily basis. Forces use a range of methods of communication, including staff briefings, wallboards and command and control systems. Several forces stated that one or more of these methods must be used if call-handlers and dispatch or control staff are to have the detailed information they need to make accurate decisions.

Box 4.2: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION COLLATION

Lancashire Constabulary has set up a robust cross-departmental communications structure to ensure that front-line contact staff can access the up-to-date local intelligence they need to make decisions. Senior managers attend tasking and co-ordinating meetings at levels 1 and 2, while team managers and staff attend daily tasking and co-ordinating meetings at BCU level. Contact centre staff are briefed at the start of each shift. Staff report that this intelligence-led approach has enabled them to be more aware of recent events and to better identify crime hot spots. They have used this to improve the accuracy and quality of their dispatch by providing this information and intelligence to responding patrols.

- 4.30 At a tactical level, the relationship between contact management, BCUs and other specialist departments is often influenced by the structure of the contact management and communications functions. Many call-handlers, dispatch or control staff and front-line operational staff report that senior managers in BCUs and at contact centres have conflicting priorities and that this is a significant barrier to the delivery of a joined-up, quality service.
- 4.31 For example, in one force three out of four BCU commanders signed up to an initiative in which the contact centre allocated patrols to manage scheduled response incidents – all three have seen a significant reduction in unserved open incidents. Conversely, the BCU that did not sign up to the initiative is experiencing high numbers of unserved incidents, as it cannot sustain the staffing resource at BCU level required to allocate patrols.
- 4.32 Forces must consider the relationship between all the contact centre functions when deciding which structure best suits their needs. During the inspection, staff raised the need for patrolling officers to be aligned to, and interact with, control room staff. This is also true of call-handlers and dispatch or control staff: forces have highlighted that separating the functions in some cases led to an 'us and them' situation, with neither function taking responsibility for the quality of incident logs.

- 4.33 Where parts of the contact management process belong to more than one owner, the relationship must be carefully managed to ensure effective incident management and a high standard of customer service.

Central versus local location

- 4.34 Over the last ten years, most forces have moved towards some form of centralised control function, but at least three forces have changed their contact centre structure and location from BCU-managed to central and back again. None of the three forces could provide any evidence that these changes had improved performance in incident management. The reasons for changing to a centralised model were to seek efficiencies in operational cost and to establish a standard approach to service delivery and training. The reasons for reverting to BCU control were failures around ineffective staff recruitment, remote management and a lack of mutual support and understanding, together with poor processes.
- 4.35 There is little evidence of any formal evaluation or business case to justify the significant effort expended in the transition. In fact, the key to effective working does not lie in the structure itself, but in how the contact centre is supported at chief officer level, how it is managed, supervised and resourced, and its policies, practices and information flows.
- 4.36 This is illustrated in the results of the HMIC baseline assessment for 2005/06. The four forces graded 'Excellent' were: Staffordshire (six virtual sites, centrally managed); Hampshire (two sites, centrally managed); West Midlands (over 20 sites with a mixture of central and local management); and North Wales (one site).

SUGGESTION K

Forces should evaluate the full cost, benefits and return on investment before embarking on any major change to their service delivery model.

CONCLUSION

- 4.37 Many forces have, or are developing, a specific contact centre strategy to support overall force aims and objectives on service delivery, in order to achieve a shared vision. They are now successfully beginning to use their contact centre as a strategic part of managing demand and to play a part in supporting and delivering neighbourhood policing. A strategy that provides resolution, not only by attendance, enables forces to manage limited resources more effectively, while still achieving good customer service.
- 4.38 Strategic direction, cost and political considerations will have a significant influence on the structure of the contact centre. Forces must also consider the effect relationships between each of the contact centre functions and BCUs can have on incident management. A lack of understanding of each other's roles can have a detrimental impact on quality of service.

5. Making the most of our people



5. Making the most of our people

INTRODUCTION

- 5.1 Dispatch or control staff face particular pressures and need a different combination of skills and abilities to call-handlers. Dispatch or control staff do not usually deal directly with the public, but their ability to grade and allocate the right resource in a timely manner will nevertheless have a direct impact on customer service delivery.
- 5.2 Contact centres employ a large number of staff and hence human resource (HR) issues are of particular importance to their effectiveness. In a high-pressure environment, there are significant issues that determine whether staff work to their potential, not least pay and conditions, career structures, absence management and selection processes.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 5.3 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards, as enhanced by *First contact*, to ensure maximum staff contribution to incident management, forces should:
- **create an HR strategy that recognises the needs of contact centre operations;**
 - **have a dedicated contact centre HR function;**
 - **ensure that the right number of skilled staff and supervisors are working at the right time by matching resources to incoming demand;**
 - **linking patrol availability and other demand reduction initiatives for effective dispatching;**
 - **robustly manage contact centre abstraction rates (including sickness and annual leave);¹⁸ and**
 - **ensure that pay and conditions of service reflect the complexity and importance of the role.**

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

Human Resource strategies specific to contact centres

- 5.4 Increasingly, forces recognise that contact centres are strategic business units with the potential to contribute directly to better operational service delivery. Organisational HR strategies should define how forces will achieve their overall staff-related objectives but they must be relevant to, and aligned with, the needs and requirements of each of the force's business units.
- 5.5 A 'high-involvement' approach to HR is often viewed as being particularly suitable for contact centres that serve customers with complex needs, where the operational objective is to build a relationship with the customer and provide a tailored service. A 'high-involvement' approach means:
- developing sophisticated recruitment and training practices in order to build a suitably skilled workforce; and
 - providing job security and good terms and conditions, to encourage staff retention.

¹⁸ The highlighted element represents a new addition to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and is relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

Adopting this approach removes or at least diminishes some of the potential pitfalls that forces experience in relation to meeting the specific requirements of the contact centre in a sustainable way.

- 5.6 In many cases, contact centres are similar in size to a basic command unit (BCU), which would typically have dedicated support functions in the areas of HR, finance and performance management. Despite this parallel, some contact centres still do not have this level of support, which can lead to problems because of both their scale and the fact that different regulations apply to police staff and police officers, and individual roles within the contact centre can present complex HR challenges. Also see recommendation 9 (page 61) of *First contact*.
- 5.7 To address such issues, reinforce the strategic role of the contact centre and provide the appropriate HR expertise, some forces – for example, Greater Manchester Police – have already introduced a dedicated contact centre HR function (Box 5.1), leading to significant improvements in contact centre management.

Box 5.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – THE DEDICATED HR UNIT

Greater Manchester Police employs more than 800 contact centre staff. In August 2005, the force set up a dedicated HR unit to manage and support the centre; this has already delivered a number of benefits. All staff who leave now have an exit interview, the outcomes of which are used to inform and develop training. Job adverts reflect the core competencies required for the role. Induction training has been redesigned, and refresher training introduced. The force is also working with external consultants to improve absence management. The result has been a reduction in sickness levels and improved contact centre performance. Evaluation is ongoing.

- 5.8 The paragraphs above describe HR functions and expertise that are generic to contact centre management, and cover all roles within the contact centre. There are, however, some specific issues in relation to recruitment and implementing and maintaining an accurate staffing model for incident management.
- 5.9 Dispatch or control staff in police contact centres have a complex specialist role that calls for a wide skill set. The behaviour and competency profile of staff in non-customer-facing positions will differ from that of staff who routinely interact directly with customers. To add to the complexity, however, in some cases where a police contact centre has multiple functions, staff will need both call-handling and dispatch or control skills. Whether the contact centre has multi-skilled roles or the roles are split between call-handlers and dispatchers or controllers, recruiting the right staff with the right skills is fundamental to achieving an accurate staffing model.
- 5.10 Despite the role differences, it is not unusual for individuals to start out as call-handlers before moving to a dispatch or control role. This form of development has proven to be advantageous both experientially and in helping staff retention. It is therefore wise for forces to assess potential recruits against the core competencies required for both roles, ensuring that the logistical part of a dispatcher or controller's role is taken into account. Otherwise, they risk recruiting competent call-handlers who do not have the capability to become effective dispatchers or controllers.



- 5.11 In any case, the recruitment process should include a tailored assessment, which identifies individual strengths and weaknesses. A number of forces, including Thames Valley Police, Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Surrey Police, have, in the absence of any national model, developed and implemented their own individual assessment processes, and report that this has contributed to low staff attrition rates.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Forces should use a selection procedure for contact centre staff that tests the full range of skill sets and competencies for all roles.

An appropriate staffing model

- 5.12 One of the keys to good performance is scheduling the right number of appropriately skilled staff for duty at the right time, often referred to as a 'scientific staffing model'. This is reasonably straightforward to achieve for call handling, as the systems used to take calls provide the information needed.
- 5.13 The dispatch or control element of the contact centre is more difficult to scientifically model, as the systems do not readily produce usable information. However, this can be done and, once achieved, directly impacts on service delivery. Not accurately forecasting call handling or dispatch or control leads to inconsistency in performance. Effective matching of resources to demand, succession planning and recruiting are crucial to contact centre performance.
- 5.14 Some forces redirect staff from dispatch or control to call handling in order to improve call-handling performance figures. This means that dispatch or control staff try to listen to radio talk-groups and make or take telephone calls at the same time, become highly pressured and regularly miss comfort breaks. While this reallocation or multi-tasking may be acceptable at quiet times or for very short periods, some forces are now doing it as a matter of routine. Evidence suggests that this has put extra pressure on dispatch or control staff, and has increased sickness levels and the incidence of stress-related illness.
- 5.15 Maintaining an appropriate staffing model across all contact centre functions depends on successful recruitment and robust succession planning. Police officers can be transferred from another area to contact management relatively quickly, but police staff recruitment can take six months or more, due to the lengthy recruitment, vetting and appointment processes. Much of this delay can be avoided through pre-planning, for example by maintaining a bank of recruits who have already passed the selection process and can be contacted and appointed quickly. Such planning can avoid the need to rely on expensive overtime working or the deployment of staff into roles for which they are not equipped.
- 5.16 An increasing number of forces have invested time and money in analysing demand and planning contact centre staffing accordingly, using a range of methods to do this including workforce management packages, such as Pipkins, Blue Pumpkin, GMT Planet and Q-Max, or Excel spreadsheets.
- 5.17 Having the right number of patrolling officers scheduled at the right time is essential for dispatchers or controllers to allocate resources and avoid a backlog of incidents where deployment is appropriate (Box 5.2). Resource planning and scheduling is

SUGGESTION 1

To support robust succession planning, forces should maintain a recent list of people who passed an interview and assessment for contact centre positions but could not be offered a post; this would allow prompt replacement of leavers by people who could take up employment at the earliest opportunity. People on the list should only remain on it for a maximum period of 12 months before having to reapply.

common in contact centres. This year, West Midlands Police won a national award, competing with over 100 commercial companies, for its accurate contact centre resource-planning model.

Box 5.2: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – RESOURCE PLANNING

Lancashire Constabulary recognised that matching patrols to demand patterns has a vital role to play in effective dispatch and good customer service. It therefore commissioned research focusing on the areas of immediate response and non-emergency grading. In the light of the findings, shift patterns have been changed to reflect incoming demand and contact centre team managers are now aligned with BCU resource managers. The number of open incidents has fallen by 30 per cent, freeing dispatch or control staff to focus on incident management. An audit system has been set up to review the process on an ongoing basis.

- 5.18** The availability – or otherwise – of response or neighbourhood policing officers to respond to incidents will have a direct impact on the effectiveness of dispatch or control staff, who individually may be dealing with as many as 80 open incidents at any one time. Senior managers interviewed in focus group sessions cited examples of contact centres coping well with incoming demand, but poor resource planning for patrolling officers impaired the ability to service incidents and created bottlenecks.
- 5.19** Merseyside Police is widely recognised as representing good practice in this area. It has a work-scheduling unit that has, since 1996, been providing seminars and workshops on the subject of resource management. It also runs a two-week course, the only such course available in Europe, called 'Eliminate the gamble from your resource management', which has trained a large number of UK forces in the scientific distribution of officers over the hours of the day and the days of the week against demand profiles. In addition, the course provides:
- an understanding of the principles of resource management;
 - managers and administrators with the necessary skills to show 'best value' in resourcing;
 - an understanding of the effects of shift work on employees; and
 - identification of best practice in resourcing day-to-day and event-driven demand.
- 5.20** The impact for Merseyside Police alone of adopting this approach was a £3 million saving in costs such as overtime and cancelled rest days in the year ending December 2005. Other benefits include improved incident management, because the correct number of officers are on duty to service demand.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Forces should use staffing models for contact centres and patrolling officers, to ensure that resources involved in incident response and management are effectively aligned to demand.

Abstraction management

- 5.21 Levels of abstraction (where a person is not on duty due to sickness, maternity or paternity leave, annual leave, training, attrition or court appearances) can be as low as 25 per cent in some contact centres but as high as 50 per cent in others. How these abstractions are managed can have a significant impact on the staffing model and cost to the organisation.
- 5.22 Sickness levels are often higher among contact centre staff than in the rest of the force, due to the intensive nature of the work and because more restricted duty officers – for example, those recovering from injury or long-term illness – are posted there, but police contact centres still have lower sickness absence levels than centres in the commercial sector¹⁹ and forces that have invested management time in addressing sickness absence have seen significant improvements.
- 5.23 Another factor that may heavily influence abstraction rates in police contact centres is the percentage of female employees. Legal requirements in relation to maternity (and paternity) leave need to be factored into the abstraction levels.
- 5.24 Some forces have found that the lack of an accurate staffing model constrains their ability to train staff, limits meal breaks and leads to other health and safety issues. The overall impact on performance is significant, eventually leading to higher sickness levels and an increase in staffing turnover.
- 5.25 Many forces have also recognised that the lack of any career structure can generate low job satisfaction, which in turn can increase absenteeism, affect service levels and have a detrimental impact on staff turnover. Some 92 per cent of forces now have a career structure for all contact centre staff. This may be partly responsible for the fact that staff turnover is relatively low in police contact centres – less than 14 per cent compared with an average of 25 per cent in commercial contact centres.
- 5.26 Reducing turnover enables forces to cut recruitment costs and retain knowledge, skills and experience. Some forces have made great strides forward in recognising that sickness, retention and staff turnover impact greatly on their ability to deliver a good service and 63 per cent of UK forces have effective initiatives. For example, Greater Manchester Police uses an outsourced medical service to receive calls from staff reporting unfit for work to manage their sickness absence. This has been positively received by staff – who now feel that they have early access to professional medical advice, intervention and support – and the force has experienced a reduction in sickness levels. These and other issues can all have an impact on staff turnover (see Figure 5.1).

¹⁹ *Merchants global contact centre benchmarking report*, Merchants, 2006.

FIGURE 5.1: WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU WANT TO STOP WORKING IN POLICE CONTROL ROOMS?

	%
Poor working patterns (shifts, nights, too long, poor breaks)	46
Pressure/stress/unmanageable workload	40
Management/supervision (lack of support, lack of consultation, etc)	40
Staffing levels	17
Pay	17
Management priorities (statistics/targets, changes in working practices)	11
Ill health	9.5
Better job	8.0
Family responsibilities	6.1
Travelling distance (relocation)	4.6
Poor working environment	3.6

Source: *The thin front line: Call handling in police control rooms*, P Bain, P Taylor and E Dutton, 2005.

- 5.27 Commendably, several forces – including Norfolk, Thames Valley and Devon and Cornwall – are now actively employing workforce management solutions. Prior to using their technological software solution, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary was aware of its demand profile; it could manually distribute staff to meet demand, but it was very much hit or miss, without knowing whether they were over- or understaffed. The use of the relevant software has allowed more precision in the management of demand and staffing levels. It has also been useful to managers in presenting clear and unequivocal evidence when they have insufficient staff to meet their charter levels and targets.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Forces should monitor the impact of contact centre abstraction rates and adopt robust processes to manage abstractions.

Pay and conditions

- 5.28 One aspect of staff retention is using pay and conditions to send a clear signal to staff that they are valued, thereby increasing loyalty and making them less likely to leave. One way to achieve this is through an appropriate pay and conditions package. However, UNISON (the main staff association for police staff members) reports a significant disparity in pay and conditions across the 43 forces in England and Wales. UNISON has opened a debate on a national approach to pay and conditions through the Police Staff Council, a national body comprising UNISON, the General Municipal and Boilermakers' Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities.

- 5.29 A national approach to pay and grading would help the Police Staff Council address major policy and negotiating issues in a consistent way at a time when workforce reform is high on the agenda. An alignment of police staff pay and conditions presents the Service with an opportunity to:
- use pay and conditions as a coherent tool to help foster modernisation and reform;
 - protect police authorities and forces from unequal pay claims; and
 - incorporate greater efficiencies into the pay negotiating process.
- 5.30 HMIC would support a national approach, which would deliver a move towards more consistent pay and conditions while retaining an element of local flexibility. However, it is recognised that there are many complex issues in effecting a change on a national basis.

CONCLUSION

- 5.31 Police contact centres must balance increasingly sophisticated and complex demands with tight budget constraints. As contact centres grow and take a more strategic role, they move away from basic service delivery towards a more holistic view both of the customer and of their relationship with the customer. In order to achieve effective incident grading, deployment or resolution, contact centres require the right number of staff with the right skills, scheduled on duty at the right time. The HR function requires an in-depth knowledge of what each role involves in order to effectively support and invest in contact centre staff and development. This will have a positive impact on both performance and service delivery.
- 5.32 The single most important 'people' issue still remaining is the need for the whole organisation to recognise and encourage the professionalism of contact centre staff – call-handlers, dispatch or control staff, supervisors, managers and staff in specialist roles such as call centre analysts. The organisation must recognise that the contact centre is fundamental to delivering organisational objectives and excellence in customer service and that contact centres therefore need a robust staffing model, good abstraction management policies and a structured and timely recruitment process.

6. Professionalism through skills and training



6. Professionalism through skills and training

INTRODUCTION

- 6.1 Employee empowerment is vital in delivering customer satisfaction; and the key to employee empowerment is investing in the skills, training and education staff need to do their jobs effectively. While dispatch or control staff are not always interacting with external customers, they nevertheless play a crucial part in overall service delivery. The competencies required are complex, and dispatch or control staff will require induction training, on-the-job coaching and ongoing development opportunities.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 6.2 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards, as enhanced by *First contact*, it is expected that all forces will have the following in place in respect of contact centre staff:
- **relevant and specific training linked to current policies, procedures, relevant legislation and organisational goals for staff at all levels;**
 - **appropriately designed and delivered cost-effective induction and refresher training, available for all staff and specifically designed to support the core competencies of each role;²⁰ and**
 - **mentoring or tutoring processes for new and existing staff.**

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

- 6.3 A training strategy designed around competency frameworks and organisational objectives can help organisations deliver cost-effective training with a measurable impact on performance. To support competencies and develop skills, effective analysis of training needs should be carried out and all training evaluated for its impact on performance and, therefore, the effectiveness of the investment. (The Kirkpatrick model described in *First contact* is a useful evaluation tool.²¹)
- 6.4 Formal qualifications, either gained in-house or nationally recognised, can be linked to core competencies and are used throughout the public and private sectors to professionalise specific roles and functions. In some organisations, staff at all levels are tested each year to ensure that they are maintaining their skills and competencies and delivering a quality service.
- 6.5 Training in policing generally has improved significantly in recent years and is rightly regarded highly. However, in terms of specific areas of business, there are still some gaps and these include the area of incident management, most particularly specific relevant training and the availability of induction training and mentoring.

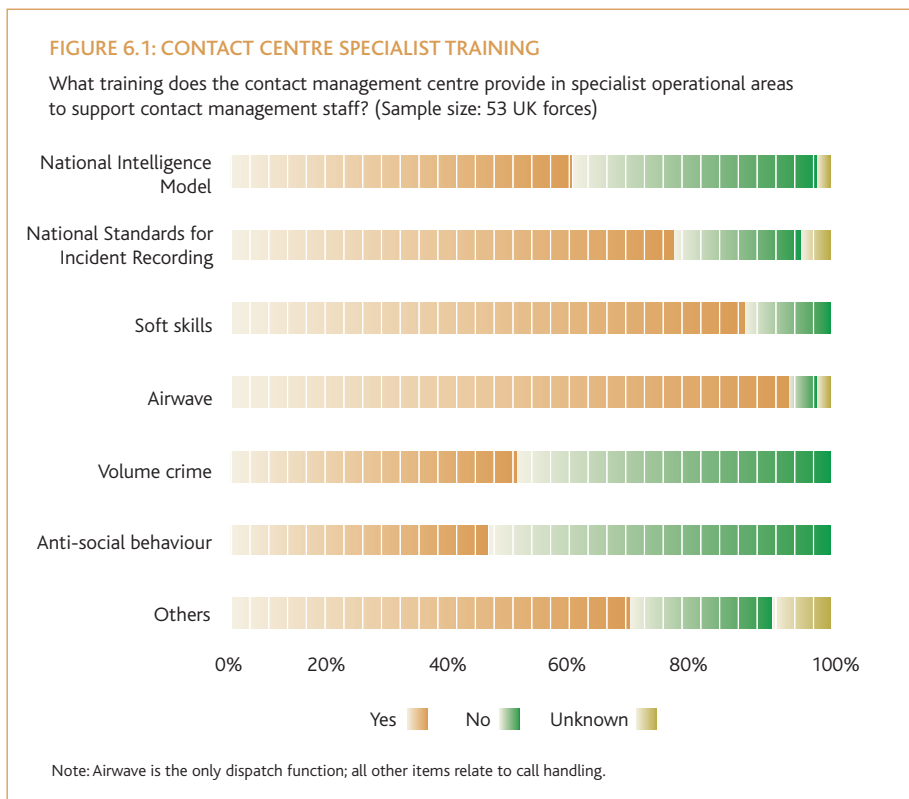
Specific and relevant training

- 6.6 The Police Service actually leads much of the commercial world in relation to the design and use of nationally agreed competency frameworks for each individual role within the contact centre. Role profiles are based on specific core competencies, enabling training to be tailored rather than generic.

²⁰ The highlighted element represents a new addition to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and is relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

²¹ *Evaluating training programs: The four levels*, Donald L Kirkpatrick, Berrett-Koehler, 1998.

- 6.7** Dispatch or control staff need a good knowledge of individual neighbourhoods, local and force priorities and cultural differences, as well as having good logistical, listening, communication and decision-making skills. While they do not always interact directly with customers, they still need a good understanding of customer needs.
- 6.8** One force has identified that training staff to resolve issues and problem solve over the telephone, taking time to explain to callers why and how the process works, is key to ensuring that their customer satisfaction levels remain high and they still deal with one-third of incidents over the telephone. This approach also helped manage demand, and provided information to track trends and patterns for proactive resolution.
- 6.9** Five of the 12 fieldwork forces have a training strategy and use training needs' analysis to drive delivery; the others indicated that they intended to develop these. However, training is too often limited to induction or designed solely to meet certain legal requirements. In some forces, dispatchers or controllers undergo specific dispatch training before undergoing on-the-job training with a tutor; unfortunately, in others their counterparts receive no training at all. These disparities were also true of other key roles, including control room duty officers. Generally, those forces that provide training do so in ways that are well structured and well implemented.
- 6.10** Research conducted into the types of specialist training that forces are providing for contact centre staff indicates a propensity towards call handling rather than the dispatch or control function (see Figure 6.1).



- 6.11 All 53 UK forces surveyed agree that the impact of not training staff appropriately to perform their duties can lead to low staff morale, increased staff turnover and poor-quality incident management. Some forces are now addressing this with specific training packages covering deployment of firearms officers, management of pursuits and logistical and communications training on radio and dispatch. Merseyside Police also provides training that covers community needs and neighbourhood priorities, to help contact centre staff better understand the diverse communities they serve. Northumbria Police has trained its duty officers in critical incident management and other key areas, leading to significant improvements in performance, particularly regarding the timeliness of the response to firearms incidents.

“Equipping front-line contact centre staff with the operational skills and knowledge to do their job effectively is necessary and vital to deliver a professional and credible service.”

Natalie Calvert, Managing Director, Calcom Group

- 6.12 The main tool to aid the dispatch or control function is the Airwave digital radio system, which has a number of additional functions and facilities compared with the old analogue system. For example, the number of radio talk-groups can be increased; staff can hold one-to-one radio conversations; and information can be transferred from command and control to individual radio sets. Where forces have trained dispatch staff in all the functionalities, they, and staff, have reported an improvement in the communication side of incident management. For example, using point-to-point contact (one-to-one communication) frees up airtime to increase capacity for more urgent transmissions.
- 6.13 However, fieldwork focus groups and other user groups reported that general radio discipline is poor – exemplified by a lack of clarity over the meaning of radio transmissions, or long transmissions being left unchecked and thus preventing other police officers from transmitting messages.
- 6.14 To address this, the Police Information Technology Organisation has compiled national standards for Airwave ‘radio speak’ that aim to reduce talk-time via radio and set a national standard for radio discipline. ‘Airwave speak’ is intended to bring accuracy, brevity, clarity and discipline to voice communications within and across forces. The standards are currently being piloted by West Midlands Police.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Forces should ensure that dispatch or control staff use Airwave radio-speak standards developed by the National Policing Improvement Agency and then test them for competency as part of their personal development reviews.

- 6.15 Some forces have developed and are now offering or supporting formal qualifications in some areas of contact management, such as call taking. However, there are as yet no national qualifications in police dispatch or control. In 2005, Skills for Justice designed a formal qualification module for police dispatchers or controllers based on extensive consultation, but this still awaits accreditation. Under the new National

Contact Management Programme, Centrex is developing a modular accredited training package for call-handling staff, but at present is unable to provide a publication date. Both of these packages have the potential to improve incident management and give staff a qualification that recognises their skills and abilities.

Induction training

- 6.16 Timely, effective and relevant training for all contact centre staff is critical to overall service delivery; it underpins the ability to collate intelligence at the first point of contact, gather accurate information and make appropriate decisions. Induction training was found to be in-depth and appropriate, in some cases a probationary period lasting 12 months. Dispatch or control staff rely on accurate information in order to deploy correctly, and patrolling officers also rely on the accuracy of information communicated to them when attending incidents and when giving evidence in court. Induction training must play a major role in this regard.
- 6.17 Based on evidence gathered during the inspection, effective induction training for controllers or dispatchers should include:
- telephone techniques for handling both emergency and non-emergency calls – such as interactive listening, dealing with difficult callers, accuracy of information and intelligence collection and building a rapport;
 - organisational understanding;
 - policies and procedures;
 - basic law;
 - diversity issues;
 - scenario training;
 - key systems training – notably Police National Computer, command and control, crime recording, local intelligence networks, Airwave, etc;
 - critical incident management relevant to the role;
 - radio use and procedures;
 - pursuit training;
 - appropriate firearms training;
 - professionalising the investigative process;
 - health and safety; and
 - self-care and stress management.

“I had a structured induction process, with a mentor throughout the period, and have had to prove my competency in incident management. The training I have received has been good and has supported my role well.” Duty inspector at Hampshire Constabulary contact centre



Refresher training

- 6.18 Refresher training and regular ongoing training complements initial training and helps staff keep up to date with ever-changing systems, procedures and processes associated with their roles. To complement this, an analysis of training needs should be carried out as a foundation of cost-effective training.

- 6.19 The lack of refresher training was a problem raised by many staff; one member of staff had not received any input over the last 15 years other than systems training. Although this absence does not appear to have impacted on her performance, it certainly impacted adversely on her morale and development. Surveys show that only 28 forces provide refresher training for contact centre staff. This inspection found that the picture has changed little – the focus remains on systems rather than soft skills training.

“We don’t give our people any customer service training, we only give them systems training. We will change this in the very near future.”

Deputy Chief Constable, Lothian and Borders Police

RECOMMENDATION 14

Forces should provide all contact centre staff with effective, relevant induction, refresher and regular ongoing training, tailored to the needs of their role.

Mentoring or tutoring

- 6.20 The role of the dispatcher or controller is complex and demanding and the work can be challenging. This places increased emphasis on the requirement for a high level of appropriate training and support, and many forces have now introduced a role they term as ‘mentor’ or ‘tutor’. Mentoring is essentially about helping people develop more effectively and building confidence to help the learner take increasing initiative for his or her own development. Tutoring is about instructing in skills and techniques – there is an element of control in the hands of the person doing the training or coaching. Both roles provide one-to-one instruction and support, can be tailored to specific learning styles and needs, and are proven to increase self-esteem and confidence.
- 6.21 Encouraging staff to become mentors or tutors can be an effective way of investing in people, both by passing on the acquired knowledge of the mentor or tutor and also as an explicit recognition of those senior staff. There must be, however, a formal selection process and appropriate training.
- 6.22 Forces such as North Wales, West Midlands and Kent use a formal selection process for tutors and mentors, arguing that this has a positive impact on performance and staff morale. In other forces, there are no formal selection procedures and training is either non-existent or not linked to competencies. These forces have found that bad practices are passed from person to person, resulting in poor performance and increased complaints from operational staff and customers.

SUGGESTION M

Forces should ensure that staff with a tutoring or mentoring role have been selected to do this and have received appropriate training.

CONCLUSION

- 6.23 The contact centre is the public's gateway to the Police Service, and the whole organisation needs to see it as such. Training in force policies, understanding diversity and telephone techniques can assist in empowering staff to make incident-grading decisions and effectively resolve or deploy resources to incidents, which ultimately impacts on the overall customer experience.
- 6.24 Forces have already made many improvements to the way they take calls. This is vital, as accurate intelligence gathering at the outset affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the rest of the process. Forces now need to improve the training offered to other specialist roles in the contact centre, especially dispatchers, controllers, tutors and duty officers.

7. Getting the best from technology



7. Getting the best from technology

INTRODUCTION

- 7.1 In the contact management environment, technology plays a significant role in enabling performance and in supporting staff activity. Undoubtedly, the two major technological enablers to incident management are the command and control system and radio communications. There is, however, an increasing array of complementary technologies that presents a challenge to senior managers trying to achieve an appropriate suite of systems.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 7.2 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS), as enhanced by *First contact*, it is expected that for a force to consider itself at the forefront of good practice in the field of police contact management technology, it would need:
- **appropriate technology matched to, and driven by, strategic and business requirements, integrated into current systems, user-friendly for staff and customers and adding value to the customer experience; and**
 - **timely, accurate and relevant information for call-handlers and dispatch or control staff at the point of interaction with the caller or responding resource, to inform their response.**²²

HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

- 7.3 In 1994, the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) was developed by the Police Advisory Group on Information Technology, renamed in 1998 as the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO). The strategy was designed to standardise the technical architecture for the Police Service in England and Wales in order to run national software applications.
- 7.4 The strategy required agreement on a single specification, but strategy subsequently changed significantly from a national systems approach towards the building of an integrated information environment – the Information Systems Strategy for the Police Service – seeking to enable greater IT integration and information sharing in the future.
- 7.5 Through NSPIS, PITO has delivered a command and control system that is now being used in six forces. It was originally intended that the system would be adopted by all police forces, but the NSPIS project delivered long after its original target date and many forces had had to replace their already creaking systems with new products. They are now unwilling or unable to replace their relatively new systems with the national product due to cost constraints. Instead, forces are investigating the integration of their existing systems as a preferred option for the way forward.
- 7.6 *First contact* highlighted that individual forces were at very different stages of development in relation to their call-handling technologies and the same is true in relation to incident management. In the absence of national solutions, many forces took diverse and highly individual paths – for example, in terms of command and

²² The highlighted elements represent new additions to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and are relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

control systems, 32 forces use proprietary systems from NSPIS, Steria, Northgate and Intergraph, with the other 11 forces using systems developed in-house.

7.7 There are numerous permutations of technologies deployed in forces' contact management functions and this report does not seek to include each and every solution. The generic systems that have the greatest impact on dispatch or control are:

- command and control;
- resource management, including:
 - global positioning;
 - automatic vehicle and people location; and
 - geographic information;
- mobile data; and
- Airwave digital radio.

Note: HMIC does not intend to provide a guide to individual brands or to endorse particular products.

Command and control systems

7.8 Command and control systems provide dispatch or control staff with a computerised means to:

- classify and prioritise calls for service – in conjunction with the NCHS criteria;
- provide a database of information – such as links to previous calls, firearms intelligence and protocols for wanted or missing persons; and
- automatically flag incident trends at neighbourhood level – to alert neighbourhood policing teams.

7.9 Some systems also carry a prompting facility to support dispatch or control staff in deployment of specialist teams or to serious incidents. The Police Service's main suppliers are also developing interfaces between command and control systems and other key systems, such as local intelligence networks, crime systems and other locally held information.

7.10 Humberside Police has used this approach to facilitate an interface between the NSPIS command and control system and its domestic violence and crime applications. This obviates the need to double-key information, resulting in reduced input time and increased accuracy.

7.11 Police forces across the UK **should** be able to pass electronic command and control incident data to each other efficiently, effectively and securely. In reality, the vast majority of forces are still passing incident-related data to other forces or agencies by email, fax or telephone. With cross-border collaborative projects already under way in a small number of forces, the need to share real-time, mission-critical incident data has never been greater.

7.12 For example, Kent Police is currently working closely with the Highways Agency to pass on information about appropriate incidents and enquiries. Furthermore, NSPIS includes a public application programme interface that enables forces to integrate it

7. Getting the best from technology

with other applications. The impact that incident transfer has on the customer is an improved and efficient service, as double-keying of data and the repeating of information is eliminated and the whole process becomes much more streamlined and efficient.

- 7.13 In another initiative, the benefits of integration have been highlighted by the successful implementation of the tri-services control room on the Isle of Man (Box 7.1).



Box 7.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – CROSS-SERVICE/AGENCY INTEGRATION

The Isle of Man Government launched its emergency services joint control room (ESJCR) on 19 April 2004. The room aims “to assist the emergency services to respond to people in distress as quickly and efficiently as possible” and has taken over the control room functions of the Isle of Man Constabulary, Fire Service and Ambulance Service. The main drivers for the change were the introduction of a new digital terrestrial radio system, TETRA,²³ and the computerisation of the existing paper-based system.

Before the ESJCR was established, incidents were managed by telephone. When an incident was reported to the police, the police controller would create an event log and then inform the other emergency services verbally as appropriate. Each service would then create its own event log. The complexity of the process led to delays in responding to incidents. The ESJCR has eliminated the need for this duplication. When a call comes in, a single command and control log is created and, using technology integration, a response from all three services can be activated at the press of a button. This has resulted in a much more efficient process in responding to emergencies and has been well received from those who have used the service.

- 7.14 However, many forces lack the funding to take advantage of these integrated technologies. Although the Home Office Police Standards Unit made some funding available for cross-border working, circumstances meant that this could not be released before the end of the 2005/06 financial year. Unfortunately, in the interim, funding was withdrawn. Forces must now seek a new funding stream. The delay has seriously hampered forces’ ability to enter into cross-border data-sharing arrangements.
- 7.15 To further emphasise this point, the Bichard Inquiry report in 2004 into the tragic deaths in Soham, Cambridgeshire of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman criticised the absence of national IT solutions, stating:

“There was, and remains, no uniformity of approach. Each of the 43 police forces has a variety of IT systems, which are used for a variety of different purposes. The interfaces between systems at local force-to-force level are almost non-existent.”²⁴

²³ Terrestrial trunked radio: an open digital trunked radio standard for professional mobile radio users.

²⁴ *The Bichard Inquiry report*, Sir Michael Bichard, June 2004.
www.homeoffice.gov.uk/pdf/bichard_report.pdf?view=Binary

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency should work together to develop a business case to enable forces to procure the technology needed to share data with each other and with other agencies.

Resource management

- 7.16** One of the biggest problems raised during this thematic was that of resource allocation and management. Patrol officers expressed frustration at the apparent lack of co-ordination in the allocation of jobs; many report anecdotally being sent from one end of a county or city to the other, often passing other patrols that were in a better position to attend. Conversely, dispatchers or controllers complain of not receiving status updates from patrols and being forced to use units that are available even if they are not necessarily the nearest or most appropriate. Such claims and counterclaims are unproductive and forces need robust analysis to manage deployment.
- 7.17** The following paragraphs explore the police use of the global positioning system (GPS), automatic vehicle and people location systems (AVLS and APLS), and geographic information systems (GIS), focusing on the advantages that these systems can have for the public, control staff and patrolling officers.
- 7.18** GPS is a navigational system with worldwide coverage, funded and controlled by the US Department of Defense. Orbiting satellites can determine the latitude and longitude of a receiver anywhere on earth by computing differences in the time taken for signals from different satellites to reach the receiver. Where deployed, therefore, these receivers allow police dispatch or control staff to locate a resource anywhere in their force area to within a few metres. The most common GPS products in the police market are AVLS and APLS.
- 7.19** AVLS and APLS track the position of mobile resources on a computerised map to street level, providing updates every few seconds. The use of AVLS and APLS is growing in police contact centres in England and Wales and forces are realising the benefits that can be gained. This is one of the key applications that enable dispatch or control staff to plan and plot resources.
- 7.20** Two of the main benefits are officer safety and the ability to see which resource is closest to an incident, avoiding the need to rely on personal geographic knowledge or radio updates from officers and saving valuable time. Resource deployment is enhanced with GIS mapping systems that can be used in conjunction with AVLS and APLS to provide dispatchers or controllers with up-to-date information to assist them, and to provide patrolling officers with other information and intelligence.
- 7.21** A few forces in the process of testing AVLS and APLS in small pilot schemes in basic command units are experiencing some technical issues around integration with current systems. They are working to resolve these with individual suppliers; early evaluation has yet to be carried out by those forces.

7.22 GIS use computer hardware and software to capture, manage, analyse and display all forms of geographically referenced information. Currently, all forces in England and Wales use GIS, although there are variations in functionality, meaning that some GIS can support incident plotting and automatic vehicle and person location while others will produce only basic maps.

7.23 Some forces use Blue8 World or similar GIS mapping systems, which their dispatch or control staff describe as essential to the accurate management of incidents and resources. One of the benefits to the customer is enhanced response, because the accuracy of the information available allows dispatchers or controllers to direct patrol officers more effectively and efficiently.

7.24 GIS enable information to be linked to data about locations – so, for example, the name of an individual can be linked to an address. This information needs to be input manually, meaning that forces must be prepared to invest in systems and processes that will ensure that the information is detailed and accurate.

Mobile data solutions

7.25 The term 'mobile data' has a wide range of definitions. Some would suggest that simple one-line messaging on an Airwave radio terminal is mobile data, while others argue that true mobile data provision is much more substantial (for example, allowing remote access to systems such as command and control, crime recording, the Police National Computer (PNC), the missing persons' database, electronic directory enquiries and diary management).

7.26 It has been a cause of frustration for police officers that, while technology has advanced beyond recognition in the wider world, and forces throughout England and Wales now have a large number of information tools at their disposal, the ability of police officers on the ground to access this information is severely limited. Most officers currently have to return to the station to process prisoners, access local and national databases, file reports or be assigned tasks – all of which keeps them off the street and out of sight of citizens for at least 30 per cent of their time on duty.²⁵ More recent research commissioned by the Home Office discovered that over 50 per cent of officers' time was spent in the police station.²⁶

7.27 However, there are signs of progress. Mobile data has been available in the UK for some years, but has been limited to providing status updates using text-to-radio. Over the past 18 months the technology has advanced significantly, with command and control, crime recording, diary management, GPS, stop and search and fixed penalty applications all now available through mobile data. To deliver this service, forces need to adopt one of two routes – a TETRA solution or working with a commercial bearer such as the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS). Both involve significant costs and the situation is also complicated by the fact that no one company is in a position to offer a single solution, as all forces have their own unique legacy systems.

SUGGESTION N

Forces using mapping systems to dispatch resources need a system that keeps command and control system data as up to date and accurate as possible. It is recognised that there may be cost implications, but forces could work together on a regional or collaborative basis to put such systems in place.

²⁵ *Diary of a police officer*, Home Office Police Research Paper 149, 2001.

²⁶ *24/7 response policing in the modern police organisation: A view from the beat*, M Chatterton and E Bingham, January 2006.

- 7.28 Individual forces are trying various mobile data solutions designed to link patrolling officers to systems such as the PNC and command and control. Police in Sussex are working with operational staff and suppliers to test the provision of GIS information directly to patrolling officers. Lancashire Constabulary has tested a TETRA solution that enables it to transmit photographic images of missing persons to patrolling officers. The Metropolitan Police Service is currently installing 1,500 mobile data terminals in operational vehicles. These forces have involved operational users in the design of solutions, leading to widespread acceptance of these applications.

“Chief officers do not yet realise the full potential and the impact that effective mobile data can have on service delivery.” IT consultant

- 7.29 Over the last five years, a significant number of pilots have been run by forces throughout England and Wales. Although some have recorded benefits, there is no national picture of the overall benefits the Service could expect, as the pilots have been conducted for specific reasons in different forces. In an attempt to achieve a more widely applicable solution for all forces, PITO has funded four pilot projects to test mobile data applications and measure the benefits.
- 7.30 PITO is working with the British Transport Police (BTP), Staffordshire Police and Strathclyde Police and on a joint initiative between Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire forces. The BTP pilot involves GPRS and will deliver command and control, intelligence, fixed penalty and stop and search facilities from hand-held personal digital assistants (PDAs). Additionally, Staffordshire’s solution will include crime screening, email, missing persons’ reporting and directory services. The force is working with its command and control provider, Steria, to develop the system to offer diary management, GPS mapping for resource allocation, and satellite navigation information for both vehicle and foot patrol officers.
- 7.31 In order to make the pilots effective, all forces are taking end-user and organisational requirements into account when designing their individual solutions. The PITO projects aim to identify clear benefits and direction at the end of the trials that the Service in general can realise and take forward nationally.

Airwave

- 7.32 Since their introduction in the 1960s, personal radios for patrolling officers have represented the main medium for contact between those officers and the control rooms or supervisors directing their deployment. For decades such radios were operated on a local basis and precluded any meaningful cross-force communication. Airwave, introduced in 2004/05, is the first genuinely national system for police radio contact.
- 7.33 Airwave is a secure digital radio network for the exclusive use of the emergency and public safety services in Great Britain. Designed to carry voice and data communications, the service offers guaranteed levels of coverage across England, Wales and Scotland. Airwave is part of the Government’s critical national infrastructure and therefore remains functional at all times, even during major incidents when conventional mobile and fixed telephony networks may become overloaded and fail, as was the case during the London bombings of July 2005.

SUGGESTION P

Forces should use the results from the forthcoming mobile data pilots to evaluate the full impact of mobile data and the benefits it can achieve. They should consider collaborating on a regional or national basis to develop a solution that supports front-line service delivery.

7.34 UK police forces are the primary users of Airwave and the service has been provided to all forces throughout England, Scotland and Wales as part of a £2.9 billion UK government contract. Roll-out was completed in March 2005, and currently there are around 150,000 users. On behalf of the Police Service, in 2002 PITO identified a number of benefits that the system should realise;²⁷ however, no formal exercise has been conducted to test whether these have indeed been realised. This thematic inspection has, with the co-operation of ACPO and PITO, taken the opportunity to look at a number of key benefits in relation to incident management. More details of the subsequent findings are in Appendix E, but a few of the benefits most relevant to incident management are discussed below, namely:

- fleetmap;
- more efficient control rooms;
- greater call clarity; and
- talk-groups.

Fleetmap

7.35 Although the fleetmap was not cited in PITO's list of benefits, it was considered prudent, given its overall effectiveness and resilience in terms of business continuity, to comment on how forces have configured it.

7.36 Individual forces are responsible for the configuration of the radio terminals, including the talk-groups (groupings of users who can talk to each other and hear each other talking) and their associated functionality; the users' rights and identities on the system; and access to external telephony, the PNC, and also the control room system (Integrated Communications Control System – ICCS). This process is known generically as 'fleetmapping', and is perhaps more of an art than a science. A carefully crafted fleetmap will be efficient, understandable by end users, resilient, and capable of supporting both core policing duties and large/major incidents anywhere in the country.

7.37 A badly constructed fleetmap will limit the functionality available to users (despite being paid for), and will restrict the ability of policing units of whatever type to communicate with each other (within force boundaries or between forces). At large and major incidents it could potentially render an expensive radio system virtually useless. Even day-to-day equipment failures will have a substantially greater impact if the fleetmap is not intelligently constructed.

7.38 Inspection work suggests that forces have constructed their fleetmaps in a variety of ways, depending on the topography of the force area and the financial resources available. In many cases there is little evidence to show that forces, particularly contiguous forces, have collaborated to enhance cross-border activity. However, one major piece of work is currently under way between Staffordshire, West Mercia, West Midlands, Northumbria and Strathclyde to prove the concept that, if any force were to lose system functionality, any of the other forces could, in effect, take over the dispatch or control function on that force's behalf.

²⁷ *Review of Airwave benefits management framework and baseline review findings*, PITO, 2002.

RECOMMENDATION 16

Forces should review their fleetmap on a regular basis to gain full benefit from Airwave capability and functionality, in collaboration with neighbouring forces, to support core policing duties and business continuity.

More efficient control rooms

- 7.39** Airwave provides the ability for front-line officers to communicate directly, conduct enquiries and complete administrative tasks remotely, thus freeing up dispatch or control staff to concentrate on other duties. Forces could capitalise on this by making better use of the system's ability to send patrol officer status updates from the hand-held terminal to command and control systems: one force doing this has reduced traffic through the control centre by almost 60 per cent. The system also makes it easier for officers to access advice from supervisors and control room staff, giving them the confidence to deal with incidents. In order to maximise the benefits to the control room, forces should consider:

- making better use of status updates to relieve pressure on the control room;
- integrating Airwave status messaging in command and control systems;
- integrating locally procured force IT systems with Airwave;
- training operational staff in using alternative methods of communication and IT; and
- developing new working practices for control room and operational staff.

Greater call clarity

- 7.40** Improved voice clarity removes any ambiguity of meaning and reduces the need for repetition. Airwave screens out background noise, ensuring that speech quality is crystal clear. This helps officers communicate effectively, particularly in noisy and hazardous environments. Fieldwork found that this feature, combined with better quality transmission and reception, has increased officers' and dispatch or control staff's confidence in the system. Feedback from focus groups indicated that radio clarity is considered the most important element of any radio system, and staff stated that the improvement in this area has been immense since the introduction of Airwave.

“You can have as many bells and whistles as you want on a radio system, the most important thing for officer safety and accurate communication is how clear radio transmissions are.” Radio operator

“With the brilliant clarity now being experienced, people forget how bad reception was before and how that put officers at risk.”

IT manager and former police superintendent

SUGGESTION R

Training for staff and supervisors should include a module explaining the full range of services available through the Airwave package and highlighting the potential benefits.

Talk-groups

- 7.41 The available communications options of the Airwave service afford opportunities to improve incident management and control. Forces identified talk-group management as an important issue. In restructuring neighbourhood areas, some forces have inadvertently increased radio traffic to a constant 80 per cent of airtime usage. They identified that they had experienced problems during force restructuring – some talk-groups became overloaded when boundaries moved, increasing the number of patrols on individual talk-groups. This resulted in officers being unable to get through and overloading the dispatch function.

SUGGESTION 5

Forces' working practices should take full advantage of all Airwave functionality. Forces should also implement a marketing strategy to increase staff awareness of that functionality in order to fully exploit the system.

- 7.42 Five forces stated that they use radio talk-groups that are visually monitored rather than audibly monitored (dispatch or control staff monitor emergency alarm transmissions visually on their ICCS screens to ensure officer safety) to reduce pressure on staff. This also reduces air traffic for the main talk-group and allows events to be controlled without interference from other patrols. Dynamic talk-group management increases capacity, allowing dispatchers or controllers to concentrate on incidents and transmissions that require their assistance or action, at the same time giving patrolling officers more communication options.

CONCLUSION

- 7.43 Technology is continually evolving and it is hard for forces to keep up with changes. Many police contact centres face budgetary constraints that limit their ability to invest and inhibit value for money. However, investment is essential if forces are to provide dispatch or control staff and operational officers with the tools they need to carry out their respective roles. One approach would be for forces to enter into collaborative agreements in order to achieve economies of scale, such as in the management and general provision of IT.
- 7.44 Command and control systems are now being developed that will help dispatch or control staff resource incidents effectively and that are tailored to local requirements. To ensure efficient, effective incident management across borders, these systems must work together. Increasingly, forces are realising the benefits of mapping systems, which – provided they are kept up to date – provide highly accurate information and enable dispatch or control staff to zoom in on streets down to the level of individual houses. Forces see the ability to locate mobile resources through AVLS and APLS as enhancing their ability to effectively command and control resources and incidents.
- 7.45 Processes must be updated and organisational culture changed if mobile data is to realise its full potential. The PITO pilots will be fully evaluated against business benefits and the outcomes should be awaited with interest.
- 7.46 The Airwave digital radio system has the potential to provide the police and other emergency services with a tried and tested solution that will enable them to communicate securely both in times of crisis and during their day-to-day operations. To gain maximum benefit from Airwave, forces must ensure that their systems are fully integrated, both internally and externally, so that information and intelligence can be shared between all partners.

8. Using information to improve performance

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8. Using information to improve performance

INTRODUCTION

- 8.1 In contact management, rising call volumes, increasing complexity of callers' enquiries and the need for ever-greater efficiency create a demanding context where a rigorous approach to measurement and evaluation is essential if centres are to deliver excellent service both during and beyond the call itself. Performance information can play a vital role in allowing managers to assess the demand and tailor the response and in checking the quality of the service provided. To achieve any or all of these objectives, however, the measures used must focus on the right things and capture data that is both accurate and consistent.

WHAT SHOULD 'GOOD' PERFORMANCE LOOK LIKE?

- 8.2 Taking account of the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS), as enhanced by *First contact*, it is expected that for effective performance management a force would need to:
- **achieve the nationally agreed standards of performance set out under the National Standards for Incident Recording (NSIR), Quality of Service Commitment (QoSC) and the NCHS;²⁸**
 - **have a structured process for using performance information and good practice to improve service delivery; and**
 - **conduct regular reviews of contact centre service and processes.**



HOW GOOD IS CURRENT POLICE PERFORMANCE?

National performance standards

- 8.3 The Police Service currently receives 69 million calls each year, of which 11 million are 999 calls. Combined, they generate in excess of 33 million incident logs, at a total contact centre operating cost of some £74.9 million nationally.²⁹ Where such an important service as contact management exists independently in each of the 43 forces of England and Wales, there is a clear need to apply some national standards to the service and performance that might be expected of every force. Among the key standards are the NCHS, the National Crime Recording Standards, the NSIR, the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) and the QoSC (see Appendix F for more detail on each).
- 8.4 The common aim of each of the existing standards is to help the Police Service better manage its business by gathering clean data and accurate information; understand demand; make use of regular customer feedback; adopt a standard approach to customer contact; and send a clear, consistent message to customers on what they can expect from the Service.
- 8.5 The NSIR was initially piloted in 11 police forces and has made a significant difference to recording standards, helping forces develop a better understanding of incident demand. As a result, NSIR is now being implemented across the Service.

²⁸ The highlighted element represents a new addition to the framework for good practice as set out in *First contact* and is relevant to incident management (see Appendix C).

²⁹ As calculated from the response to the HMIC *First contact* questionnaire, November 2004.

The Police and Crime Standards Directorate is responsible for collating NSIR data and ensuring its accuracy prior to publication. Front-line staff have been involved in the implementation process to ensure that NSIR codes are user-friendly.

- 8.6 Although the NSIR is generally seen as a step forward, it is important to stress that it sets standards for incident recording but does not cover the actual incident response, and hence does not standardise measurement or evaluation of the whole end-to-end service received by callers. Forces have developed their own approaches to measuring and managing the quality of this function, but there is clear scope for the service to develop a national standardised approach.

Local performance measures

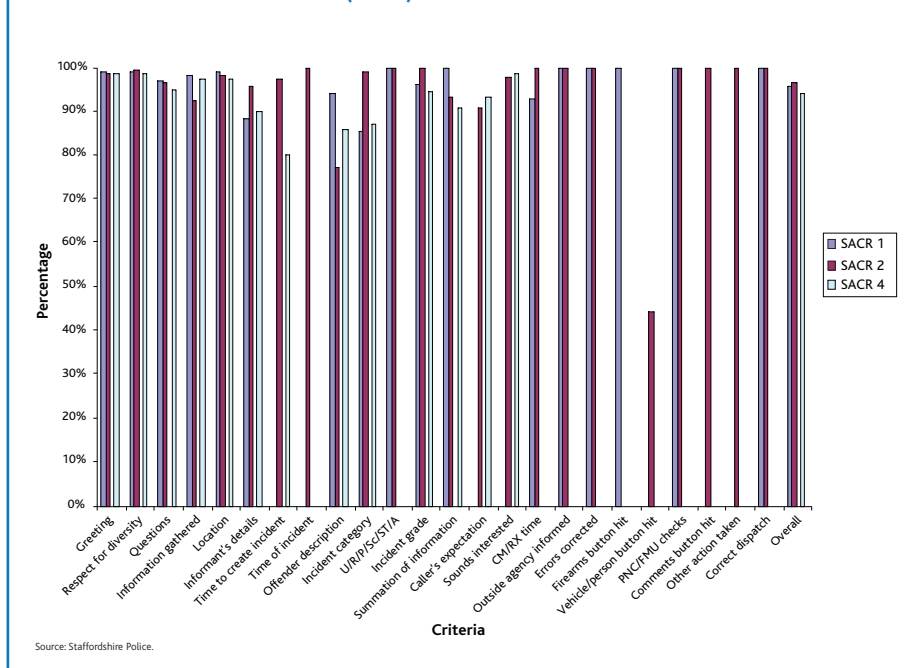
- 8.7 Beneath the headline national statistics, historically forces have collected data locally on a variety of measures that have ranged from the speed of answering the initial telephone call to the time taken from dispatch to arrival at the scene. While most of the categories of data collected by forces have been sensible, either as performance measures or background management information, the indicators selected have been highly variable and even those that claim to be 'national' indicators have been collected inconsistently, making meaningful comparison impossible.
- 8.8 The PPAF contains some high-level performance information, such as ease of access and response to callers, but this is limited and there are no specific measures for incident management. Individually, however, some forces now have more sophisticated management information systems, which allow them to collate a wider range of measures and statistics (see Figure 2.2 on page 32).
- 8.9 Forces have identified different ways of using incident information to assess and improve the quality of incident response and management. Three forces visited have separate, dedicated quality monitoring departments that have teams to monitor contact centre performance. Post-incident closure, the team listens to a significant proportion of radio transmissions, checking the accuracy of associated incident information and the timeliness of resource allocation and incident resolution. The teams provide information to supervisors on individual performance for use in performance appraisals and to achieve improvements.
- 8.10 While the use of such dedicated teams has obvious potential, two forces identified problems when the quality teams are separate from the contact centre. Supervisors often disagreed with observations made by the team and ignored their findings, as they felt that the team lacked direct knowledge of processes and policies that underpin dispatchers' or controllers' decisions. To rectify this, these forces have now involved contact centre managers and supervisors in improving the processes and liaison. Both report that the quality and accuracy of incident information has improved by 30 per cent since the introduction of the quality-monitoring process.
- 8.11 Contact centre managers are now beginning to see the benefits of using quality monitoring to boost the performance of dispatch or control staff, improve training and enhance customer relationships, and some are developing in-house solutions (Box 8.1).

Box 8.1: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – QUALITY MONITORING

Bedfordshire Police has developed a quality monitoring system for dispatch and control using a Microsoft Access database. The database is populated with information taken from its management information systems and is used to monitor performance and to identify training requirements for dispatch or control and other contact centre staff. The monitoring covers a number of areas, including checking the accuracy of incident details, incident location, caller details, classification, grading, routing and results. An audit compliance module built into the system lists key elements and the percentage compliance achieved. Patrolling officers who are responding to incidents now have accurate information, allowing them to deliver a better quality of service.

- 8.12 Forces use a variety of methods to dip sample the quality of dispatching. It is now more widely accepted that simply setting time targets, especially at an inappropriate stage of the process, can have a detrimental effect on quality, because staff can spend time concentrating on how to beat the system rather than doing their actual job. Many command and control systems now provide the type of in-depth, linked information on firearms users, wanted missing persons and local intelligence that dispatchers often need to communicate to patrolling officers.
- 8.13 The quality of incident management by control or dispatch staff is now principally about making appropriate decisions over allocation, and then making the relevant information and support available to the responding patrols.
- 8.14 One force dip samples against a standard template based on the quality of details entered on incidents, and produces management information broken down to shift level (see Figure 8.1). The aim is to ensure that incident reports have the correct elements and categories so that the decision regarding the action required is based on good-quality information. The standard covers how the call was taken and dealt with and includes all parts of the process up until resolution. It includes the quality of the greeting; correct caller details; correct incident category and grading; offenders' description; time taken to create the incident; and whether cross-referencing indicators have been filled in.
- 8.15 The information gathered is marked against the standard set; for example, one shift entered details of the firearms application only 40 per cent of the time when the target was 99 per cent. This type of management information is then used on a shift basis to focus on improving team performance in the quality of incident recording.

FIGURE 8.1: PERCENTAGE ACHIEVED BY DIP-SAMPLED EXAMPLES, SOUTHERN AREA CONTROL ROOM (SACR), 2004/05



- 8.16** Using performance information on the quality of incident records enables the rest of the process to be actioned accurately, such as initially taking and recording accurate incident details. Ensuring that those details are transmitted to responding patrols is crucial to officer safety and good incident management. Staffordshire Police uses this approach and dip samples the quality of incident records and uses the information to improve team performance through personal development reviews.
- 8.17** The only measure that forces consistently publish annually in relation to incident management is the time taken for a patrol to respond and arrive at an incident. This measure has limited value as there is no definition of when the time is measured from. For example, some forces will start the clock ticking from receipt of call, others when the incident is created on the command and control system, others from the point at which the incident is saved on their command and control system, and others when the incident is received by the dispatcher or controller. This was previously a national measure but was discontinued following concerns about road safety as well as inconsistency.
- 8.18** A comprehensive national approach to measuring the quality of incident management, based more on the quality of decision making than on easily quantifiable indicators, is now urgently required to inform both national and local performance management, and thus to improve service delivery in a sustainable way at both levels.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The National Policing Improvement Agency should, through the National Contact Management Programme, further develop the National Call Handling Standards suite of performance indicators to incorporate incident management, thus providing complete contact management information.

Using management information to improve performance

- 8.19 The true value of performance and management information, once in a valid and consistent format, lies in how it is used by local managers to improve actual performance. Merseyside Police is in the process of developing management information on the response provided to different incident grades. The objective is to assess the force's performance in its published response to incidents to ensure that the expectations they have given to customers are actually being delivered. The force hopes to identify the percentage of incidents correctly responded to:
- by a patrolling officer;
 - by telephone resolution; or
 - by other agencies or partners.

This is an innovative approach to measuring the delivery of customer service in incident management, and one that other forces and the Home Office/HMIC will monitor.



- 8.20 The quality of service and response contribute significantly to the quality of customer service provided, which plays a key role in building and maintaining public confidence in the Police Service more widely. In recognition of this, some forces, such as Hampshire and Strathclyde, are using a solution based on NICE Systems from Call Centre Technology that can track the customer's experience from the initial call through to radio dispatch and patrol attendance. In the near future it will even use CCTV footage to show the impact an incident can have on the person involved. The information is used to develop individuals and improve training, in addition to having many operational and evidential benefits.
- 8.21 Lancashire Constabulary has been working with the Police Reform Unit at the Home Office to introduce performance measures that take account of the customer's journey from beginning to end (Box 8.2). The force piloted this approach during 2006; however, at the time of writing, no formal conclusions had been reached.

Box 8.2: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Lancashire Constabulary has set out to measure performance from the customer's perspective at all stages of the incident management process. The force is gathering performance information from patrolling officers at individual and team level that includes patrol availability, status updates, productivity, sickness and attrition. This information is used by basic command unit commanders and contact centre managers to ensure that workload is evenly distributed and incidents managed effectively. As a result, there has been a 30 per cent reduction in open incidents and an increase in both internal and external customer satisfaction levels.

8.22 Forces are investing a lot of time and effort to improve processes and thereby performance and quality of service. It is interesting that the 2005/06 PPAF result on customer satisfaction – reflecting the ease of contacting the Service and the treatment received – is a commendable 89.5 per cent. This compares well with the results of the 2006 *Merchants global contact centre benchmarking report*, which compared customer satisfaction levels across five continents and a number of different types of contact centre. The global picture ranges from 80 to 84 per cent satisfaction, while satisfaction levels for individual service industries range from 72 to 86 per cent.

8.23 These comparisons indicate that the Police Service in England and Wales has done much to improve its customer focus, but there is no room for complacency. Forces must continue to seek opportunities to improve customer service and operational response.

Reviewing contact centre service and processes

8.24 While an external focus is important in identifying areas for improved response, it is equally important to examine internal processes and systems to identify efficiencies. One such area is the potential to reduce demand generated by the organisation itself – so-called non-value demand – which arises as a result of unnecessary activity, mistakes or failures to deliver and which can cause customers to re-contact the organisation and complain, creating still further work.

8.25 By applying the systems focus, Greater Manchester Police identified avoidable costs in relation to non-value demand on their inbound and outbound radio calls – totalling over £400,000. They are now in the process of using this information to improve efficiency in radio communication by the wider use of mobile data and through improved processes.

8.26 Another way to scrutinise systems is to employ an independent contact consultancy, such as Catalyst – which has developed a powerful, practical framework called the Discovery Audit. The framework uses qualitative analysis, based on real-time, statistically valid evidence, to get to the crux of call-handling dynamics and the customer experience. Evidence gathered through observation supplements the data gathered from automatic call distribution (ACD) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and the information is then used to evaluate existing processes (Box 8.3).

SUGGESTION T

Forces should develop local management information on incident response and management, to ensure that customers receive a quality service throughout the life of the incident, from taking the call, through grading, deployment, resolution and feedback.

Box 8.3: GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY – IMPROVING SYSTEMS

Cambridgeshire Constabulary has embarked on a radical reappraisal of how it communicates with the community and its partner organisations. In 2004, the force commissioned Catalyst to advise on the establishment of a state-of-the-art customer service centre at Thorpe Wood in Peterborough, intended to handle more than 1 million calls per year.

Catalyst delivered a comprehensive report that included a set of practical ‘quick wins’, which could be implemented without the need for external involvement or capital investment. These included restructuring the organisation to put a greater emphasis on performance management and improving the training procedures. The force has already reported improved data-processing rates and more efficient and effective interactions with the community. Levels of customer satisfaction with the treatment they receive rose to 90.3 per cent in 2006.

- 8.27 In recent years, many forces have focused on process improvements within their contact centres. There are some excellent examples across the Police Service of this approach, achieving efficiencies and effectiveness against a backdrop of ever-decreasing budgets. Forces are reporting that the challenge is becoming even greater with the need to invest in improving protective services.

CONCLUSION

- 8.28 Being able to manage demand is an essential element in providing a high-quality service, but it relies on having a clear understanding of the nature and scale of anticipated demand and then having sufficient, and competent, staff available both within contact centres and on the ground to respond. Making best use of valid performance information, applying good practice where possible and regular reviews of systems and processes all contribute directly to the end product.
- 8.29 Measuring the **right** things presents a major challenge in policing. In the past, measures have tended to focus on quantitative data, as this is easier to gather than qualitative information. Now, forces make better use of performance information, have developed PPAF domains, use workforce management or Excel spreadsheets to schedule staffing profiles, and publicise their commitment to service delivery. Increasingly, forces are realising the benefits of introducing statistical modelling in resource planning. This results in better alignment to meet demand, thus enabling more effective response to calls for service.
- 8.30 A recent report commissioned by HM Treasury has investigated performance in all public sector contact management. The report sets out a long-term vision for service transformation over the next ten years, including steps that can be taken immediately. The report makes a number of recommendations that could have an impact on the Police Service. One in particular recommends the establishment of performance indicators and targets for contact centre operation based around the objective of at least a 25 per cent reduction in costs by the end of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.³⁰

³⁰ *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, Sir David Varney, HM Treasury, December 2006.

- 8.31** The contact centre is a fundamental part of delivering operational policing and is the gateway to the Police Service. Therefore, it is imperative that contact centre management does not become the next gap in service delivery, as this would have a significant impact on the provision of all services, including protective services.

9. National Contact Management Standards



9. National Contact Management Standards

THE NATIONAL CALL HANDLING STANDARDS

- 9.1 The National Call Handling Standards (NCHS) were formulated to establish a national approach to call handling in the Police Service. *First contact* reported on the original NCHS in some detail, and they have certainly helped move the Service in a very positive direction. *First contact* concluded that forces had a real opportunity to build on the NCHS in order to establish clear and unequivocal standards for call handling and recommended some significant enhancements and additions to assist in achieving this goal. The response from all quarters to these enhancements was extremely positive.
- 9.2 A further significant step forward will be achieved if the scope of the NCHS is expanded to encompass all contact centre functions. *Beyond the call* sets out further recommendations and proposed additional enhancements to the previously revised NCHS that will support this broader focus. A previous recommendation of *First contact* is also restated, namely to develop a national contact management strategy under the direction of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). The new National Contact Management Programme (NCMP), for which the NPIA is responsible, is now the appropriate vehicle to take forward this outstanding issue. It would be appropriate to designate the new standards as the National Contact Management Standards.

RECOMMENDATION 18

The National Policing Improvement Agency should develop a national contact management strategy, building on the National Call Handling Standards, *First contact*, *Beyond the call* and HMIC baseline assessments, and covering all aspects of police contact management.

FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD PRACTICE AND ASSESSMENT MATRIX

- 9.3 The good practice framework for police contact centre management was originally developed through the NCHS and then enhanced by the *First contact* report, and it identifies further good practice standards in six of the eight business drivers. The assessment matrix has been enhanced to reflect the changes made to the framework for good practice (Figure 9.1)

FIGURE 9.1: SAMPLE ASSESSMENT MATRIX

1.8 ADOPT THE NATIONAL INCIDENT GRADING CRITERIA AND DEFINITIONS FROM THE NCHS AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE CLEARLY COMMUNICATED TO CALLERS AND ALL STAFF

2	4	6	8
NCHS or clear incident grading criteria are not used to grade incidents.	Non-NCHS incident grading criteria are in place.	The contact centre makes partial use of NCHS grading criteria.	NCHS grading criteria are used across the organisation. The organisation conveys a consistent message to the public regarding the standards they can expect based on NCHS definitions.

Source: *First contact: A thematic inspection of police contact management*, HMIC, November 2005.

- 9.4 Forces can use the matrix to assess themselves against the standards in a number of ways. New contact centres can use the matrix to monitor and develop performance, while well established centres can use it to help them maintain continual improvements in performance. The matrix is designed to be flexible, and forces can tailor elements of it to reflect neighbourhood policing priorities.

GOOD PRACTICE

- 9.5 A standards and contacts repository has been designed by the national contact centre managers' forum in the light of the good practice identified in *First contact*. The repository can be accessed through the Police National Legal Database. The repository contains good practice case studies from *First contact*; contact centre industry publications; links to professional contact centre organisations; and information on national and regional contact centre meetings.
- 9.6 The repository is in the early stages of development and it is expected that it will expand its content base in the future under the stewardship of the NCHS delivery group, which reports to the steering group of the NCMP. The repository will also take into account the good practice identified in this report to ensure that it covers the whole incident management process.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The National Policing Improvement Agency, through the National Contact Management Programme, should further develop the existing centralised repository for good practice in contact centre management, ensuring that the element of incident management is incorporated.

CONCLUSION

- 9.7 Over the past 18 months, much has been achieved, through the NCHS, the Policing Performance Assessment Framework, the National Standards for Incident Recording and the Quality of Service Commitment, to support significant improvement in police contact management. However, these standards are essentially about recording data rather than managing incidents. The new NCMP is an excellent opportunity to build and expand on all previous work in relation to contact management, and this will assist forces in delivering customer service.
- 9.8 The Police Service, through implementation of the recommendations in both *First contact* and *Beyond the call*, has a real opportunity to establish an effective contact management regime for every force, whether individually or in collaboration. If the Service fails to take this opportunity, it is clear from the recent report, commissioned by HM Treasury,³¹ that the Government will look to impose change. The scale of likely change is illustrated by the report's key findings in respect of contact centres:
- Public service contact centres can do more to drive out inefficient and ineffective practices – and there are some examples of providers seeking to make this happen. The public sector has the capacity to secure improvements of up to 25 per cent over the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period.

³¹ *Service transformation: A better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer*, Sir David Varney, HM Treasury, December 2006.

- Access to public services via contact centres needs to be made clear and simple, with a reduction in the number of access lines and less variation in how services are offered. More contact centre services should be joined up where this will provide a better service for citizens and businesses.

9.9 Among the associated recommendations are the following:

- All taxpayer-funded contact centres should undergo formal published accreditation by December 2008.
- Performance indicators and targets should be established based on the objective of at least a 25 per cent reduction in costs by the end of the 2007 CSR period. This could include:
 - 80 per cent of contacts by citizens or businesses to be resolved at first contact;
 - a 50 per cent reduction in avoidable contact;
 - making the web the primary access point for all simple information and advice requests;
 - moving all public sector telephony charges to a single tariff; and
 - requiring all contact centres with fewer than 200 call-handlers to share their services with others.

9.10 The last recommendation alone would, if implemented, change the entire face of police contact centre management. As the report's author, Sir David Varney, states in his foreword:

“My hope is that the UK’s public services will respond to this report and create a world-class public service economy. Other governments faced with the issues described... have decided to impose structural change to deliver better public services, such as building new departments for citizen and business-facing services. Although I do not favour this approach at present in the UK, I recommend that progress in other countries is kept under review and used to test the progress of our transformation. If we show signs of lagging behind then these structural change alternatives need consideration.”

The Police Service cannot say it was not given the opportunity to transform without compulsion – it is now time to make that transformation on its own terms.

Appendices



Appendix A

Acknowledgements

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, Kate Flannery, would like to express her gratitude to the organisations, individuals and forces that contributed to this inspection (see below).

Particular thanks go to the following people, police forces, companies and agencies for giving up their time to support the inspection:

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Fieldwork forces

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Greater Manchester
Hampshire
Lancashire
Northumbria
South Wales
Staffordshire
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 CM Insight, Weybridge
 Data Dimension, South Africa
 Datapoint, Brentford
 European Confederation of Contact Centre Organisations, Northern Europe
 Isle of Man Government
 Maritime and Coastguard Agency
 Merchants, South Africa
 National Air Traffic System
 Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO)



Appendix B

Recommendations matrix and suggestions

No.	Chapter	Recommendation	Owner			Timescale
			Chief Constable	Association of Chief Police Officers	National Policing Improvement Agency	
1	Customer Page 27	All forces should adopt and implement fully the national incident grading criteria set out in the National Call Handling Standards, supplemented, where appropriate, by their own local response times.	✓			Within 6 months
2	Customer Page 31	Forces should develop local measures to support or explain Policing Performance Assessment Framework data and to gauge which part of the customer experience is good, and why. Customer satisfaction information should be used to improve performance.	✓			Within 12 months
3	Customer Page 34	Forces should establish and publish standard processes to gather relevant information at the first point of contact and should agree with customers the appropriate means and timescale for providing timely, meaningful information and feedback on the progress of incidents.	✓			Within 6 months
4	Culture Page 42	Forces should ensure that front-line supervisors have access to relevant support and training to ensure that the impact of their proactive leadership on overall service delivery is enhanced.	✓			Within 6 months
5	Culture Page 46	Basic command unit commanders and heads of contact centres should be jointly accountable for incident management, making it an integral part of their commitment to providing customer service. This should be reinforced through the force's personal development review process.	✓			Within 6 months

No.	Chapter	Recommendation	Owner			Timescale
			Chief Constable	Association of Chief Police Officers	National Policing Improvement Agency	
6	Culture Page 49	Forces should adopt a single corporate incident management model, which is championed at chief officer level.	✓			Within 12 months
7	Culture Page 50	Operational supervisors should ensure that information on patrolling officers' availability status is accurate and up to date, in order to achieve the force's organisational objectives.	✓			Within 12 months
8	Strategy and structures Page 57	Forces should take the earliest opportunity to explain options whereby part or all of the contact centre service could be delivered or procured collaboratively.	✓			Within 6 months
9	Strategy and structures Page 57	The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency, supported by the national forum introduced following the recommendations of <i>First contact</i> , should collate and use good practice from regional fora. This should include incident management and call-handling practices and should be developed into national customer service standards.		✓	✓	Within 12 months
10	People Page 66	Forces should use a selection procedure for contact centre staff that tests the full range of skill sets and competencies for all roles.	✓			Within 6 months

No.	Chapter	Recommendation	Owner			Timescale
			Chief Constable	Association of Chief Police Officers	National Policing Improvement Agency	
11	People Page 67	Forces should use staffing models for contact centres and patrolling officers, to ensure that resources involved in incident response and management are effectively aligned to demand.	✓			Within 12 months
12	People Page 69	Forces should monitor the impact of contact centre abstraction rates and adopt robust processes to manage abstractions.	✓			Within 12 months
13	Skills and training Page 74	Forces should ensure that dispatch or control staff use Airwave radio-speak standards developed by the National Policing Improvement Agency and then test them for competency as part of their personal development reviews.	✓			Within 12 months
14	Skills and training Page 76	Forces should provide all contact centre staff with effective, relevant induction, refresher and regular ongoing training, tailored to the needs of their role.	✓			Within 6 months
15	Technology Page 83	The Association of Chief Police Officers and the National Policing Improvement Agency should work together to develop a business case to enable forces to procure the technology needed to share data with each other and with other agencies.		✓	✓	Within 12 months

No.	Chapter	Recommendation	Owner			Timescale
			Chief Constable	Association of Chief Police Officers	National Policing Improvement Agency	
16	Technology Page 87	Forces should review their fleetmap ³² on a regular basis to gain full benefit from Airwave capability and functionality, in collaboration with neighbouring forces, to support core policing duties and business continuity.	✓			Within 6 months
17	Performance information Page 93	The National Policing Improvement Agency should, through the National Contact Management Programme, further develop the National Call Handling Standards suite of performance indicators to incorporate incident management, thus providing complete contact management information.			✓	Within 12 months
18	National standards Page 100	The National Policing Improvement Agency should develop a national contact management strategy, building on the National Call Handling Standards, <i>First contact, Beyond the call</i> and HMIC baseline assessments, and covering all aspects of police contact management.			✓	Within 12 months
19	National standards Page 101	The National Policing Improvement Agency, through the National Contact Management Programme, should further develop the existing centralised repository for good practice in contact centre management, ensuring that the element of incident management is incorporated.			✓	Within 6 months

³² The configuration plan of radio terminals, 'talk-groups', associated functionality, users' rights and identities on the system, access to external telephony and other control room systems.

Suggestion letter	Page number	Suggestion
A	28	Forces should ensure that processes are in place to quality check incident details and information, to ensure accuracy and appropriate response.
B	30	Forces should have processes in place to ensure that front-line staff are aware of customer feedback results, helping them to understand the importance of their role in setting customer expectations at the first point of contact.
C	36	When implementing and updating systems and new technology, consideration should be given to key standards for the follow-up phase of customer service.
D	43	Forces should ensure that staff delivering front-line services have the opportunity to contribute to improvement in processes and systems, to enhance overall service delivery.
E	46	All forces should ensure that their contact centres apply National Intelligence Model disciplines and use the flow of intelligence to develop and meet individual and corporate strategies.
F	52	Forces should create a forum or process whereby contact centre and front-line staff meet to discuss and resolve issues that affect their contributions to incident response and management.
G	56	Forces should evaluate the benefits from their attendance or non-attendance policies and realign them with the results from customer satisfaction feedback.
H	56	Forces should put mechanisms in place to keep customers informed at timely intervals using first contact as an opportunity to explain and set realistic expectations for callers on how and when they will be updated.
J	58	A senior management team member from the contact centre should attend any force strategic communication meeting, to achieve a corporate approach to media and marketing.
K	62	Forces should evaluate the full cost, benefits and return on investment before embarking on any major change to their service delivery model.
L	66	To support robust succession planning, forces should maintain a recent list of people who passed an interview and assessment for contact centre positions but could not be offered a post; this would allow prompt replacement of leavers by people who could take up employment at the earliest opportunity. People on the list should only remain on it for a maximum period of 12 months before having to reapply.

Suggestion letter	Page number	Suggestion
M	76	Forces should ensure that staff with a tutoring or mentoring role have been selected to do this and have received appropriate training.
N	84	Forces using mapping systems to dispatch resources need a system that keeps command and control system data as up to date and accurate as possible. It is recognised that there may be cost implications, but forces could work together on a regional or collaborative basis to put such systems in place.
P	85	Forces should use the results from the forthcoming mobile data pilots to evaluate the full impact of mobile data and the benefits it can achieve. They should consider collaborating on a regional or national basis to develop a solution that supports front-line service delivery.
R	87	Training for staff and supervisors should include a module explaining the full range of services available through the Airwave package and highlighting the potential benefits.
S	88	Forces' working practices should take full advantage of all Airwave functionality. Forces should also implement a marketing strategy to increase staff awareness of that functionality in order to fully exploit the system.
T	95	Forces should develop local management information on incident response and management, to ensure that customers receive a quality service throughout the life of the incident, from taking the call, through grading, deployment, resolution and feedback.

Appendix C

Framework for good practice and assessment matrix

INTRODUCTION

This appendix sets out a framework for good practice and an assessment matrix developed from those published in *First contact: A thematic inspection of police contact management*. It also makes suggestions as to how forces can use the diagnostic performance measures set out in the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS) to improve contact centre performance.

The framework for good practice was originally developed for the NCHS. It was subsequently enhanced in *First contact* and has been further enhanced in this report to cover incident management and includes all the key business drivers addressed in the inspection:

- customers;
- human resources;
- skills, training and education;
- culture;
- strategy and organisation structure;
- technology; and
- management information and processes.

Location and facilities which were covered in *First contact* are not included in this report as there have been no significant changes in this area since publication. However, they are included in the framework to ensure that it provides an overall picture and encompasses both phases of the project.

The assessment matrix takes the good practice standards and allocates potential scores of two, four, six or eight points depending on performance against compliance with the standard. It is designed to create a consistent basis for assessment, whether internal or external. *First contact* recommended that the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and HMIC work together to further develop the assessment matrix and, in particular, to agree a weighting for these standards, and this inspection would reiterate that recommendation.

The first phase of this inspection proposed a set of diagnostic performance measures for contact centres, based on the NCHS. These measures can be used to measure overall progress or can be broken down into functional areas; for example, a staff perception survey could be broken down by time, and sickness absence levels could be measured by role.

THE GOOD PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

The framework comprises a number of statements that together set out the standards that should be expected of a high-performing police contact centre. The second phase of the inspection has added elements that relate directly to the dispatch or control function: these are highlighted in colour below. The standards are listed under the eight business drivers accepted as key elements of good performance.

1. Putting the customer first by:

- 1.1 identifying, through consultation and analysis, the different customer groupings relevant to contact management;
- 1.2 ensuring that a process is in place to regularly consult customers and use the results to improve services, and placing customer feedback at the centre of organisational thinking and planning;

- 1.3 monitoring complaints and positive feedback to resolve repeat problems and identify best practice;
- 1.4 keeping customers informed with relevant and timely information in relation to reported incidents or enquiries;
- 1.5 providing customers with regular information on services provided and standards to better manage demand and customer expectations;
- 1.6 recognising the important part played by staff in determining the customer experience;
- 1.7 ensuring timely and appropriate response to all forms of contact media so that no group or individual is unfairly disadvantaged in gaining access to the service; and
- 1.8 adopting the national incident grading criteria and definitions from the NCHS and ensuring that they are clearly communicated to callers and all staff.

2. Getting the business culture right by:

- 2.1 recognising contact management as a core element of operational service delivery that supports organisational objectives, with proactive leadership and support at chief officer and departmental levels;
- 2.2 communicating organisational objectives and the contact centre strategy to all employees;
- 2.3 recognising and rewarding achievements and performance that support a quality service rather than simply creating a target-driven culture;
- 2.4 having a process to regularly consult, engage and survey employees using results to improve service delivery;
- 2.5 putting a mechanism in place to foster and encourage corporacy, co-ordination and shared accountability between the contact centre and other policing functions that are key to delivering customer service; and
- 2.6 positively addressing and subjecting to evaluated policy decisions function-specific issues of operational culture.

3. Developing an effective strategy and organisational structure by:

- 3.1 developing a contact management strategy incorporating a demand management strategy to meet both business and customer needs;
- 3.2 having policies, procedures and a programme of action to deliver the strategy, together with an analysis and evaluation process to measure success, and a process in place to communicate the strategy to the force and external stakeholders;

- 3.3 empowering employees to participate in service delivery and decision-making processes;
- 3.4 putting in place business continuity and disaster recovery plans which will be regularly reviewed and tested;
- 3.5 forecasting demand and business planning to inform budget setting; and
- 3.6 ensuring units and departments that are key to delivering customer service have shared accountability.

4. Investing in 'people' development by:

- 4.1 creating a human resource (HR) strategy which recognises the needs of contact centre operations;
- 4.2 having an effective and legally compliant recruitment policy;
- 4.3 ensuring that the right number of skilled staff and supervisors are working at the right time;
- 4.4 forecasting employees' career progression and developmental needs;
- 4.5 putting in place personal performance development plans for all staff;
- 4.6 carrying out exit interviews to understand why staff leave and to use the information to improve conditions;
- 4.7 linking patrol availability and other demand reduction initiatives for effective dispatching; and
- 4.8 robustly managing contact centre abstraction rates (including sickness and annual leave).

5. Ensuring continuing professional and skills development by:

- 5.1 having in place a training strategy that is linked to a costed HR strategy, and planned training designed around training needs to deliver cost-effective training;
- 5.2 providing staff at all levels with relevant and specific training to meet individual personal development and organisational goals;
- 5.3 ensuring that mentoring and tutoring support exists for new and existing staff;
- 5.4 supporting employees at all levels to achieve industry-standard qualifications; and
- 5.5 designing and delivering cost-effective induction and refresher training, available for all staff and specifically designed to support the core competencies of each role.

6. Investing in good location and facilities by:

- 6.1 ensuring that workplaces are well designed, provide areas for refreshments, meetings, etc, and meet health and safety requirements for all equipment, including furniture.

7. Making the most of contact centre technology by:

- 7.1 having appropriate technology matched to, and driven by, strategic and business requirements. Technology is integrated into current systems to assist in reducing delays and duplications and is user-friendly for staff and customers, adding value to the customer experience;
- 7.2 having a range of communication channels available to those seeking to contact the force that are tailored to meet both customer and organisational needs;
- 7.3 ensuring the availability of timely, accurate and relevant information for call-handlers and dispatch or control staff at the point of interaction with the caller or responding resource, to inform their response; and
- 7.4 having management and performance information to assist in supervision, assessment and improvement of services.

8. Making best use of management information by:

- 8.1 having a performance management framework that uses timely and accurate quantitative and quality assurance information to inform management in the decision-making process and deliver continuous improvement; and
- 8.2 regularly reviewing contact centre services and processes.

THE ASSESSMENT MATRIX

1. Putting the customer first

1.1 IDENTIFY, THROUGH CONSULTATION AND ANALYSIS, DIFFERENT CUSTOMER GROUPINGS RELEVANT TO CONTACT MANAGEMENT			
2	4	6	8
Ad hoc processes are in place to collect customer information, with no clear plan in place to use this to improve performance.	A structured process is in place to collect customer information, and an analysis of information is carried out.	A structured process is in place to collect customer information, and an analysis is carried out. The information is used to target the needs of different customer groups to improve performance.	Service delivery and future business process and planning are designed around analysis of customer feedback to achieve excellence.

1.2 PLACE CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND SATISFACTION AT THE CENTRE OF ORGANISATIONAL THINKING			
2	4	6	8
Limited customer satisfaction information is available.	Regular surveys are used to understand customer satisfaction. A structured process of gathering data on customer satisfaction is in place and there is strong evidence of action based on findings.	Satisfaction measures are an embedded part of individual and organisational measures and improvement plans.	Customer feedback is at the centre of organisational thinking and recognition mechanisms.

1.3 MONITOR COMPLAINTS AND POSITIVE FEEDBACK, TO RESOLVE REPEAT PROBLEMS AND IDENTIFY GOOD PRACTICE			
2	4	6	8
There is ad hoc management and tracking of complaints.	A documented process is in place to track and ensure that complaints are resolved. It also addresses root causes of problems to restore customer satisfaction.	Appropriate levels of staff empowerment to deal with complaints and escalation processes are in place and supported at front-line level.	Customer complaints and letters of thanks are used to develop the service. Customer feedback is at the centre of organisational thinking.

1.4 PROVIDE METHODS FOR KEEPING CUSTOMERS INFORMED ON PROGRESS OF PARTICULAR INCIDENTS OR ENQUIRIES			
2	4	6	8
Ad hoc contact is made to update the customer in relation to the incident.	A structured process for contacting customers is in place to keep them informed.	Customer contact systems are in place, with satisfaction measures including follow-up contact. Customer feedback is used to develop the service and tailor it to individual customer needs.	Keeping the customer informed with relevant and timely information in relation to incidents or enquiries is at the centre of organisational thinking.

1.5 PROVIDING CUSTOMERS WITH REGULAR INFORMATION ON SERVICES PROVIDED

2	4	6	8
Ad hoc customer information is available, with no clear plan.	A plan is in place to inform customers of services provided.	A documented process is in place which ensures that customers receive timely and relevant information regarding customer access and services.	Providing customers with regular information on services provided and accessibility is part of force plans and objectives.

1.6 RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANT PART PLAYED BY STAFF IN DETERMINING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

2	4	6	8
Ad hoc meetings are held, with limited involvement for front-line staff in contributing to decision making.	A process is in place to include staff in the decision-making process.	A range of processes are in place to include staff in decision making to ensure their views are valued and they are involved in delivering continuous improvement.	All staff are involved (from front-line to executive) in delivering continuous improvement. Actions are planned and benefits to the organisation are measured.

1.7 ENSURE TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO ALL FORMS OF CONTACT MEDIA SO THAT NO GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL IS UNFAIRLY DISADVANTAGED IN GAINING ACCESS TO THE SERVICE

2	4	6	8
Telephone response times are measured against the NCHS service level target.	Ad hoc measures are in place for multi-media access.	Clear service levels are in place to respond to requests via all media (for example telephone, email and SMS).	Clear service levels are in place to respond to requests (for example via telephone contact, email and SMS). Performance information is used to monitor and improve service delivery.

1.8 ADOPT THE NATIONAL INCIDENT GRADING CRITERIA AND DEFINITIONS FROM THE NCHS AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE CLEARLY COMMUNICATED TO CALLERS AND ALL STAFF

2	4	6	8
NCHS or clear incident grading criteria are not used to grade incidents.	Non-NCHS incident grading criteria are in place.	The contact centre makes partial use of NCHS grading criteria.	NCHS grading criteria are used across the organisation. The organisation puts out a consistent message to the public regarding what standards they can expect based on NCHS definitions.

2. Getting the business culture right

2.1 RECOGNISE CONTACT MANAGEMENT AS A CORE ELEMENT OF OPERATIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY THAT SUPPORTS ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES, WITH PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT AT CHIEF OFFICER AND DEPARTMENTAL LEVELS

2	4	6	8
Contact management does not appear on agendas and is not prioritised as a business area.	Contact management only appears on operational and departmental agendas and appears on executive agendas on an ad hoc basis.	Contact management appears on the organisational agenda at executive level. It is prioritised at operational and departmental levels.	Contact management is regarded as a fundamental part of service delivery. It appears on the organisational agenda at executive level. Clear leadership and support are given by chief officers and contact management is given priority as a business area.

2.2 COMMUNICATE ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND THE CONTACT CENTRE STRATEGY TO ALL EMPLOYEES

2	4	6	8
There is ad hoc communication based on events or issues.	A regular and effective formal communication structure is in place that encompasses a number of different media channels to communicate organisational objectives to staff.	A regular and effective formal communication structure is in place and its effectiveness is demonstrated by an increase in performance.	Communicating organisational objectives is a key driver of performance. There are high levels of visibility and commitment to the organisation.

2.3 RECOGNISE AND REWARD ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE, SUPPORTING A QUALITY SERVICE RATHER THAN SIMPLY CREATING A TARGET-DRIVEN CULTURE

2	4	6	8
Reward and recognition are ad hoc or non-existent.	A reward and recognition scheme is in place but is not linked to quality performance. There is no clear evaluation of its success.	A reward and recognition scheme that is designed around effective performance is evaluated and measured against contact centre service delivery.	A structured scheme is in place that recognises and rewards staff for quality performance and is not target-driven.

2.4 PROCESSES ARE IN PLACE TO REGULARLY CONSULT, ENGAGE AND SURVEY EMPLOYEES

2	4	6	8
Ad hoc staff satisfaction surveys are carried out, but there are no meaningful results which can be used at contact centre level.	A regular documented process is in place to survey employees and ensure employees' feedback is collected at contact centre level.	Employees' views are surveyed and the feedback received is action-planned and used to develop and improve service delivery.	Staff feedback received is action-planned and used to develop and improve service delivery. Staff satisfaction and high customer satisfaction are at the centre of organisational thinking.

2.5 MECHANISMS ARE IN PLACE TO FOSTER AND ENCOURAGE CORPORACY, CO-ORDINATION AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN THE CONTACT CENTRE AND OTHER POLICING FUNCTIONS THAT ARE KEY TO DELIVERING CUSTOMER SERVICE

2	4	6	8
The contact centre is stand-alone, with limited interaction across the organisation.	Individual networks and relationships are used to resolve cross-departmental business issues.	Proactive processes are in place, which ensure all cross-departmental business issues are identified and resolved.	The contact centre is fully integrated into force business, and interaction with other functions is co-ordinated and positively supports corporacy.

3. Developing an effective strategy and organisational structure

3.1 DEVELOP A CONTACT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, INCORPORATING A DEMAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2	4	6	8
There is no documented contact centre strategy.	A contact centre strategy is in place and includes managing demand.	A contact centre strategy is in place and reflects current force and national strategies. Demand management is a core element and targets resources to meet strategic priorities.	The contact centre strategy is fully implemented and includes demand management. It is communicated to staff and stakeholders. Staff are fully aware of their individual contribution to delivering force objectives.

3.2 POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND A PROGRAMME OF ACTION ARE IN PLACE TO DELIVER THE STRATEGY. A COMMUNICATION PROCESS IS IN PLACE TO COMMUNICATE THE STRATEGY TO THE FORCE AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

2	4	6	8
Minimum policies are in place to deliver the strategy, with no clear programme of action or evaluation process.	Policies and procedures are in place, with no clear programme to deliver the strategy and with limited communication.	Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place, with a clear delivery programme. Communication internally and externally is developing but not fully implemented.	An evaluation process is in place and is used to measure how the strategy affects performance. Using a range of methods, the strategy is clearly communicated to force and external stakeholders.

3.3 EMPOWER EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE DELIVERY AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

2	4	6	8
There are few or no opportunities to participate in service delivery and the decision-making process.	Some processes are in place to encourage or allow staff participation and involvement.	A range of co-ordinated approaches are used to include staff in decision making; feedback is used to improve service delivery.	Appropriately trained and equipped staff are empowered to participate in the decision-making process, and two-way communication takes place at every level.

3.4 PUT IN PLACE BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND DISASTER RECOVERY PLANS WHICH ARE REGULARLY REVIEWED AND TESTED

2	4	6	8
Contingency/disaster recovery has not been thought through or only one element is in place.	Key areas have been identified for recovery and both plans are in place, but there is no structure for review or testing.	Both plans are in place to cover all scenarios, service and cost are balanced, and there is some evidence of review and testing.	Robust plans are in place, which are regularly tested and reviewed to cope with expected scenarios and maintain service delivery.

3.5 FORECASTING DEMAND AND BUSINESS PLANNING INFORM BUDGET SETTING**2**

Limited forecasting and resource planning is in place.

4

Call forecasting and planning are an important part of operations. Rotas achieve appropriate balance for individuals and the organisation.

6

A range of methods is used to manage capacity and demand, with flexible approaches to resourcing.

8

Call forecasting and planning are linked to the long-term strategy and used to set a realistic budget.

3.6 ENSURE UNITS AND DEPARTMENTS THAT ARE KEY TO DELIVERING CUSTOMER SERVICE HAVE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY**2**

There is no evidence of shared accountability in customer service delivery.

4

Shared accountability is ad hoc and unstructured.

6

Shared accountability is structured and used to deliver good customer service.

8

Shared accountability for delivering customer service governance is held at executive level and used to achieve good performance.

4. Investing in 'people' development

4.1 CREATE AN HR STRATEGY WHICH RECOGNISES THE NEEDS OF CONTACT CENTRE OPERATIONS

2	4	6	8
Force HR strategy incorporates contact centre needs. Low-level HR involvement is in place.	The contact centre has an HR strategy linked to force strategy.	The contact centre has an HR strategy linked to force strategy. HR specialists have a high involvement with the contact centre.	The contact centre has a costed HR strategy linked to force strategy. The strategy has a positive impact on performance. Dedicated HR experience has a high involvement with the contact centre.

4.2 AN EFFECTIVE AND LEGALLY COMPLIANT RECRUITMENT POLICY IS IN PLACE

2	4	6	8
Recruitment and induction are dealt with on an ad hoc and unstructured basis.	Requirements are linked to a resource plan. Assessment covers a balance of relevant competency areas and tests. There is an integrated induction and training programme.	Integrated recruitment, induction and ongoing training programmes are in place, and development begins at recruitment.	Long-term initiatives ensure appropriately skilled resources are available. There is a focus on holistic employment approaches and long-term gains.

4.3 ENSURE THE RIGHT NUMBER OF SKILLED STAFF AND SUPERVISORS ARE WORKING AT THE RIGHT TIME

2	4	6	8
Limited forecasting and resource planning is in place.	Call forecasting and planning are an important part of operations. Rotas achieve appropriate balance for individuals and the organisation.	A range of methods is used to manage capacity and demand, and there are flexible approaches to resourcing.	Call forecasting and planning are linked to the long-term strategy and used to ensure that the right number of staff and supervisors are on duty to meet demands.

4.4 FORECAST EMPLOYEES' CAREER PROGRESSION AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

2	4	6	8
There is limited opportunity for career progression.	A career progression scheme is available but is not measured against overall performance.	Career progression and developmental needs are mapped against organisational and employee needs.	Career progression and developmental needs are mapped against organisational and employee needs, and are measured against overall unit performance.

4.5 PERSONAL PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT PLANS ARE IN PLACE

2	4	6	8
Individual performance measurement is based on a limited number of statistical measures.	Performance measures which balance quantity and quality are in place. They are used to a limited extent when setting individual targets.	A balanced set of measures linked to recognition and development are used to set and to agree individual targets linked to recognition and improvements.	There is an overriding feeling of honesty in performance feedback to staff. Individual empowerment and performance are an integral part of the culture and organisation.

4.6 CARRY OUT EXIT INTERVIEWS TO UNDERSTAND WHY STAFF LEAVE AND USE THE INFORMATION TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS

2	4	6	8
There is no process in place to carry out exit interviews or to collate results.	An ad hoc process is in place to collect and collate exit interview results.	A documented process is in place to collect and collate timely exit interview results. The information is used to address issues.	A robust process is in place to collect and collate timely exit interview results. Analysis is carried out and the information used to improve performance and ensure the recruitment process is evaluated and developed accordingly.

4.7 EFFECTIVE DISPATCHING IS LINKED TO PATROL AVAILABILITY AND OTHER DEMAND REDUCTION INITIATIVES

2	4	6	8
Limited resources (or patrols) are available to service the demand for incidents.	Ad hoc patrol availability and limited demand reduction initiatives are in place. No formal incident management performance indicators exist for basic command unit (BCU) commanders.	Demand reduction initiatives are in place but are not co-ordinated and measured against improvements in performance. Patrol availability is mapped against demand, and BCU commanders and heads of contact centres have incident management as one of their key performance indicators.	Incident management is a key performance indicator for BCU commanders and heads of contact centres. Patrol availability is mapped against demand to ensure a prompt customer service. Demand initiatives are planned, co-ordinated and measured against improvements in performance.

4.8 ROBUSTLY MANAGE CONTACT CENTRE ABSTRACTION RATES (INCLUDING SICKNESS AND ANNUAL LEAVE)

2	4	6	8
Limited abstraction management processes are in place.	Abstraction management is in place but mainly focuses on sickness absence.	Processes are in place to manage all absence. Information is used to improve performance.	Robust abstraction management is in place, supported by retention policies and with force and local mechanisms.

5. Ensuring continuing professional and skills development

5.1 A TRAINING STRATEGY THAT IS LINKED TO A COSTED HR STRATEGY IS IN PLACE. COST-EFFECTIVE TRAINING IS PLANNED AROUND TRAINING NEEDS

2	4	6	8
Ad hoc training is delivered, with little or no evaluation against organisational performance.	A training strategy is in place. There is a training plan in place, but it is not costed or designed around training needs analysis.	A cost-effective training plan has been designed around training needs analysis and is evaluated against performance.	A cost-effective training plan linked to a costed HR strategy exploits the use of technology and has been designed around customer needs and expectations. It is evaluated against organisational performance.

5.2 PROVIDE STAFF AT ALL LEVELS WITH RELEVANT AND SPECIFIC TRAINING TO MEET INDIVIDUAL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL NEEDS

2	4	6	8
There is limited evidence of ongoing training or development planning.	Personal development planning is in place. There is evidence of progression based on this process.	Training is designed around organisational and individual needs. Development planning is used as part of broader succession planning.	Training and development is central to the employment contract. It is individually tailored and designed around organisational and individual needs.

5.3 MENTORING AND TUTORING SUPPORT EXISTS FOR NEW AND EXISTING STAFF

2	4	6	8
No mentoring or tutoring role exists in the contact centre.	Ad hoc mentoring and tutoring exists. No formal structured process is in place.	Trained mentors and tutors are in place and are recruited using a formal structured process.	Mentors and tutors are in place and their effectiveness is formally measured and evaluated.

5.4 SUPPORT EMPLOYEES AT ALL LEVELS TO ACHIEVE INDUSTRY-STANDARD QUALIFICATIONS

2	4	6	8
No standard qualifications are available to employees.	Employees are able to achieve limited qualifications.	Industry-standard qualifications, which meet individual and organisational needs, are available to all employees.	Bespoke industry-standard qualifications are supported by the organisation and are widely available to staff.

5.5 APPROPRIATELY DESIGNED AND DELIVERED COST-EFFECTIVE INDUCTION AND REFRESHER TRAINING, AVAILABLE FOR ALL STAFF AND SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO SUPPORT THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF EACH ROLE

2	4	6	8
Induction training is only available for call-handling staff. Refresher training is ad hoc.	Limited induction and refresher training is in place for all contact centre staff.	Comprehensive induction and refresher training covers call-handling and dispatch functions within the contact centre. It is designed and planned around individual and business needs.	Comprehensive induction training and planned refresher training are available for all functions and ranks within the contact centre. They are costed and measured against contact centre performance.

6. Investing in good location and facilities

6.1 ENSURE THAT WORKPLACES ARE WELL DESIGNED AND INCLUDE AREAS FOR REFRESHMENTS, MEETINGS, ETC [Part of the complete framework and included in *First contact*, but not in *Beyond the call*.]

2	4	6	8
There is minimal investment in the working environment.	The contact centre environment supports safe and effective working.	The contact centre environment is designed with staff input to support well-being.	There is a high standard of ergonomically designed features to meet health and safety requirements and deliver continuous improvement in performance.

7. Making the most of contact centre technology

7.1 APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY IS MATCHED TO, AND DRIVEN BY, STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS, AND INTEGRATED INTO CURRENT SYSTEMS

2	4	6	8
Lack of systems integration produces delays and duplication.	Some integration is evident, but technology still relies on staff support or 'work-arounds' to achieve effectiveness.	Systems are well integrated and user-friendly. Delays and duplication of effort are minimised.	Systems are fully integrated and user-friendly, resulting in high staff satisfaction, reduced delays and duplication. Systems are designed around customer needs.

7.2 A RANGE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS IS AVAILABLE TO THOSE SEEKING TO CONTACT THE FORCE, AND CHANNELS ARE TAILORED TO MEET BOTH CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL NEEDS

2	4	6	8
Telephone contact is the only option available.	There is some use of multi-media. Options reflect available finance rather than business needs or projections.	Multi-media channels are available, enabling a wider access to the organisation. Options reflect a documented business plan.	Multi-media channels have been designed with business growth and customer needs in mind. They have improved accessibility and customer satisfaction.

7.3 TIMELY, ACCURATE AND RELEVANT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE TO CALL-HANDLERS AND DISPATCH OR CONTROL STAFF AT THE POINT OF INTERACTION WITH THE CALLER OR RESPONDING RESOURCE, TO INFORM THEIR RESPONSE

2	4	6	8
Systems do not supply integrated, timely information to call-handlers or dispatch or control staff.	Systems are integrated but supply limited information to contact centre staff.	The caller's details and relevant information from corporate systems are available at the point of interaction, along with additional information for dispatch or control staff.	Systems have been designed with end-users in mind. They deliver a wide range of timely information that assists staff in the decision-making process. Technology is used to transmit information to and from patrolling officers.

7.4 MANAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION IS USED TO ASSIST IN SUPERVISORS' ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICES

2	4	6	8
Limited management information is available.	Management and performance information is available but is not comprehensive and/or requires additional effort to interpret.	A range of relevant management information is available and is routinely used by managers to inform decisions and deployment.	Relevant management and performance information is available for the past, present and future. It is relevant and directly supports decisions and service improvement.

8. Making best use of management information

8.1 AN EMBEDDED PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK IS IN PLACE THAT USES TIMELY AND ACCURATE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA TO INFORM MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

2	4	6	8
A limited set of measures are in place. They are focused on statistical management information.	A broad range of statistical performance measures are in place.	A balanced range of measures, at contact centre and individual levels, reflect contact centre quality and performance, and are used by managers to make decisions.	Groups of measures are used which clearly focus on individual and contact centre performance. Individual measures focus on effectiveness. Performance information is at the centre of the decision-making process.

8.2 REGULAR REVIEW OF CONTACT CENTRE SERVICES AND PROCESSES

2	4	6	8
Few or no reviews take place within the contact centre.	Service delivery is reviewed on an ad hoc basis.	A regular and effective review process is in place. Results are measured against contact centre performance.	A robust review process is clearly documented. Benefits are realised, and results drive continuous organisational performance improvement.

Appendix D

Baseline assessment grading 2005/06

HMIC baseline assessment 2005/06 CONTACT MANAGEMENT				
	2003/04 gradings	2004/05 gradings	2005/06 gradings and direction of travel	
Avon and Somerset	Good	Fair	Fair	Stable
Bedfordshire	Good	Good	Good	Improved
Cambridgeshire	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Cheshire	Good	Fair	Good	Stable
City of London	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Cleveland	Poor	Fair	Good	Stable
Cumbria	Good	Fair	Fair	Stable
Derbyshire	Good	Good	Good	Stable
Devon and Cornwall	Fair	Fair	Fair	Stable
Dorset	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Durham	Fair	Fair	Fair	Stable
Dyfed-Powys	Fair	Fair	Good	Stable
Essex	Fair	Fair	Good	Stable
Gloucestershire	Good	Good	Good	Stable
Greater Manchester	Fair	Poor	Poor	Improved
Gwent	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Hampshire	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
Hertfordshire	Good	Good	Good	Improved
Humberside	Poor	Poor	Fair	Improved
Kent	Good	Excellent	Good	Stable
Lancashire	Good	Good	Good	Stable
Leicestershire	Good	Good	Good	Stable
Lincolnshire	Fair	Good	Good	Stable
Merseyside	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Metropolitan Police Service	Fair	Fair	Fair	Improved
Norfolk	Fair	Fair	Fair	Stable
North Wales	Fair	Fair	Excellent	Improved
North Yorkshire	Fair	Good	Good	Improved
Northamptonshire	Good	Good	Good	Improved
Northumbria	Fair	Good	Good	Improved
Nottinghamshire	Fair	Fair	Good	Stable
South Wales	Fair	Fair	Fair	Stable
South Yorkshire	Poor	Fair	Fair	Improved
Staffordshire	Good	Good	Excellent	Stable
Suffolk	Poor	Fair	Fair	Stable
Surrey	Good	Good	Good	Stable
Sussex	Poor	Fair	Fair	Stable
Thames Valley	Fair	Good	Good	Improved
Warwickshire	Fair	Fair	Fair	Stable
West Mercia	Good	Good	Good	Stable
West Midlands	Fair	Excellent	Excellent	Stable
West Yorkshire	Fair	Good	Good	Improved
Wiltshire	Good	Fair	Fair	Stable

Appendix E

Airwave inspection report

Airwave is a secure digital radio network for the exclusive use of the emergency and public safety services in Great Britain. Designed to carry voice and data communications, the service offers guaranteed levels of coverage across England, Wales and Scotland. This allows users to maintain instant communication even in remote areas or within confined spaces such as buildings and tunnels.

Airwave is part of the Government's critical national infrastructure and therefore remains functional at all times, even during major incidents when conventional mobile and fixed telephony networks may become overloaded and fail, as was the case during the London bombings of July 2005. The UK Police Service is one of the primary users of Airwave and the service has been provided to all police forces throughout England, Scotland and Wales as part of a £2.9 billion UK Government contract. Roll-out was completed in March 2005, and Airwave currently has around 150,000 users.

KEY BENEFITS

On behalf of the Police Service, in 2002, the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) identified a number of benefits that the system should realise, but no formal exercise has been conducted to test whether these have indeed been realised.

Those benefits are:

- improved access to other applications;
- enables private conversation;
- reduction in geographic constraints;
- enhanced penetration within buildings;
- improved interoperability between forces and other agencies;
- improved voice clarity;
- increased officer confidence;
- reduced criminal scanning;
- more efficient control room;
- reduced time in station;
- more immediate Police National Computer (PNC) result;
- free to speak;
- more efficient use of officer time;
- more effective remote working;
- no over-talking;
- less intrusion by press/troublemakers; and
- less interference.

This thematic inspection has, with the co-operation of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and PITO, taken the opportunity to look at a number of key benefits in relation to incident management, and this appendix is a report on those findings.

The inspection has found that, in practice, the benefits being realised by forces are falling short of those envisaged by PITO. For many forces, Airwave merely provides a digital replacement for an outdated analogue system and, depending on the force's installation specification of Airwave, a number of the benefits will never be realised, as many forces took as much or as little as they needed or could afford. However, forces have secured benefits in the following key areas.

Fleetmaps

Although fleetmaps were not listed in PITO's list of benefits, it was considered prudent, given their importance in terms of overall effectiveness and resilience in terms of business continuity, to make comment on how forces have configured them.

Individual forces are responsible for the configuration of the radio terminals, including the 'talk-groups' (groupings of users who can talk to each other and hear each other talking), and their associated functionality; the users' rights and identities on the system, access to external telephony and to the PNC; and also the control room system (Integrated Communications Control System – ICCS). This process is known generically as 'fleetmapping', and can be considered more of an art than a science. A carefully crafted fleetmap will be efficient, understandable by end-users, resilient, and capable of supporting both core policing duties and large and major incidents anywhere in the country.

A badly constructed fleetmap will limit the functionality available to the users (despite being paid for), and will restrict the ability of policing 'units' of whatever type to communicate with each other (within force boundaries or between forces). At large and major incidents it potentially could render an expensive radio system virtually useless. Even day-to-day equipment failures will have a substantially greater impact if the fleetmap is not intelligently constructed.

The inspection found that forces have constructed their fleetmaps in a variety of different ways depending on the topography of the force area and the financial resources available. In many cases there was little evidence to show that forces had collaborated, particularly contiguous forces, to enhance cross-border activity. However, one major piece of work is currently under way between Staffordshire, West Mercia, West Midlands, Northumbria and Strathclyde to prove the concept that if any force were to lose system functionality, any of the other forces could, in effect, take over the dispatch or control function on that force's behalf.

RECOMMENDATION

Forces should review their fleetmap on a regular basis to gain full benefit from Airwave capability and functionality, in collaboration with neighbouring forces, to support core policing duties and business continuity.

Security

Airwave is an encrypted network, and as such communications cannot be scanned or monitored by outsiders, thus preventing criminals or individuals with malicious intent from thwarting the work of police officers and emergency workers. Evidence from officers engaged in both overt and covert operations confirms the benefits of this facility. To ensure that they are benefiting fully from the enhanced security offered by Airwave, forces should consider:

- launching a marketing and communications strategy in order to raise awareness among users that Airwave has effectively eradicated criminal scanning and that it works in areas where radios did not;
- monitoring technological advances to maintain the integrity of the system;
- introducing earpiece technology so that transmissions can only be heard by the user;
- and

- reviewing the covert surveillance processes and procedures, as the encrypted radio coverage provided by the Airwave end-to-end service now provides nationwide coverage instead of the small coverage area provided by Cougar radios. This should have a dramatic effect on the way the surveillance teams operate.

Combined mobile radio and telephony

Airwave's unique, multi-functional handsets can act as a digital radio, mobile telephone and data terminal in one, enabling police officers to access local and national databases, including PNC records. They also support the ethos of neighbourhood policing by enabling the public to access police officers directly. Therefore, forces need to launch a community strategy outlining the manner in which the public can contact their neighbourhood police officer or police community support officer by telephone. However, this is not without risk if members of the public cannot make contact with the officer; there must be a supporting mechanism in place, such as voicemail or transfer to an operator, to ensure that the call can be concluded to the caller's satisfaction. Voicemail messages must be picked up in a timely manner, and in line with strict protocols.

Increased officer confidence

Well informed staff improve operational effectiveness by providing officers with more relevant information and contributing to improved incident management. Having a deeper understanding of officers' work will raise dispatch or control staff's awareness of the safety implications of what they do, and help them provide more proactive support when required.

Evidence from the inspection has found that the enhanced communications opportunities and improved information flow offered by Airwave have increased officer confidence immeasurably. In addition, Airwave handsets carry emergency buttons, so users can call for urgent assistance, overriding transmissions if necessary, thus making life safer for police officers and emergency service personnel. The fact that the Airwave system operates within buildings also helps to build confidence. To maintain this situation, forces may wish to consider:

- conducting proactive, ongoing tests to ensure that contracted coverage is, and continues to be, provided, together with tests on Airwave features such as automatic vehicle and people location systems (AVLS and APLS), text messaging and telephone interface, to ensure that these features are available to users;
- continuously reviewing coverage levels to ensure that these are being maintained and that the force is receiving the coverage that it has paid for;
- ensuring that the fleetmap is effective and appropriate for their needs and that this is reviewed on a half-yearly basis to ensure that it is fit for purpose; and
- presenting Airwave performance figures on their intranet sites to show the effectiveness of the system.

Interoperability

Airwave enables forces that historically worked on independent radio systems to communicate seamlessly via TETRA³³ technology, including at the site of an incident. By sharing the same communication system, police, fire and ambulance personnel can deliver a truly joined-up response. This functionality has also delivered benefits in the fight against level 2 criminality, where cross-border operations have been enhanced by the ability to maintain radio contact. However, one of the most surprising findings of the inspection is that many dispatch or control staff and their supervisors are not fully aware of the functionality available to them. Forces should consider:

- training staff in the use of talk-groups and national status codes;
- providing operational guidance regarding the management of cross-border incidents and effective talk-group management;
- developing inter-force protocols for incident management;
- providing quick reference guides on national status codes and available talk-groups for officers working outside or close to their force boundaries; and
- installing the talk-groups of surrounding forces within their fleetmaps for greater interoperability.

Greater call clarity

Improved voice clarity removes any ambiguity of meaning and reduces the need for repetition. Airwave uses unique technology to screen out background noise, ensuring that speech quality is clear. This helps officers communicate effectively, particularly in noisy and hazardous environments. The inspection has found that this feature, combined with better quality transmission and reception, is also increasing the confidence of officers and dispatch or control staff in the system.

“You can have as many bells and whistles as you want on a radio system, the most important thing for officer safety and accurate communication is how clear radio transmissions are.” Radio operator

“With the brilliant clarity now being experienced, people forget how bad reception was before and how that put officers at risk.”

IT manager and former police superintendent

Better use of officer time

Airwave’s functionalities (which include telephony, mobile data, AVLS/APLS and SMS texting) allow officers to communicate with each other, with supervisors and with members of the public and to access the PNC and other force applications without the need to go through a third party, usually the control room. This inspection has found that this feature, along with improved transmission and reception, has resulted in officers being deployed to incidents more quickly.

The ability to send SMS text status updates also speeds up deployment, by giving dispatch or control staff more up-to-date information about officers’ whereabouts and availability. The ability to make telephone calls and point-to-point calls means that officers can go

³³ Terrestrial trunked radio: an open digital trunked radio standard for professional mobile radio users.

from incident to incident without needing to return to the police station, although hard evidence of this was difficult to find. There is still very much a cultural change required here. Improvements in information flow have also increased officers' ability to be more proactive. To realise the full benefits of Airwave's functionality, forces should consider:

- providing direct access to the PNC via hand-held and mobile data terminals;
 - integrating other force IT systems with Airwave, such as crime reporting from scene – on a note of caution, a question has been raised in relation to whether Airwave is a radio system, a telephone system or a mobile data system. It cannot do all three at the same time; therefore, forces may need to pick and choose who has what, or they may get themselves into a position whereby they cannot contact the resource as they are 'hooked' into using one of the other facilities;
 - providing annual training covering the use of new equipment and associated changes to working practices;
 - looking at their policies on command and control and the use of non-dispatch talk-groups;
 - looking at what functions can be undertaken at first contact point rather than using control room staff; and
 - integrating the AVLS/APLS systems (both vehicle and personal) from Airwave into their command and control system for rapid and more effective resource deployment.
- The health and safety aspects of resources are also greatly enhanced.

More efficient control room

Airwave provides the ability for front-line officers to communicate directly, conduct enquiries and complete administrative tasks remotely, thus freeing up dispatch or control staff to concentrate on other duties. Forces could capitalise on this by making better use of the system's ability to send patrol officer status updates from the hand-held terminals to command and control systems: one force has reduced traffic through the control centre by almost 60 per cent. The system also makes it easier for officers to access advice from supervisors and control room staff, giving them the confidence to deal with incidents.

In order to maximise the benefits to the control room, forces should consider:

- making better use of status updating to relieve pressure on the control room;
- integrating Airwave status messaging into command and control systems;
- integrating locally procured force IT systems with Airwave;
- training operational staff in using alternative methods of communications and IT; and
- developing new working practices for control room and operational staff.

Talk-groups

The available communications options of the Airwave service affords opportunities to improve incident management and control. Forces identified talk-group management as an important issue. In restructuring neighbourhood areas, some forces have inadvertently increased radio traffic to a constant 80 per cent of airtime usage. They identified that they had experienced problems during force restructuring: some talk-groups became overloaded when boundaries moved, thus increasing the number of patrols on individual talk-groups. This resulted in officers being unable to get through and the dispatch function becoming overloaded.

SUGGESTION

Forces' working practices should take full advantage of all Airwave functionality. Forces should also implement a marketing strategy to increase staff awareness of that functionality in order to fully exploit the system.

Five forces identified that they use radio talk-groups that are visually monitored rather than audibly monitored (dispatch or control staff monitor emergency alarm transmissions visually on their ICCS screens to ensure officer safety) to reduce pressure on staff. It also reduces air traffic for the main talk-group and allows the event to be controlled without interference from other patrols. Dynamic talk-group management increases capacity by allowing dispatchers or controllers to concentrate on incidents and transmissions that require their assistance or action, at the same time giving patrol officers more communication options.

CONCLUSION

Since their introduction in the 1960s, personal radios for patrol officers have represented the main medium for contact between those patrols and the control rooms or supervisors directing their deployment. For decades such radios were operated on a localised basis and precluded any meaningful cross-force communication. The Airwave digital radio system, introduced in 2004/05, is the first genuinely national system for police radio contact that allows communications across borders.

Airwave has the potential to provide the police and other emergency services with a tried and tested solution that will enable them to communicate securely both in times of crisis and during their day-to-day operations. To gain maximum benefit from Airwave, forces must ensure that their systems are fully integrated, both internally and externally, so that information and intelligence can be shared between all partners.

Appendix F

National standards and initiatives

The Quality of Service Commitment: making it easy to contact us

Police forces in England and Wales have signed up to a commitment that states the following:

We are committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to the public and responsive to individual, community and business needs.

We will:

- provide equality of access to services and information;
- provide a range of ways to access our services that address the needs of users;
- consult with those who use our services and the local community about what is important to them and publish specific local commitments;
- provide a range of information that focuses on areas of service that you have told us are important to you, ensuring the information is easy to understand; and
- widely publicise the details of how you can access police services in your local area.

This will include:

- the location and opening times of police stations and other contact points;
- other ways that you can contact us or obtain advice and information, such as websites, surgeries or public meetings;
- the name of the officer who is responsible for policing in your area;
- when you should call 999 for emergencies;
- the arrangements for contacting the police for non-emergencies; and
- the arrangements for how to report a crime or incident.

We will:

- provide a range of ways in which you can let us know your views and widely publicise these locally;
- respond to you within ten working days when requested; and
- publish regular updates about what we are doing to improve our services as a result of views received.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The code contains details of the services that victims of crime can expect to receive from the criminal justice agencies. According to the code, the Police Service should provide the following services for victims:

- tell them if there is going to be an investigation into the crime within five days of the victim reporting the crime;
- provide a Victims of Crime leaflet and pass their details to Victim Support (if agreed);
- provide monthly updates until the case is closed; and
- inform them of any arrest, subsequent release and any charge or action to be taken within five days (or one day if they are receiving an enhanced service).

Forces were expected to fully implement the code by April 2006.

Neighbourhood policing teams

The Government has pledged to provide every community throughout England and Wales with a dedicated neighbourhood policing team. These teams will work with partners to tackle local priority issues and improve the quality of life for everyone in the area.

A Home Office publication entitled *Neighbourhood policing: Your police, your community, our commitment*³⁴ sets out plans to deliver neighbourhood policing teams to every area by 2008 and to provide funding for up to 24,000 police community support officers (PCSOs). In his March 2006 budget speech, the Chancellor announced plans for the accelerated recruitment of PCSOs, with 16,000 scheduled to be in place by April 2007.

As well as increasing the visibility of the Police Service, putting more PCSOs on the street is designed to give members of the public:

- information about how their force is policing the local community;
- access to a point of contact for their neighbourhood policing team; and
- an opportunity to tell the police about the issues that are causing them concern and help shape the response to those issues.

In February 2005, the National Centre for Policing Excellence (on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers – ACPO) published a paper, *Professionalising the business of neighbourhood policing* (subsequently updated in August 2006). The paper sets out ten principles as the basis of learning for 43 pathfinder basic command units (BCUs) in the first phase of an ACPO-led programme of reform. The programme aims, in partnership with the Home Office, the Association of Police Authorities (APA) and the Department for Communities and Local Government, to achieve confident and secure neighbourhoods by providing communities with:

- access – to policing services through a named point of contact;
- influence – over policing priorities in their neighbourhood;
- interventions – joint action with partners and communities; and
- answers – sustainable solutions and feedback.

Neighbourhood policing teams are considered central to the implementation of a wide range of community and public-facing initiatives – HMIC will be inspecting all forces in summer 2007 to gauge progress of the programme.

101, the single non-emergency number

In the absence to date of a national non-emergency telephone number, callers have often found accessing local numbers difficult and so have taken the easy option of ringing 999 to report a non-emergency incident or seek non-urgent advice.

The non-emergency telephone service is intended to relieve pressure on the 999 system by providing direct access to information and advice on community safety issues, including non-emergency crime and anti-social behaviour. The 101 service will be available 24 hours a day, have multi-language features and be accessible via the internet.

³⁴ *Neighbourhood policing: Your police, your community, our commitment*, Home Office, 2005.

The service is designed to provide a standard national solution and is based on research into public needs and expectations and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

The core service will cater for calls connected with:

- vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property;
- noisy neighbours;
- intimidation and harassment;
- abandoned vehicles;
- rubbish and litter, including fly tipping;
- people being drunk or rowdy in public spaces;
- alcohol-related anti-social behaviour; and
- street lighting issues.

The first wave of the roll-out, which began in May 2006, featured different service delivery models in each of five police force areas. In October 2006 the Home Office decided not to proceed with the full national roll-out of 101 until a full assessment of wave 1 is carried out. This decision was taken following the evaluation of the implementation proposals submitted by the wave 2 partnerships. Allowing more time to fully assess the learning from wave 1 will better inform the decision on the future strategy for roll-out. This has now been deferred pending the outcome of this assessment in 2007.

National standards for crime and incident recording

The National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) were developed by ACPO with assistance from the Home Office, following investigations into crime recording variation by ACPO, the Home Office and HMIC. They were adopted by all police forces in England and Wales in April 2002, in an effort to improve the consistency of police crime recording, and to better reflect the demands made on the police by victims of crime. For most forces, this meant taking a more victim-focused approach to crime recording, based on the victim's perception rather than solely on hard evidence.

Historically, the quality of incident recording has also been highly variable. The National Standards for Incident Recording (NSIR) were born out of the need for greater consistency in standards and a better understanding of overall demand on police forces. The main aim of the standards, developed by the Police Standards Unit in 2005, is to ensure that all appropriate incidents, both crime and non-crime, are recorded accurately and consistently. This allows the resulting data to inform a Service-wide approach to issues such as reducing incidents or tackling anti-social behaviour and to enhance the quality of service delivery at local level. The impact of both the NSIR and NCRS on incident management is discussed in Chapter 9.

The Policing Performance Assessment Framework

At a national level, the relative performance of forces is assessed using the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). The framework is divided into the following domains – generic areas of policing service:

- citizen focus;
- reducing crime;
- investigating crime;
- promoting public safety;
- providing assistance; and
- resource usage.

Consideration is also given to the differences in policing challenges that individual forces face, by the addition of a 'local domain'.

In each of these domains, there is an agreed combination of quantitative performance measures – statutory performance indicators (SPIs) – and qualitative judgements – from HMIC's baseline assessments. These are consolidated to provide an annual joint assessment, with gradings of Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor and an indication of improvement or deterioration against previous performance.

The Home Office is currently developing a new single framework to assess policing and community safety. It is committed to establishing this framework for crime, drugs and policing by April 2007. The framework – Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS) – will replace the performance frameworks used currently for police forces plus crime and drug partnerships, thereby reducing bureaucracy.

The National Policing Improvement Agency

Within the public sector, it is usual for there to be a standards-setting body and/or an improvement agency, for example the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA), but there is currently nothing like this in respect of the Police Service.

ACPO proposed the establishment of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) in its response to the Government's November 2003 Green Paper *Building Safer Communities Together*. It suggested setting up a new agency to support the improvement of service delivery by police forces and police authorities, both individually and collectively, and to support the implementation of national standards. The Government stated its commitment to setting up the agency in the police reform White Paper,³⁵ the National Policing Plan 2005/08 and included provision in the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The NPIA is expected to be fully functioning by April 2007. It will assume responsibility for supporting the Police Service in all major police reform programmes, including neighbourhood policing, police workforce modernisation and a new contact management project.

In October 2006, the Home Office announced that agreement had been reached to form a new group, the National Contact Management Programme (NCMP) Steering Group, and the first meeting was held in December 2006. This group will bring together the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS) and the NSIR, and possibly sometime in the future the NCRS, into a single group that will have overall responsibility for the maintenance of all standards. This is an excellent opportunity to strategically drive contact centre performance forward in the wake of *First contact*, HMIC's baseline assessments and the NCHS.

³⁵ *Building communities, beating crime*, Home Office, 2004.

Appendix G

National call grades and definitions

This appendix is an extract from the National Call Handling Standards (NCHS); the full document is available at http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/community-policing/call_handling_standards.pdf?version=1

The NCHS defined a call for service and provided a guideline to influence and to assist the call-handler. It provided examples to support those definitions, and should be linked to the definitions of specific incidents and recording practices contained in the minimum data standards and counting rules associated with the National Crime Recording Standards (NCRS) and the National Standards for Incident Recording (NSIR). The national call grades and definitions are required to support consistency and comparability between forces.

A contact is defined as emergency or non-emergency as a result of the information available to the operator and not by the means of access to the operator (ie 999/non-999, etc). It will only qualify as an 'emergency' if the criteria set out below are satisfied.

An emergency contact

An emergency contact will result in an immediate emergency police response.

An emergency contact encompasses circumstances where an incident is reported to the police which is taking place and in which there is, or is likely to be, a risk of:

- danger to life;
- use, or immediate threat of use, of violence;
- serious³⁶ injury to a person; and/or
- serious damage to property.

Where the contact relates to an allegation of criminal conduct, it will be dealt with as an emergency if:

- the crime is, or is likely to be, serious and in progress;
- an offender has just been disturbed at the scene; or
- an offender has been detained and poses, or is likely to pose, a risk to other people.

Where the contact relates to a traffic collision, it will be dealt with as an emergency if:

- it involves, or is likely to involve, serious personal injury; or
- the road is blocked or there is a dangerous or excessive build-up of traffic.

Where the above circumstances do not apply, a contact will still be classified as an emergency if:

- the circumstances are such that a police contact handler has strong and objective reasons for believing that the incident should be classified as an emergency; or
- an emergency contact will require immediate response in line with force deployment policy.

³⁶ 'Serious' for the purpose of this call grading policy means that the contact handler can objectively determine the contact as serious. (Source: NCHS.)

A non-emergency contact

A contact will be classified as a non-emergency if the above criteria are not met.

The consequences of classifying a contact as a non-emergency mean only that the police response may not be immediate, and may encompass a range of solutions, some of which will not involve the attendance of a police officer.

A non-emergency contact attracts three levels of initial response:

- a priority response;
- a scheduled response; and
- resolution without deployment.

Examples of these solutions include:

- **a priority response** – in which the police contact handler acknowledges that there is a degree of importance or urgency associated with the initial police action, but an emergency response is not required. These typically arise in circumstances where:
 - there is genuine concern for somebody's safety;
 - an offender has been detained;
 - a witness or other evidence is likely to be lost;
 - at a road collision, there are injuries or a serious obstruction;
 - a person involved is suffering extreme distress or is otherwise deemed to be extremely vulnerable;
 - local force policy mandates a priority response at, for example, a report of domestic burglary, sudden death, or a missing person; and
 - hate crime;
- **a scheduled response** – in these circumstances, it is accepted that the needs of the caller can be met through scheduling because:
 - the response time is not critical in apprehending offenders; and
 - the matter is service-oriented and a better quality of initial police action can be taken if it is dealt with by a pre-arranged police response by a police officer or by other appropriate resource, or attendance at a police clinic or surgery; and
- **resolution without deployment**, which adequately meets the needs of the caller through telephone advice or a help desk, access to a database of frequently asked questions, the involvement of another and more appropriate agency or service, or through some other method.

Forces are expected to fully implement the National Call Handling Grades in line with the project's strategic objectives.

Appendix H

Glossary of terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Automatic call distributor or automatic call distribution (ACD)	Technology that facilitates the handling of large call volumes by controlling the order in which calls are offered to agents, routeing calls to particular agent groups and providing a wide range of statistical information used in managing a call centre. Either hardware or software based, the ACD offers sophisticated options for call handling within a centre.
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers.
Airwave	Digital trunked radio system developed by O2.
APA	Association of Police Authorities.
Automatic people location system (APLS)	A product that transmits accurate satellite positioning of human resources over a TETRA system to mapping systems in an operations dispatch or control room.
Attrition	The term used to cover loss of staff from a centre, usually described as a percentage of total staff.
Automatic vehicle location system (AVLS)	A product that transmits accurate satellite positioning of mobile vehicle resources over a TETRA system to mapping systems in an operations dispatch or control room.
BCU	Basic command unit – typically a geographic policing area.
Benchmarking	The process of measuring products, services and practices against the market, competitors or those companies recognised as industry leaders.
Bluetooth	A wireless technology that allows computers, telephones and other devices to talk to each other over short distances (typically about 10 metres).
BT	British Telecom.
Business continuity	A methodology to create a plan for how an organisation will resume partially or completely interrupted critical functions within a predetermined time after a disaster or disruption.
Call/contact centre	A central point for receipt of calls for service. The term 'contact centre' is gradually replacing the term 'call centre' because it more accurately describes the activities now taking place. In addition to telephony, contact centres provide customer access through email and progressively through webchat.

TERM	DEFINITION
Call-handler	A person working within the call-handling environment who answers calls, determines the call circumstances, decides the call responses and initiates or implements the call responses.
Call handling	The operational activity of answering calls, investigating calls, deciding call responses and implementing or initiating call responses.
Call-handling demand	The number and profile of calls presented to the call-handling environment.
Call response	The response that the call-handler implements or initiates, which is usually one or a combination of the following: connect caller; advise caller; refer caller; transfer caller; send report; or arrange for assignment.
Command and control	Command – the functional exercise of authority, based upon knowledge, to attain an objective or goal; and Control – the process of verifying and correcting activity such that the objective or goal of command is accomplished.
Command and control system	A system that provides dispatch or control staff with a computerised means of classifying and prioritising calls for service and providing a database of information that they can use to develop more effective ways of handling those calls and meeting customer needs.
Command and control thinking	A heavy-handed and cumbersome form of regulation. The term implies a dictatorial style of management.
Controller	See dispatcher.
Customer relationship management (CRM)	A system designed to support the collection and analysis of customer-relevant information and make it available to relevant people (eg call takers) to enable them to provide a service tailored to the customer's needs.
Database	Any collection of information, but generally one that can be segmented and searched automatically.
Data mining	The process of automatically searching large volumes of data for patterns.
Disaster recovery	The process of restoring an operation after an interruption of service, including equipment repair and/or replacement, file recovery and/or restoration, and resumption of service to users.
Dispatcher or controller	A person working within the dispatching or controlling environment who assigns operational units to incidents and supports the activities of operational units whether at incidents or not.
ESJCR	The Emergency Services Joint Control Room in the Isle of Man.

TERM	DEFINITION
First point of contact	The first place the caller is answered, typically either a switchboard, automated response or, in the case of a 'one-stop shop', a call-handler.
Geographic identification system (GIS)	GIS is an approach to creating and storing geographic information in the form of maps that are linked to data sets.
Global positioning system (GPS)	A worldwide radio-navigation system formed from a constellation of 24 satellites and their ground stations. GPS uses these satellites as reference points to calculate positions accurate to a matter of metres.
GPRS	General Packet Radio Service.
Helpdesk	Often used to describe a dedicated function intended to resolve non-attendance calls or deal with protracted enquiries. This can either be part of the contact centre or BCU-based.
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.
ICCS	Integrated Communications Control System (radio and line communications).
Key performance indicators (KPIs)	Those areas identified by organisations as being critical to their successful performance.
Management information systems (MIS)	ACD reports providing data on staff and staff groups, in-bound and out-bound calls, and exchange lines.
Monitoring	The process of listening to agents' telephone calls for the purpose of maintaining quality.
NCHS	National Call Handling Standards – the standards by which management, standard business continuity, support, supervision and operational activity within the call-handling environments of all police forces will be assessed on a national basis.
NCMP	National Contact Management Programme.
NCRS	National Crime Recording Standards.
NIM	National Intelligence Model.
NPIA	National Police Improvement Agency.
NSIR	National Standards for Incident Recording.
NSPIS	The National Strategy for Police Information Systems.
O2	A provider of mobile services to consumers and businesses in the UK, formed in 2001 following the demerger from British Telecom of its former mobile business, BT Wireless.

TERM	DEFINITION
PAD	Public Assistance Desk.
Personal development review (PDR)	The process of reviewing an individual's qualitative and quantitative performance, setting objectives and measuring achievements.
PITO	Police Information Technology Organisation.
PNC	Police National Computer.
PNLD	Police National Legal Database.
PPAF	Policing Performance Assessment Framework.
QoSC	Quality of Service Commitment.
SMS	Short message service. Also known as text messaging. Written messages sent from or received by mobile phones.
Talk-groups	A system of Airwave radio channels that operators and operational staff can communicate with each other, either individually or as members of one single group.
TETRA	Terrestrial trunked radio – an open digital trunked radio standard for professional mobile radio users.
Virtual call centre	A contact management structure consisting of several sites which are linked electronically to enable calls to be routed to any centre, thus allowing them to act as a single site for call handling and reporting purposes.
Voicemail	An electronic telephone message storage system, often with wide-ranging functionality.
Workforce management software	Software systems that forecast call load, calculate staff requirements, organise schedules and track real-time performance of individuals and groups.

Appendix J

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