ANSWERING THE CALL
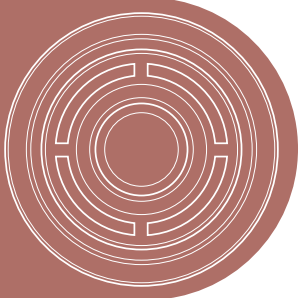
A follow-up review of the Police Service
of Northern Ireland contact management
inspection recommendations

September 2015

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Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all

Contents

List of abbreviations

CJI   Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland

CMC   Contact Management Centre

CRM   Customer Relationship Management

IPR   Individual Performance Review

PSNI   Police Service of Northern Ireland

RPA   Review of Public Administration

SGB1   Staff Grade B1

Chief Inspector's Foreword

First impressions are important for every customer and help set the scene for their subsequent experience, and so it is for the public when they seek help from the police. The CJI inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI) Contact Management arrangements in 2012 made four strategic and four operational recommendations which were designed to improve service delivery.
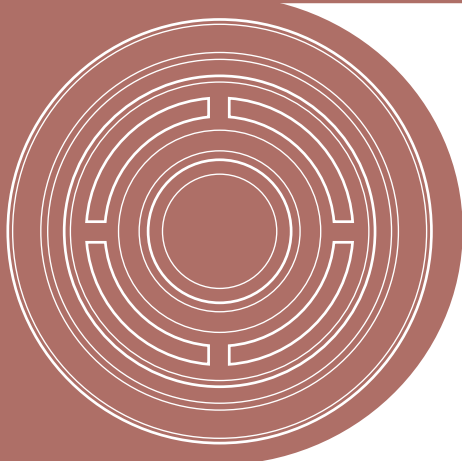
This follow-up review has assessed that the PSNI has made good progress against the eight recommendations with six fully achieved and two partially achieved. The structural changes in policing to compliment the new Councils, together with the current fiscal environment has helped move the police to a new position of being expected to do the same with less.

The review acknowledges that the PSNI is in the midst of change. The current call management arrangements are continuing to evolve so that the centralisation and standardisation of service provision together with the increasing civilianisation of the 'Dispatcher' role are now becoming realistic goals.
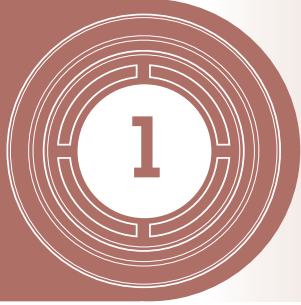
This review was conducted by William Priestley. My sincere thanks to all who supported him in this work.

Brendan McGuigan
Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland

September 2015

Follow-up Review

1 Introduction

Background to the follow-up review

CJI's inspection report into the PSNI's contact management arrangements was published in June 2012. At that time, the PSNI had just completed a move from an eight-centre contact management model to a four-centre one in a relatively short time span. The move had been managed and communicated well and had placed service excellence as integral to the development of the contact management strategy.

In 2012 variations in staff skills and service delivery were identified as enduring issues, as were the lack of strong links between organisational targets, standards and the individual performance review regime (IPR). Inspectors considered that the contact management arrangements should be further reviewed, to consider any further efficiencies and better service delivery made possible by moving to an even more centralised contact management solution in the future.

There had been no organisational strategy to employ non-police in the role of Dispatcher. Inspectors recommended the PSNI should actively pursue the deployment of non-police members of staff in that role, to reduce its dependence on serving officers within contact management centres.

To contact the PSNI in non-emergency situations the public had been encouraged to use a dedicated 0845 number. At that time in England and Wales a new single non-emergency number, 101, had just gone operational. Inspectors suggested that the feasibility of a move to a simpler, single non-emergency number in Northern Ireland should be investigated.

In 2012 the customer relationship management (CRM) software which applied to non-emergency calls, needed to be extended to provide the same degree of management information to better inform the handling of emergency calls. Call handling standards had been developed but not fully deployed, therefore Inspectors recommended the PSNI should fully deploy their agreed call handling standards and monitor compliance through a robust quality assurance framework.

Abandoned call rates had improved significantly under the 2012 contact management arrangements from around 20% to 3.7%. The overall achievement rate across the new contact centres was around 89% with regard to answering emergency calls within 10 seconds. The PSNI had set an internal target to answer 90% of non-emergency calls within 30 seconds. Figures for February 2012 indicated that the achievement was around 88%.

In total, the report of 2012 made four strategic recommendations which Inspectors considered would improve the PSNI contact management arrangements. Four further recommendations were made, aimed at improving its operational delivery.

Changes since the 2012 inspection

Since the 2012 inspection there had been significant structural and other changes to the PSNI as well as the local government landscape in Northern Ireland. In line with the Review of Public Administration (RPA), the PSNI moved to an 11 District Command Unit model in April 2015. The effects of change were still being felt during the fieldwork phase of this follow-up review; especially with regard to the allocation of police Districts to the appropriate contact management centre (CMC). Further changes to accommodation were anticipated during 2015. At the time of the review there were three contact management centres located at Castlereagh, Armagh (Gough) and Maydown.

The effects of diminishing budgets and resources had also been felt since the report of 2012. A focus on ensuring officers were deployed to public facing services meant the supply of attested officers to undertake the role of Dispatcher was no longer sustainable. This had directed attention to supporting the role of non-police as Dispatchers and a bespoke course had been designed to train personnel specifically for that role. The first of two such courses was just beginning as the follow-up review was being drafted, therefore Inspectors are unable to comment on course outcomes.

The follow-up review

The PSNI were notified of the follow-up review in the CJI business plan 2014-15. Further notification was given in December 2014 and a self-assessment of progress against CJI recommendations was provided by the PSNI in January 2015. Fieldwork was arranged to take place in April 2015 and consisted of one-to-one and focus group interviews with relevant staff from across the contact management estate. Observation of contact management centres in operation and the provision of additional documents and statistics from the PSNI enabled further analysis and led to the drafting of the report in May 2015. This follow-up review was focused on assessing progress against the four strategic and four operational recommendations made in the original CJI report of 2012.

Progress against recommendations

Strategic recommendation 1

Inspectors recommend that the contact management strategy should be reviewed after one year of operation. This should include consideration in the long-run of deploying a more centralised contact management solution.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

We have moved from eight Control rooms, down to three CMCs – NCMC in Maydown, covering North Area; UCMC in Castlereagh covering Belfast City and SCMC in Gough covering South Area.

Inspectors' assessment

The contact management strategy had been subject to review which resulted in further changes and the adoption of a three-centre model. Due to continuous review and other changes, including the alignment of the PSNI with new local government arrangements, the structure is likely to change again in pursuit of a more centralised model of contact management.

Currently, each of the three centres operates independently of each other. However, technology solutions enabled them to be linked cybernetically to enable dynamic call routing, matching demand to available resources. Theoretically, this meant that the three centres could operate as one, virtual contact management centre optimising resources across the service area.

However, there were limitations to the virtual links across the three contact management centres. There was a lack of consistency across the service as to how Districts dealt with a range of incidents, depending on each of their priorities. Additionally, protocol was applied inconsistently within Districts. These circumstances led to situations when contact management staff could not rely on agreed policies being implemented by some District personnel. At times, this had resulted in friction when contact management staff had initiated responses which seemed not to accord with District protocol.

A more corporate approach to core business, such as standard deployment responses to volume crime incidents, implemented consistently across the service, would assist the efficacy of incident handling during the initial contact stages.

Strategic recommendation 2

Inspectors recommend that the PSNI should actively pursue the deployment of non-police members of staff as Dispatchers to reduce its dependence on serving Police Officers within contact management centres.

Status: Partially achieved.

Agency response

We have reduced our police officer Dispatcher number from 160 to 107 by up scaling police staff and by using a managed contract service provider. This number of 107 will naturally reduce to 100 by the end of this [2015] calendar year and as every police officer retires, resigns, relocates, gets promoted or transferred, they will be replaced by police staff or managed contract staff.

Inspectors' assessment

The role of Dispatcher had previously been almost solely the domain of attested police officers. Since 2012 the role had been opened to non-police personnel with a view to reducing the reliance on police officers. Whilst this had partly been in response to the 2012 CJI recommendation, the effects of austerity in the form of budgetary pressures had also been a factor. The PSNI had experienced pressures to retain the numbers of front-line officers and had responded by focusing attention on roles which could be performed by non-police personnel.

Within the current contingent of call management staff the breakdown of roles as performed by police and non-police is illustrated in Figures 1 to 3.

Figure 1: Breakdown by role and status of contact management staff (Urban – Castlereagh)

Status	Role	Number
Inspector	Service Delivery Manager	1
Sergeant	CMC Supervisor	16
Constable	Dispatcher	47
Police staff (SGB1)	Call Handler	5
Noonan staff	Dispatcher	9
Noonan staff	Call Handler	48

Figure 2: Breakdown by role and status of contact management staff (South – Gough, Armagh)

Status	Role	Number
Inspector	Service Delivery Manager	1
Sergeant	CMC Supervisor	8
Constable	Dispatcher	32
Police staff (SGB1)	Call Handler	26
Constable	Call Handler	1
Noonan staff	Call Handler	10

Figure 3: Breakdown by role and status of contact management staff (North, L/Derry, Maydown)

Status	Role	Number
Inspector	Service Delivery Manager	1
Sergeant	CMC Supervisor	8
Constable	Dispatcher	28
Police staff	Dispatcher	5
Noonan staff	Dispatcher	3
Noonan staff	Call Handler	30
Police staff (SGB1)	Call Handler	2

Existing personnel performing the role of call handler were eligible to apply to be considered for the Dispatcher role. Successful appointment to the role depended upon successfully completing a course, delivered by training staff at the Police College. Trainers had been tasked with designing a course at short notice and without access to any recent training needs analysis. However, the trainers were experienced in communication training and had a background in dispatch and call handling. At the time of fieldwork no courses had commenced. Two back-to-back courses were planned to take place between May and August 2015 with up to eight delegate places available on each one. Planned attendees drawn from the three CMCs comprised four police officers and 12 civilian police staff (nine police staff and three Noonan[1] staff).

The ratio of police officers to civilian police staff in the role of dispatcher (not including supervisory roles) remains high at 107 police to 17 non-police. Even if all Dispatcher course attendees are placed in roles across the contact management centres and the natural wastage set out by the PSNI occurs as expected, this ratio will change only slightly. Therefore, there needs to be continued focus on reducing the dependence on police officers in the Dispatcher role to fully discharge this recommendation.

Strategic recommendation 3

To ensure that the handling of emergency calls can benefit from customer relationship management data, Inspectors recommend that the system is extended to cover emergency calls providing a more effective and efficient call management service.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software is fully embedded and allows for local priorities to be available to all Call Handlers for emergency and non-emergency calls, helping deliver an effective service based on individual need and Service/District/Area priority.

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1 'Noonan' staff were previously referred to as 'Resource' staff and are made available on managed contracts.

Inspectors' assessment

CRM software had been made available across the platform thus providing important information on-screen to all Call Handlers, including the emergency lines. CMC staff explained that this had been beneficial in providing a better service to callers as it provided handlers with the necessary local information and call history impacting on decision-making. Whilst local policies were available to Call Handlers to enable them to appropriately categorise incidents reported to them, variances across and between police Districts had led to inconsistent implementation as outlined in Inspectors' assessment of progress on recommendation one.

Strategic recommendation 4

Inspectors recommend that the PSNI fully implement their agreed call handling standards and monitor compliance through a robust quality assurance framework. The PSNI should report on the quality of service and compliance with call handling standards of each of its contact management centres.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

There is a robust Quality Assurance Unit in place, consisting of one Sergeant, two Constables and four QA Staff covering all aspects of quality assurance across the CMCs, including: conducting regular customer call backs; Call Handler QA assessments; coaching and mentoring; statistics production and analysis; and in-depth supervision on key strategic areas, for example, Hate Crime/Incident, Missing Persons and Domestic Incidents/Crimes.

Inspectors' assessment

Call handling standards were implemented and monitored by pro-active quality assurance frameworks operating in each of the three CMCs. Inspectors observed the quality assurance regime in operation at each of the three centres. Quality assurance of service delivery and adherence to call handling standards was evident in the operations and attendant policies and procedures. Staff spoken to during the follow-up review confirmed that they had been supported by regular and useful feedback by the quality assurance team. Quality assurance staff were observed listening in to Call Handlers, and where appropriate provided feedback and, if required, took remedial action. Measurement of quality was against the national call handling standards and guidance on how these translated into service delivery had been published.

Operational recommendation 5

Inspectors recommend that the use of the non-emergency and switchboard numbers as a means of contacting the PSNI should be continually monitored and subjected to quarterly review to help assess the feasibility of moving to a simpler, single non-emergency number.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

We have launched 101 as our new single non-emergency number and switched off the 0845 600 8000 number.

Inspectors' assessment

The introduction of a single, three digit non-emergency number had been achieved and the old contact number had been discarded. Inspectors were told that initially calls had continued to be received at the old non-emergency number and that marketing and communication of the new number could have been better. However, the proportion of calls made to the old number had declined sharply before it was discontinued.

Operational recommendation 6

Inspectors recommend that to achieve a service that takes account of local priorities as effectively as possible, a technology solution should be found to displaying District priorities on-screen to Call Handlers based on the origin of the call.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software is fully embedded and allows for local priorities to be available to all Call Handlers for emergency and non-emergency calls, helping deliver an effective service based on individual need and Service/District/Area priority.

Inspectors' assessment

The information provided by the CRM software is now available across the platform to all Call Handlers, Dispatchers and the emergency call system. Inspectors observed the CRM software being used in all three locations. Inspectors were told by a range of staff that the provision of the CRM software had been of benefit to providing a better quality service to people ringing in to the centres. It had provided Call Handlers with important local information when they did not necessarily have personal knowledge of the area, as well as call histories and other notable information.

Operational recommendation 7

Inspectors recommend that information obtained by the service call-back system should be incorporated into the new Individual Performance Review (IPR) system.

Status: Achieved.

Agency response

IPR is fully embedded into the Service with quality assurance, performance and managing expectations key themes throughout CMC staff IPRs.

Inspectors' assessment

The introduction of the quality assurance system had formalised the gathering of performance information from the call-back activities and had provided verifiable data for the IPR. Inspectors saw how this information had been used in a range of IPRs to provide meaningful feedback and continued personal development.

Operational recommendation 8

Inspectors would recommend the PSNI revisit their staffing model for contact management to see if further efficiencies can be delivered.

Status: Partially achieved.

Agency response

The evolution of contact management continues at a rapid pace, with more tweaks foreseen as a result of the Review of Public Administration commencing 1 April 2015. Contact management has come a long way and the PSNI are striving to meet the demands and expectations of the customers we serve, whilst constantly reviewing processes, practices and staffing models to ensure an efficient and effective contact management function.

Inspectors' assessment

Inspectors saw that the staffing model for contact management was under constant review. In part, this had come about because of other pressures on staffing and the focus on placing police officers, as much as possible, in front-line roles. Further changes are anticipated as budget restraints restrict the use of police officers in roles which do not require attested officers and the numbers of trained non-police Dispatchers increases. At present, the ratio of police to non-police across the three CMCs means that for every police officer in post there are 1.3 non-police (excluding supervisory officers).
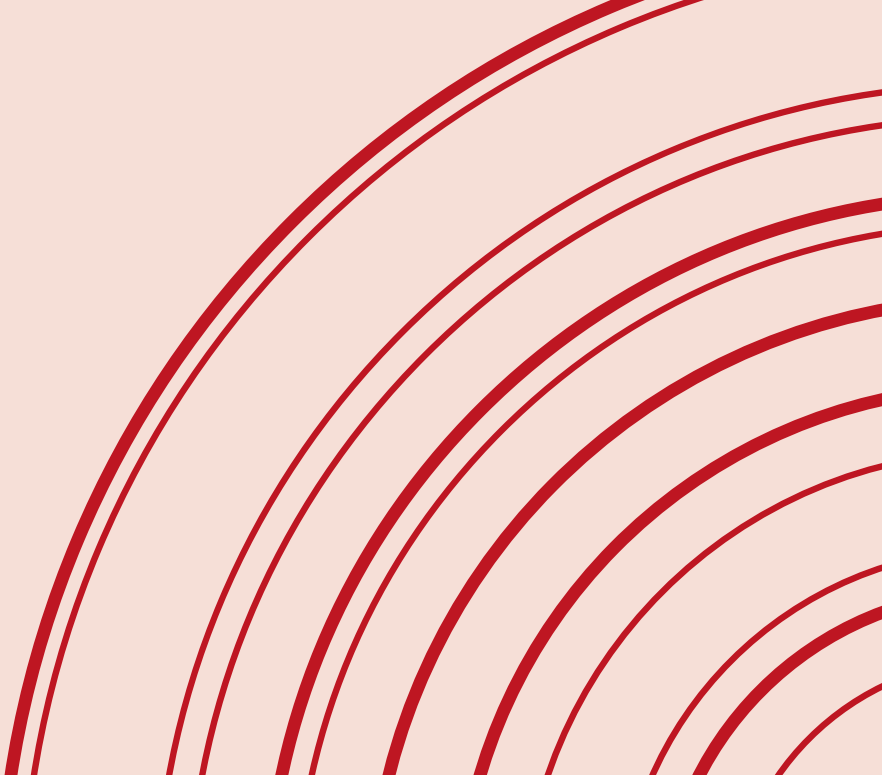
3 Conclusion

Three of the four strategic recommendations had been achieved whilst the remaining one, with regard to placing non-police in the dispatch role, had been partially achieved. Of the four other recommendations, three had been achieved with one being partially achieved; with regard to delivering further efficiencies by reviewing the staffing model for contact management. The overall achieved rate is therefore six out of a total of eight (75%).

Further work remained to be done to fully realise the use of non-police staff in contact management roles. In particular, the move to increase the numbers of non-police Dispatchers had occurred only very recently and the course to train suitable people for the role was being delivered at the time of drafting this review.

Further work was also necessary in the wake of changes to the structure of policing brought about by aligning with the new local Councils. The three CMCs worked across police District boundaries and this had caused problems when there was inconsistency in the implementation of policies by District staff. Despite local information being readily available on-screen to contact management staff, inconsistent application of agreed policies by District staff reduced the usefulness of this information.