

Assurance Meeting to Discuss OCC / 101 Performance – Meeting Notes

Date: Wednesday 26th October 2016
Chair: John Campion
Note taker: Andy Champness, Chief Executive
Venue: Conference Room, Leek Wootton

	Name:	Capacity:
Attendance:	John Campion	Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
	Anthony Bangham	Chief Constable (CC)
	Amanda Blakeman	Assistant Chief Constable Local Policing (ACC)

Purpose

The PCC welcomed the CC and his team. The PCC explained that there had been a significant increase in concern over the Force's performance in answering both 999 and 101 calls. As a consequence he had convened the meeting to hold the Chief Constable to account for West Mercia Police's approach to handling calls from the public. Notes would be produced and published summarising the key areas discussed.

The PCC started by thanking the CC for the engagement of staff and the co-operation in the lead up to this meeting.

PCC: How do you reassure me that our communities receiving an acceptable 999 service?

Response:

The focus has been and remains on 999 calls over and above everything else. Performance recently has been below what the Force considers acceptable. The Force is aiming for 90% of calls answered within 10 seconds. Getting into the detail has enabled staff to re-focus on risks and consequences of 999 performance, and performance is improving.

PCC: We have seen a significant reduction in 999 performance since the beginning of the year. What steps are you taking to manage the risk and improve performance?

Response:

It is important to understand why performance has been as it has. Creation of missing person logs and dealing with emails and web chat within the control room has affected

performance. Each missing person log takes 15 minutes, but each is important to improve the way we deal with missing persons.

Demand on staff time has therefore increased as a result of recognising vulnerability. A comprehensive recovery plan we have introduced emphasises there is only one acceptable way of operating: that is to answer 999 calls, prioritising emergency calls over others.

Off phone activity must be done by someone who knows what they are doing. Additional resource is being put into that.

PCC: Why are our alliance partners able to maintain higher levels of 999 call handling performance than West Mercia?

Response:

A different telephony system exists in Warwickshire. We are unable to divert non-emergency calls out of the West Mercia control room when the switchboard is not operating, which can be done in Warwickshire

The new system will solve that problem, but won't be in place until later next year. We could extend the hours of switchboard availability, but a switchboard is not always efficient and effective. We want to introduce a flexible system to free up the capacity to allow people to concentrate on 999 through the way we deal with calls, treating people with empathy and compassionately, but also efficiently.

There are also different Command and Control systems in the two forces which affects performance. Again, this will be resolved with the new system next year. Warwickshire has a larger proportion of call handlers than West Mercia, but fewer dispatchers than West Mercia. Vacant posts are being moved into West Mercia from the Warwickshire control room where they are not needed, so new staff can be brought in here without increasing costs.

PCC: What is the rationale for the current arrangement of offering fixed contracts in the OCC as opposed to having a permanent workforce where improvements in performance could be driven?

Response:

There are 15 vacancies at Hindlip and Battlefield in total, including 6 in Warwickshire which have been moved to Hindlip. There is ongoing recruitment. There will be a new role profile and shift pattern to match changes in demand. Consultation with staff and unions over these changes will be underway soon.

We are looking for omni-competent staff, who handle and dispatch to both 999 and 101 calls. We will have both shift changes and full and part time work patterns to provide a good balance. The Force was using temporary contracts to manage a gradual reduction in overall staffing numbers to the new OCC. We are now increasing the proportion of permanent contracts as the risk of unnecessary redundancy costs is increasingly limited.

PCC: What immediate steps are being taken to map the demand in the OCC including channelling our communities to use a more self service approach?

Response:

We are looking at automated responses and giving more information through other channels to reduce demand. We want to increase self-service to counter-balance the increasing telephone contact demands.

PCC: How is the current contact generated by the calling points outside of police stations being managed effectively to reduce the impact on OCC performance?

Response:

Calling points at the moment are the worst telephone lines we have. There is no reason why officers in stations can't answer when someone calls. The right signage would enable this. Officers need to be more accessible. Some members of the public will have come to see the police by appointment and should be expected. Most changes can be made straight away.

We are considering multi-media contact points like Cheshire have. This is still a work in progress, and we are hoping to have proposals within the month.

PCC: Can you explain why there has been a deterioration across the alliance in non emergency (101) performance?

Response:

101 performance has deteriorated, and demand has gone up. As a target, 90% in 30 seconds is not helpful and hasn't been achieved for some time. In fact we no longer consider it achievable. We accept and agree that it needs to improve. We consider that 80% in 30 seconds is more achievable, with 90% in 60 seconds and 100% in 120 seconds. We think that is realistic, achievable and would be acceptable to the public when compared with other non-emergency call handlers. Staffordshire only have a target of 100% in 2 minutes. This does need to be looked at from the public perspective. If expectations are re-set this is achievable, mostly because of the changes to how we handle the missing persons log. This has been the single most significant change, with direct correlation between 999 and 101 performance and the introduction and the removal of Compact (Missing Persons records) from the control room.

PCC: What contingency planning is in place to deal with a significant bout of sickness in the OCC, for example winter flu when their staffing resources are already stretched?

Response:

We would move off-telephone demand out, we are increasing resilience and creating an off-duty staff bank of people who are willing to come in at short notice.

Transition to the new OCC

PCC: Now the new OCC building is underway how will you ensure that during the transition from the current system / facility to the new arrangements there will not be any adverse effect on the service provided to our communities?

Response:

A transition plan is in development – a month by month plan. The business-as-usual lead is working with the OCC programme board to ensure this will work. We are dealing with it now so new processes and systems are in place before the move to the new building.

Future

PCC: When do you expect the new OCC to be fully operational?

Response:

It will be fully operational by January 2018.

PCC: What level of performance will you expect for emergency and non emergency calls?

Response:

The standards talked about above should be those we move into the new build with: 90% of 999s answered within 10 seconds; all 101s answered within 2 minutes, and the majority well within 1 minute. We will look at bandings of call answering more consistently to help assess the best measures for when the new OCC is fully operational.

PCC: Once they are operational, how will the two new Alliance OCCs, be truly virtual, delivering call handling seamlessly across the alliance from both OCCs?

Response

Separate buildings will inevitably result in separate cultures. Demand will be managed virtually across both sites.

Resources

PCC: Do you feel you have adequate resources to deal with the immediate challenges to the OCC performance?

Response

There were solutions which could have been implemented earlier, which would have avoided some of the dip in performance. Those are now being implemented. There is a high percentage of very hard working, but inexperienced staff, and their productivity is gradually improving. They are very good, very caring and are improving their efficiency. We are not asking for more resources now.

PCC: Do you feel you have adequate resources to deal with the transition to the new arrangements to the opening of the new OCC?

Response

The ACC is looking to go over establishment during transition. A business case is being developed to support that.

PCC: Does the CC feel that there is anything the PCC should be doing?

Response

We need to be clear in our messaging. There is an absolute commitment to 999s and we will never lower the standards there. The police have to manage expectations regarding 101 calls. The same performance cannot be expected, although it is accepted performance is not what it should be. Together we need to be careful to separate the two different services.

Summary

The PCC commented that the session had increased his reassurance that the force was responding to the recent poor performance in 101 and 999 call handling in a positive way. The PCC also complimented the CC and his team for the way they responded to the HTA session.