



HM INSPECTORATE OF CONSTABULARY IN SCOTLAND

Briefing note on call handling in Police Scotland

September 2021



Introduction

This note provides high level detail on the work which HMICS has undertaken in respect of call handling by Police Scotland.

As the primary means of direct contact with the police, Contact, Command and Control (C3) centres across Scotland are expected to provide a high level of service. Maintaining public confidence in this service is essential for Police Scotland to maintain its legitimacy. The force has maintained a high level of transparency over its call handling performance, publishing monthly reports on its website to ensure the public and interested parties can scrutinise its progress.

Since originally being directed by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in July 2015 to conduct enquiries following the tragic incident involving the deaths of John Yuill and Lamara Bell, HMICS has provided assurance throughout the journey of call handling by Police Scotland.

In total we have produced 5 reports since our original report was published in 2015 . We made 38 recommendations in total to Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and can confirm that all recommendations have since been discharged.

Since my last Update Report in 2018, HMICS has continued to engage with C3 and conduct ongoing assurance work on the new Contact Assessment Model (CAM) and the wider Police Scotland change programme.

I plan to conduct further assurance work in early 2022 on the impact of the Contact Assessment Model. No other operational area of policing has received such sustained levels of scrutiny from HMICS or any other scrutiny bodies.

As in all our call handling reports and my annual report, I would again emphasise that there will always be a level of risk which must be managed in the operation of police call handling. It is to be expected that notable incidents will take place and attract media attention. However, ensuring that these incidents are appropriately investigated, trends analysed and lessons learned to drive continuous improvement is key.

I am confident that Police Scotland has made significant progress in terms of its call handling processes and is committed to pursue continuous improvement, investing further in technology, staff and the C3 estate.

HMICS wishes to thank the officers and staff of Police Scotland who have continued to engage positively in our assurance processes and reviews, in particular C3 Division who have facilitated our work.

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HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland
September 2021



Initial Assurance Review

1. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary was originally directed by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in July 2015 to conduct enquiries following the tragic incident involving the deaths of John Yuill and Lamara Bell. The Cabinet Secretary requested an independent assessment of the operation, systems and procedures in place in police Contact, Command and Control (C3) centres across Scotland. This review was complementary to the more specific independent investigation directed by the Lord Advocate and conducted by the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) into the incident and the associated missing persons enquiry.
2. The aim of HMICS review was to assess:
 - the capacity of the systems and the human resource available within the control centres to manage, receive, answer and prioritise calls;
 - the capability of the systems and the suitability of the training provided to those who manage, receive, answer and prioritise calls; and
 - the process within the control room to ensure that all calls are handled and dispatched appropriately.
3. The review focussed on the capacity, capability and processes within all of the centres in operation at the time and considered the approach taken by Police Scotland in developing its call handling model to assess how key areas of governance, leadership and performance were placed to successfully deliver the remaining stages of the C3 re-modelling project. This remains one of the widest ranging and in-depth pieces of inspection work which HMICS has undertaken and the inspection team were drawn from a diverse range of skills and experience.
4. Our review approach included our first public online questionnaire to provide opportunities for the public and other stakeholders to engage in the review process, as well as a statistically significant audit of calls to 999 and 101 numbers. Our terms of reference for the review were published on 22 July 2015. We provided Scottish Ministers with an Interim Report which was published on 3 September 2015. Our Final Report was provided to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and published on 10 November 2015. The Final Report identified 30 recommendations for improvement which were fully accepted by Police Scotland and the SPA.
5. Following the publication of the Final Report, the Cabinet Secretary provided an update to the Scottish Parliament followed by a letter requesting that HMICS continue to undertake a programme of ongoing assurance work. This involved monitoring progress and risk levels within Police Scotland's call handling function and making unannounced visits to Police Scotland's call handling facilities.

Further Update Reports

6. This assurance continued to take place over the next 12 months and resulted in the publication of an Update Report in January 2017. The Update Report highlighted good progress against the recommendations with 16 recommendations closed, 12 partially discharged and only two recommendations outstanding. The Update Report also outlined how C3 Division had successfully delivered a number of key milestones including the implementation of a virtualised Police Scotland Service Centre (PSSC), upgrade of key ICT systems, transfer of call handling from Dundee to the PSSC and was on track for the transition of Aberdeen and Inverness centres.

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7. HMICS assurance activity continued for a further year to assess progress against the remaining recommendations and to monitor the continuing implementation of the change programme. A further Update Report was published in May 2018 when it was confirmed that all 30 original recommendations were closed. A further 8 recommendations were made, primarily for the attention of Police Scotland as a whole, to support ongoing improvement and ensure that key areas of development and risk continued to be addressed by the SPA and Police Scotland. All of these recommendations have subsequently been discharged.

Subsequent HMICS assurance work

8. Since the publication of our last Update Report in 2018, HMICS has continued to monitor the progress of C3 Division in completing its initial programme of change and the development of the next stage of transformation which has now delivered the new Contact Assessment Model (CAM).
9. CAM is the means by which Police Scotland now manages requests for police assistance made by the public and other agencies. Calls to 999 and 101 are assessed for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and the Engagement required to resolve the issue (THRIVE). The THRIVE assessment assists Police Scotland to choose the most appropriate policing response whether it be immediate, prompt, a local policing appointment or other resolution (such as advice, signposting or direct crime recording). CAM replaces Police Scotland's previous approach which relied on policies, standard operating procedures and the default prioritisation of calls which dictated how police would respond.
10. HMICS published its *Review of the early implementation of the Contact Assessment Model* in October 2019 which assessed the early implementation of CAM and provided feedback on its initial phase of operation. Although not a full inspection, HMICS supported the operation of THRIVE, as set out in our original 2015 report. An audit of calls for police assistance was also conducted and found that the vast majority of people who contacted the police received an effective service. Their calls were dealt with professionally and an appropriate response provided.
11. HMICS considered that a better quality assessment of individual circumstances was carried out using the new model and this assessment was more likely to result in a policing response that best meets needs and which is delivered timeously. Our review identified no issue of such concern that it represented an impediment to the continued rollout of CAM. In terms of the original phased rollout of CAM, HMICS identified that the full benefits would not be fully realised until the approach was implemented across Scotland.
12. In a report to the SPA Board in January 2021, Police Scotland set out its intention to establish a new Modernised Contact and Engagement Programme (MCE). The aims of the programme include increasing public accessibility; strengthening the C3 and Local Policing Operating Model; and enhancing service and sustainability. The programme will building upon the foundations of the Contact Assessment Model by further enhancing the THRIVE assessment approach and expanding available resolution options to strengthen the C3 and Local Policing Operating Model to realise its full potential. HMICS has already undertaken assurance work on the initial business case for this work.

Impact of COVID-19 on call handling

13. HMICS continued to engage with C3 Division on an ongoing basis after the publication of our 2018 Update Report. In March 2019 began regular discussions directly with C3 regarding the arrangements being put in place to ensure business continuity. HMICS also continued to attend the SPA CAM Oversight Group during this period.

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14. In December 2020, HMICS announced, as part of its review of the 2020-2021 Scrutiny Plan, that the planned inspection of the further roll out of the contact assessment model (January – March 2021) would be deferred. As part of the response to COVID-19, Police Scotland had accelerated the national roll out of CAM in order to manage its deployment of resources. However due to the impact of the restriction required as part of the collective effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 Police Scotland confirmed some functions of the Contact Assessment Model could not be implemented. For example, the use of face-to-face local policing appointments could not be deployed as planned under the restrictions. Similarly, it had not been possible to engage with the full range of partners to maximise the benefit of the model.
 15. HMICS intends to review the Contact Assessment Model during this scrutiny year, however will monitor the impact of COVID-19 on inspection priorities. The review will focus on the working practices that have been introduced during this time, and include an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of these measures.
 16. Recently there has been media coverage of the response rates to 101 calls (answer times and abandoned call rates) over recent months. HMICS has maintained a watching brief over this performance and there is no doubt that both the operating environment and the variances in demand during COVID-19 have been challenging for the service. The prioritisation of 999 calls and continued strong performance in this respect reflects the commitment of staff to maintaining service throughout this period. The SPA Performance Committee plans to conduct further scrutiny in this area to provide further assurance regarding the impact of COVID-19, CAM and other factors on performance levels. HMICS commends this approach.

Impact on wider change in Police Scotland

17. HMICS made a number of recommendations and observations as part of our assurance work regarding the overall approach to leadership, governance and management of change to both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. The response to these recommendations and learning lessons from C3, has been monitored by HMICS through our ongoing inspection and assurance programme. In our 2018 Update Report we noted that Police Scotland had undertaken a review of programme and project governance, the recommendations from which had been incorporated into new portfolio governance, change governance and investment governance frameworks. A comprehensive assurance approach was also in place.
18. HMICS is assured that Police Scotland has responded positively across its change programme to the issues which were raised including :
 - Adopting the C3 governance, programme management and quality assurance approaches as standard in implementing significant change programmes
 - Strengthening overall commitment towards programme and project management and the management of cultural change
 - Using experienced and qualified programme and project management staff
 - Training of SROs and programme/project board members
 - Distinguishing between change efforts and ‘business as usual’ governance and resourcing
 - More systematic engagement with staff and their representative groups.
19. Our ongoing portfolio assurance work has considered the wider change process since 2013 and the overall transformation portfolio since 2017. The maturity of the approach has grown considerably over that time and in particular in the past 3 years.

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20. HMICS has recently reported publicly on the benefits of the transformation programme, which included assessment of the predicted benefits from the contact assessment model. We reported that there is general recognition that the approach has and will continue to deliver benefits. However, we noted that other independent reviews of the project had raised concerns about the confidence and accuracy of the claimed benefits as articulated in FTE productivity gains. HMICS have advised Police Scotland more detailed evidence is required in this area before supporting the validation of the CAM project's benefit management and realisation.

Scottish Police Authority

21. After the publication of our original report on call handling in 2015 and in response to our recommendation regarding change governance, the SPA established the C3 Governance and Assurance Group (GAAG). In our 2018 Update Report we noted this had also proved to be a highly effective scrutiny forum where SPA Board Members had taken an active role in the governance of the programme.
22. With the completion of the original C3 re-modelling programme and the evolution of the CAM project, the SPA revised the C3 Governance and Assurance Group (GAAG) into the CAM Oversight Group (OG). The OG's main focus has been the operational impact of CAM and the service delivered to the public. This group has also proved to be effective in providing support and challenge to a programme which has a significant impact on the response to the public and confidence in service delivery.
23. In our 2019 Thematic Inspection of the SPA, we recommended that it should develop proposals for effective overall governance of change and transformation, bringing forward proposals as a matter of urgency. The authority responded promptly with revised arrangements in February 2020 being approved and the recommendation was discharged. Police Scotland has since reported to the Board on a six monthly basis on progress of the overall portfolio with more detailed reporting and scrutiny taking place across SPA Committees.

Maintaining investment

24. There can be no doubt that the SPA and Police Scotland have invested significant resources in the development of call handling, particularly in terms of staffing and technology. However the pace of that investment has undoubtedly been impacted by the level of capital funding available to the force.
25. We noted in our 2018 Update Report that significant work had been undertaken to stabilise ICT infrastructure and systems providing an effective short to medium term environment. Investment at that point had been secured to progress the outstanding upgrade of the digital integrated communication control system (ICCS). However we had also noted in our 2017 Update Report that investment in a new C3 telephony platform would be required in the short term and that ultimately a replacement for the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and STORM command and control system would also be required.
26. HMICS acknowledged that there remained uncertainty as to overall priorities for investment and that C3 Division would always be competing with many other organisational demands for capital funding meaning that a medium to long term commitment for investment could not be secured. The pace of C3-specific investment has therefore been constrained.



27. It should however be noted that investment in new technologies and new operational systems to enable wider transformation has continued as part of the delivery of the Police Scotland DDICT Strategy. The commitment to transform the way that people can contact the service and how queries would be resolved, recognising and responding appropriately to the needs of individuals and communities is reflected in the Public Contact and Engagement Strategy, which recognises the need for enhanced technology, data and digital capability. This will introduce new channels of contact for the public to access a wider range of policing services.

Appendix

The following table provides links to documents referred to within this document.

Report	Website Link
HMICS Terms of Reference 2015	HMICS Call Handling Assurance Review - Terms of Reference
HMICS Interim Report 2015	HMICS Independent Assurance Review Police Scotland – Call Handling: Interim Report
HMICS Final Report 2015	HMICS Independent Assurance Review Police Scotland - Call Handling: Final Report
HMICS Update Report 2017	HMICS Independent Assurance Review Police Scotland – Call Handling: Update Report - January 2017
HMICS Update Report 2018	HMICS Independent Assurance Review - Police Scotland Call Handling: Update Report - May 2018
HMICS Thematic Inspection of the SPA 2019	HMICS Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority
HMICS Review of the early implementation of the Contact Assessment Model 2019	HMICS Review of the early implementation of the Contact Assessment Model
HMICS Scrutiny Plan 2020-21	HMICS HMICS Scrutiny Plan 2020-21
HMICS Scrutiny Plan 2021-22	HMICS HMICS scrutiny plan 2021-22
Police Scotland - Report on Local Policing Programme January 2021	rep-b-20210113-item-10-local-policing-programme.pdf (spa.police.uk)
HMICS Assurance Validation of Police Scotland Transformation Benefits 2019/2020	HMICS Assurance Validation of Police Scotland Transformation Benefits 2019/2020
Police Scotland – Chief Constable’s Report August 2021	rep-b-20210820-item-4-chief-constable-s-report.pdf (spa.police.uk)