



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

Improving Policing across Scotland

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PRESS RELEASE

HMICS Publish Independent Assurance Review of Call Handling in Police Scotland

HMICS has today (Tuesday, November 10) published its final report on its Independent Assurance Review of Call Handling in Police Scotland.

The detailed report addresses the key areas on which the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has sought assurance and contains 30 recommendations for improvement.

It develops the emerging findings of the HMICS interim report, which was published in September, and reinforces the need for Police Scotland to focus on stabilising the existing call handling arrangements before making any further changes.

The report makes it clear that the Scottish Police Authority should not approve any further stages of the call handling project until it receives independent assurance that Police Scotland is ready.

HMICS was asked to carry out this review of call handling within Police Scotland's Contact, Command and Control (C3) facilities by the Cabinet Secretary, Michael Matheson, following the tragic incident involving the deaths of John Yuill and Lamara Bell. HMICS has not investigated the specific circumstances surrounding this incident as this falls exclusively within the scope of the inquiry being carried out by Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) and will be covered in her report to the Lord Advocate.

What HMICS has provided is a wider independent assurance of the capacity, capability and processes in all police call handling centres across Scotland. It also provides an assessment of how Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are currently placed to successfully deliver the remaining stages of the national call handling project.

In the report published today, HM Inspector of Constabulary Derek Penman gives assurance on seven areas – the commitment of the staff to provide a quality service to the public; the current stability of staffing levels; the provision of basic processes; the effective handling of emergency and high priority calls; the effective assessment of risk and vulnerability and the new training arrangements for all new staff. While the current ICT systems are generally fit

for purpose and offer basic functionality, their stability remains in question while network performance continues to affect day to day operations.

Calls are being answered quickly with 94% of 999 emergency calls currently answered within 10 seconds in the West, with 93% in the North and 92% in the East. This compares with 92% of non-emergency 101 calls currently being answered within 40 seconds in the East and West, although only 82% in the North. An HMICS audit of calls also showed that the majority of people who rang 999 and 101 received an effective service with service advisors capturing all relevant information with a 98% accuracy rate.

Mr Penman said: "Making direct contact with the police can be a major step for a member of the public. It is essential in maintaining public confidence in policing that all calls are effectively managed and the caller's experience is positive. While priority calls are answered quickly and result in a prompt response from officers, I found that lower priority calls can be affected by a lack of available resources to attend incidents and weak local management of calls.

"Whilst I have been able to provide some key assurances, I have highlighted a number of weaknesses in Police Scotland's approach to the roll out of its new national call handling model. This model is a critical element in the delivery of front line policing and a key part of the bringing together of Police Scotland post reform.

"The oversight of this project has been inadequate with key risks and other issues not being identified or highlighted to senior managers. There was an initial focus on meeting deadlines and increased productivity rather than a well-managed project with a focus on customer service, good staff relations and thorough process design."

Areas which the report identifies as needing to be addressed include improved oversight and risk management, ensuring new IT systems meet the required specification, greater national consistency in call handling and better internal and external engagement.

There is also a need for stronger financial management, as the true financial costs and savings associated with call handling have proved difficult to determine. Savings in staff costs have been offset with increased police officer and overtime costs, and there is currently no framework in place to measure all the benefits from the project.

The need for Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to look at the way they manage significant and complex change programmes in the future is also emphasised within the report.

Although the HMICS audit of calls provided assurance over the accuracy of information being recorded on systems it also highlighted inconsistencies in the way incidents are handled. It found examples of call handlers being under pressure to end calls quickly and grading of calls being dependent on resources available.

HMICS also found that some staff noted information on scribble pads rather than inputting it directly onto the system and although staff are able to bypass key ICT systems, Police Scotland has recently introduced processes to monitor and manage this.

The report noted that in line with Police Scotland's own staff survey and previous HMICS inspections, the pace and nature of change has affected the morale of both officers and staff working in the C3 environment.

Mr Penman said: "Staff are strongly committed, in often challenging circumstances, to providing a good service to the public. This is despite many being subject to significant uncertainties about their futures and facing constant change in their working practices.

“We identified that workforce planning needs more attention to address previous weaknesses and ensure there are enough staff in place at critical stages. Initial assumptions on staffing levels were limited and there were insufficient staff in place at Bilston Glen when work transferred from Stirling and Glenrothes. This resulted in poor call handling performance. Police Scotland has however made considerable efforts to address this, with full staffing levels now in place and the grades of service for answering calls currently being met.”

As part of the review, HMICS launched its first online survey to provide the public with the opportunity to pass on their experiences of police call handling. A total of 3826 questionnaires were completed, 46% from members of the public, 46% by police officers and staff, 2% from elected representatives and 7% by others. It reinforced information which HMICS found during its fieldwork, visits to call centres, interviews and during focus groups. Initial feedback from the survey helped inform the key lines of the inquiry for the review.

Mr Penman added: “While I welcome the commitment and progress that has already been made by Police Scotland to address many of the issues highlighted, my report makes 30 recommendations for improvement which I expect to be addressed as a priority.”

Police Scotland will be asked to produce an action plan with timescales for delivering the recommendations. This action plan should be agreed with the Scottish Police Authority and subject to regular reporting and public scrutiny.

HMICS will review how the recommendations are being progressed and carry out a further independent, statistically significant audit of call handling once Police Scotland has implemented the next major stages of its C3 project. This will provide an assurance as to whether the new call handling model is providing a quality of service to communities across Scotland.

Ends

Note to Editors

When the Cabinet Secretary for Justice directed HMICS to carry out this review he clearly set out the areas to be considered, namely:

- 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.

HMICS published the Terms of Reference for this review on July 22, 2015. They are available on HMICS website www.hmics.

Key findings

Outcomes

- 94.2% of 999 calls are currently answered within 10 seconds in the West. This compares with 93.0% in the North and 91.7% in the East.
- 92.4% of 101 calls are currently answered within 40 seconds in the East. This compares with 91.8% in the West, and 81.7% in the North.
- Calls to 999 fell by 2.4% and calls to 101 fell by 4.6% between 2013-14 and 2014-15.
- Almost 30% of 999 calls made to Police Scotland were an inappropriate use of the emergency service.
- Whilst there were significant issues with poor call handling performance in the East in early 2015, performance has since improved considerably. Performance in the North continues to be variable.
- Whilst there were delays in answering some 999 calls in Bilston Glen between November 2014 and April 2015, this has now been resolved.
- Police Scotland has yet to develop national service standards for contact management although work is ongoing in establishing national systems and processes which will support such standards.
- C3 performance has been regularly reported both internally and externally since April 2015.
- The current C3 performance framework lacks detail on quality of service, cost and outcomes.
- C3 does not currently operate a benchmarking framework or have an overarching improvement plan in place.

Leadership and governance

- Police Scotland is only part way through a highly complex programme of change which offers the opportunity to develop a class-leading call handling service.
- Police Scotland has sought to maintain a focus on consistent service delivery to the public, common systems and interoperability of systems, but has also focussed on productivity and achieving savings.
- The Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland have taken a narrow approach to the scrutiny of major change projects.
- Governance of the change process has been weak with key risks and project issues not being highlighted through existing structures.
- There is a lack of clarity around the strategic vision for the C3 service, with no alignment to wider policing strategy.
- Police Scotland has yet to develop an overarching customer contact strategy and has not adopted national contact management standards, principles or practice.
- There is no clear framework in place to measure the stated benefits of the new C3 model.
- Some staff occupying key project board roles have limited experience of and training in programme and project management.
- Current arrangements for risk management within the C3IR project and C3 Division are not robust.

- At times, there has been confusion between business as usual and delivery of the C3IR project.

People

- C3 staff are strongly committed, in often challenging circumstances, to providing a good service to the public. They demonstrate considerable flexibility in their working practices whilst endeavouring to meet call demand.
- Staff across Police Scotland were keen to engage with HMICS during our review with 1,754 officers and police staff responding to our online questionnaire. A further 300 members of C3 staff contributing directly to our fieldwork.
- Staff engagement and consultation by Police Scotland during the C3IR project could have been more effective.
- Initial assumptions on C3 staffing levels were limited by lack of legacy data and comparators.
- There were insufficient staff available in Bilston Glen when work transferred from Stirling and Glenrothes in early 2015, resulting in low levels of performance.
- Consistent training is now in place for all new staff, with the introduction of a 'Training Academy', but further work is required to develop a nationally consistent approach for all staff.
- Staffing levels within C3 have now stabilised with a full complement of staff in the East and West. Performance is now being maintained in these locations. Staffing challenges remain in the North.
- There is accurate demand forecasting and planning in place to inform staffing levels.
- There has been limited use of police officers in service centres to provide cover as a short term measure to address staff shortages.
- Levels of absence within C3 Division are reflective of the average figure for Police Scotland.
- Staff affected by future relocation or closure have been subject to significant uncertainties and some had not received direct wellbeing, redundancy, retirement or employment support.

Resources

- The decision to implement an interim ICT solution and to delay the procurement of major new technologies reduced the complexities and risk associated with the rollout of the C3IR project.
- The interim ICT solution in place is generally fit for purpose in terms of basic functionality. However, the stability of these systems remains in question: while network performance has improved, this continues to affect day to day operations.
- Business Continuity Planning across C3 sites has been tested regularly, and although still reliant on some legacy force plans, has proven to be well managed and maintains service and performance during periods of down time.
- At a cost of £15m, the procurement and implementation of an integrated suite of new technologies will be critical to the future delivery of call handling and presents an opportunity to improve productivity, realise savings and deliver the full benefits of the project.
- While Police Scotland has already achieved savings of over £1.8 million per annum in staff costs, it has increased police officer and overtime costs.

- Although service centre staff are able to bypass key ICT systems to support business continuity, Police Scotland has recently introduced processes to monitor and manage this.
- The current address 'look up' gazetteer and Police Scotland internal directory do not fully meet operational requirements.
- While there are defined arrangements for ICT governance and testing in place, there was limited awareness amongst some senior managers of C3 ICT issues.
- The C3 approach to information audit is not currently providing the necessary levels of assurance required.
- Identifying the true costs of the C3IR project and exact levels of savings has not been possible.

Planning and process

- Basic call handling processes are in place although consistency, understanding and definition of these processes all need to develop further.
- Currently there are no systematic processes for recording adverse incidents or 'near misses'.
- The lack of investment in process mapping and capturing local variances has been a weakness in the C3 change approach.
- More can be done to support service centre staff in assessing initial risk of calls and vulnerability of callers.
- Grading, prioritisation and dispatch of police officers works well for emergency and high priority calls, but lower priority calls can be affected by a lack of available officers to attend incidents and weak divisional management of these incidents.
- Risk and vulnerability assessment is strong within the area control room environment with ongoing re-evaluation of levels of risk as incidents are dispatched and managed.

Audit of police call handling

- The majority of people who contact the police via 999 and 101 received effective customer service.
- In 96.9% of calls we audited, the service advisors were polite, helpful and professional. Service advisors generally delivered an effective and efficient service in often challenging circumstances, and dealt with calls with patience and empathy.
- Where we found the service advisor not to have been polite, helpful and professional, this was due to the service advisor being impatient, interrupting the caller unnecessarily, failing to ask sufficient follow-up questions or providing poor advice.
- In a few cases, service advisors did not strike an appropriate balance between listening to the caller and capturing all relevant information, and ending the call promptly so the service advisor is available to receive another call.
- The call result was appropriate in 95.1% of the calls we assessed, with service advisors seeking to resolve the caller's query at the first point of contact. Where calls were not resolved appropriately on first contact, additional and unnecessary demand on the service was created.
- There was some inconsistency in the way service advisors responded to similar or the same incidents.
- We listened to several calls where the caller was frustrated that officers had failed to update them on the progress of their case. In a few cases, some callers eventually became unco-operative with the police due to a lack of communication.

- The customer relationship management system was not used consistently across service centres and service advisors. This poses risks to the quality of the data on the system.
- Police Scotland made considerable efforts to trace abandoned or silent 999 calls.
- In 98.0% of the calls we audited that resulted in an incident, the service advisor accurately recorded what was said by the caller.
- The best opening code was used for 96.5% of the incidents we audited and the best closing code for 92.6% of incidents.
- 95.1% of incidents were closed correctly and in accordance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard. This is higher than the compliance rate achieved by Police Scotland in our Crime Audit 2014 (92%).
- While 93.9% of incidents were graded correctly, there was some inconsistency in grading practice across Scotland.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should commission further work to identify and reduce failure demand. This should include marketing and public communication around appropriate use of 999 and 101 numbers, targeting high volume callers and working across all Police Scotland divisions and with external partners to reduce demand and improve performance.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should review and identify any learning around 999 call performance that can be taken forward into the planning and governance of Stages 5, 6 and 7 of the C3IR project. This should include continued proactive engagement with BT to monitor 999 performance immediately prior to and during the implementation of these critical stages.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should develop a balanced performance management framework for C3 Division which aligns to both organisational and divisional strategic objectives. This should include qualitative, cost and outcome measures.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should review and standardise its C3 complaint handling processes as part of Stages 5 and 6 of the C3IR project. This should promote the consistent recording of quality of service issues and focus on identifying learning and improvement.

Recommendation 5 (*from Interim Report*)

Police Scotland should consolidate and stabilise its staffing, systems, procedures and processes in both the East and West service centres and area control rooms. While this is being progressed, detailed planning for the previously agreed end-state model should continue, with consideration given to accelerating the recruitment of staff and early commissioning of the North Area Control Room in Dundee.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should articulate a clear vision for its Contact, Command and Control (C3) service and develop an overall strategy for customer contact. This should involve engagement with communities and key stakeholders and lead to the publication of standards of service.

Recommendation 7

Police Scotland should appoint an experienced and qualified programme manager with immediate effect to manage the remaining stages of the C3IR project. It should also ensure that key project board members are appropriately trained and experienced.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should continue development of its Contact, Command and Control (C3) leadership and governance arrangements in order to ensure clear delineation and accountability between the C3IR project and 'business as usual'.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority should urgently review and strengthen their overall approach to programme governance and establish transparent processes for commissioning independent quality assurance reviews for critical stages of all major projects. This should initially focus on improved governance and scrutiny over the C3IR project and independent quality assurance over Stages 5, 6 and 7.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should continue to review its risk management process within C3 Division including a review of existing C3IR project and corporate risks. This should also include the development of a separate 'business as usual' risk register.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should strengthen its commitment towards programme and project management and the management of cultural change. It should mainstream its improvement approach into existing project and 'business as usual' planning and review its use of Gold Groups.

Recommendation 12

Police Scotland should develop a workforce planning model which supports the C3 strategic vision and provides an evidence based assessment of required staffing levels.

Recommendation 13

Police Scotland should review the use of staff at the Information Resources Unit for call handling to ensure that effective support and training are in place to maintain skills, awareness and understanding.

Recommendation 14

Police Scotland should develop a training strategy for C3 Division which is supported by an appropriately skilled and resourced single national training unit.

Recommendation 15

Police Scotland should further develop its approach to communication and engagement for the C3IR project and include this as a specific workstream with key deliverables within its implementation plans for Stages 5, 6 and 7.

Recommendation 16

Police Scotland should review the use of ad hoc 'scribble pads' by service advisors within C3 Division and provide definitive guidance on their use, issue and proportionate supervision.

Recommendation 17

Police Scotland should ensure that the new suite of integrated technologies procured under Stage 7 of the C3IR project includes a detailed independently assured specification which supports streamlined national processes, improves compliance and reduces the risk of staff bypassing critical systems. These new systems must also support robust quality assurance processes and audit.

Recommendation 18

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority should implement strengthened ICT governance and independent quality assurance reviews for key deliverables within Stages 5, 6 and 7 of the C3IR project.

Recommendation 19

Police Scotland should engage with the Scottish Government, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Scottish Ambulance Service to explore the feasibility and joint development of a bespoke emergency services address gazetteer for Scotland.

Recommendation 20

Police Scotland should implement a robust information audit approach which should include an immediate review of data quality and information security. Functionality and accuracy of the gazetteer and internal directory should be addressed as a priority.

Recommendation 21

Police Scotland should continue to progress the development of a single suite of business continuity plans for C3 Division, replacing remaining legacy site plans.

Recommendation 22

Police Scotland should improve financial management and reporting for the C3IR project. The Scottish Police Authority should consider the level of scrutiny and due diligence applied to change project budgets and projected financial benefits. Identification of explicit savings against project costs (both revenue and capital) should be regularly monitored as part of business case review and overall benefits reporting.

Recommendation 23

Police Scotland should define and document its key processes within C3 Division and update its standard operating procedures. This should be supported with immediate investment in process training and guidance for all existing and new staff.

Recommendation 24

Police Scotland should adopt a more formalised risk and vulnerability assessment model for service advisors, reflecting this in both general and specialised awareness training.

Recommendation 25

Police Scotland should establish a Quality Assurance Framework as soon as possible. This should include regular call audits undertaken by the Quality Assurance Unit and the results shared with the Scottish Police Authority and local policing scrutiny committees.

Recommendation 26

Police Scotland should promote an improvement culture where staff are encouraged to report adverse incidents or 'near misses' and introduce processes as soon as possible where these can be recorded, assessed and any improvement identified and implemented.

Recommendation 27

Police Scotland should ensure there is a clear and consistent vision for the role, responsibilities and resourcing of Public Assistance Desks.

Recommendation 28

Police Scotland should ensure that any changes impacting on the Service Overview function are fully risk assessed and included with the appropriate governance for Stages 5 and 6 of the C3IR project.

Recommendation 29

Police Scotland should include a specific workstream within its Stage 5 and 6 plans of the C3IR project to co-ordinate the collation and transfer of all major incident plans onto a single system and embed processes for their ongoing management. This should also include training for staff in their use.

Recommendation 30

Police Scotland should ensure there is a clear and consistent vision for the role, responsibilities and resourcing of the National Systems Support function.