



**HMICS** HM INSPECTORATE OF  
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

**Thematic Inspection**  
Quality of service and feedback  
to users of police services  
in Scotland

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This inspection looked at the way police forces in Scotland engage with, and provide feedback to, members of the public who call the police to report something, whether or not it is a crime.

It examined the policies, practices and procedures which forces have in place to:

- negotiate the type of police response to the call;
- inform callers of police action taken in response to the call, once this has been completed (i.e. provide *feedback*); and
- assess callers' levels of satisfaction with the feedback they receive.

The Scottish Government, local authorities and the police service in Scotland all recognise the importance of *user focus* in delivering services. The need to ensure that services meet the needs of those requesting or requiring them, as a general principle, is highlighted in many publications. However, during this inspection we found no *published* standards detailing the feedback that service users could expect in their dealings with the police. The need for such standards and for greater efforts to manage public expectations is a principal recommendation of the inspection.

In order to clarify thinking on this matter we advised forces at the outset of the following working definition of caller/user feedback: *the response provided to people who contact the police to report a crime, seek assistance or offer information, whether that response is to advise them about progress or give information about what will or will not be done as a result.*

We anticipate that collectively forces may wish to address most of the recommendations below under the coordination of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS). However, we will continue to expect individual forces to report on progress.

**Recommendation 1:** That forces agree a national approach to user surveys to explore the needs of all service users, their satisfaction with the services received and the service improvements needed to increase user satisfaction.

**Recommendation 2:** That all forces publish details of the service that members of the public can expect to receive when they call the police. In order to promote a consistency across the Service that nevertheless acknowledges local force variations in service delivery, we propose that this take the form of a national minimum standard agreed by ACPOS that can then be tailored to take account of local differences. Publications should be sufficiently detailed that the public can understand what the police can and cannot do in various circumstances.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Scottish Government together with the relevant criminal justice agencies consider a review of all information services provided by the criminal justice system to crime victims and witnesses, with a view to co-ordinating the information flow to victims in a way that respects the respective duties of different agencies but minimises the burden and uncertainty for victims and witnesses.



**Recommendation 4:** That all forces have clear internal guidance on dealing with members of the public. This should focus on quality of service and with a specific requirement to manage expectations *and* provide feedback about progress as necessary. This guidance should set out the entire process for dealing with service users, from beginning to end, and define the relationships between the various parts of that process. Appropriate systems to promote compliance will be required.

**Recommendation 5:** That the appraisal systems/performance development reviews for all police officers and police staff be amended to include an assessment of both the quality of service delivered by the individual and any associated training needs.

**Recommendation 6:** That selection arrangements for all staff who will come into contact with the public should seek not just good communication skills but also a strong customer focus.

**Recommendation 7:** That forces work with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) to ensure that all training for new members of staff is strongly focused on achieving at a minimum the service standards referred to in recommendation 2, but also good customer care. Both elements should emphasise the need to recognise the individual requirements of customers. These principles should be embedded in probationer and induction training and reinforced at every available training and re-training opportunity.

**Recommendation 8:** That, in developing new IT solutions for police functions, improving the quality of service provided to the public is one of the primary business benefits of all new systems. There should be a particular emphasis on using mobile phone technology and e-mail to supplement existing methods of communicating with the public and reduce demand on operational officers.



## Introduction

1. The Scottish Government has made it clear that delivering high quality public services is a key priority and that user focus forms the basis of good public services. This ethos puts the person and not the institution at the centre of service delivery. It also promotes the development of continuous personal relationships between the public and providers rather than seeing services as anonymous, one-off transactions. Furthermore the Auditor General, in his evidence to the Justice Committee's recent enquiry into the effective use of police resources, stated that "being responsive to *customers* and *citizens* is a core principle of best value" (our emphasis). The Audit Committee has also expressed an interest in this area of policing and has been briefed on the broad conclusions of our work.
2. The purpose of this inspection was to examine the way police forces in Scotland engage with, and provide feedback to, members of the public who contact the police on those many matters which can be described as 'high volume' areas of police work such as the reporting of minor crimes and occurrences. It also explored the mechanisms by which forces obtain service users' views on the quality of both the service and any subsequent feedback they received in connection with their call, incident or complaint. The need to conduct an inspection on this topic was identified through our formal selection process which, in keeping with the principle of user focus, includes stakeholder consultation.
3. Readers of this report will find a number of terms are used to describe the users of police services. Reference is made to both 'service users' and 'customers' and we are aware of the danger of inappropriate use of such language in some circumstances, for example when dealing with victims of serious or violent crime. More common terms are also highlighted such as 'victims, witnesses, suspects and accused'. We believe that it is important to highlight the fact that police services should be designed to deliver what is best described as a 'customer focused' service. We also recognise that the term 'consumer' is appropriate in many cases but we have concluded that in view of the sensitive nature of much of policing activity it would be wrong to be prescriptive on this matter and we do not recommend the adoption of any overarching term for service users. Nevertheless, forces will wish to consider how to ensure that the concept of customer focus is conveyed to all their staff.
4. Although there were gaps in the data in some areas, our report concludes that public satisfaction with the users of police services is falling by small degrees and that, if left unchecked, this trend may continue. This is occurring at a time when among other priorities, tackling local, high volume crime and combating international terrorism are both very high on the Scottish policing agenda. Consequently there is a real need for general watchfulness within communities and active public support to maintain the flow of intelligence and information on which effective policing activity depends. Thus it is particularly important that public confidence in policing is not further eroded at this time.
5. Dealing with calls from the public generally involves three stages – initial contact, response and what is known as *incident resolution*. The entire process may take place in one conversation or take weeks or months. One of the key determinants of caller satisfaction is how well the caller has been kept informed of progress. Accurate, timely information comes out consistently as a key driver of public satisfaction with all public services<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond the call – A thematic inspection of police contact centres' contribution to incident management – HMI England and Wales 2007



- 6.** A great deal of effort has gone into making sure that victims of serious crime receive a caring, considerate and effective policing response. For example, the arrangements for dealing with serious crimes such as rape, murder and child abuse all have good victim-focused processes. Many of these have been developed in partnership with criminal justice partners, care agencies and volunteer organisations. Fortunately these crimes are in the minority when compared to the many thousands of less serious crimes and offences dealt with by the police each year.
  - 7.** The results of public satisfaction surveys appear good on the surface and many forces report very high levels of satisfaction. Most of these surveys are targeted at the users of police services, i.e. victims of crime or persons involved in incidents which the police have dealt with. There are some surveys which seek to obtain a wider view of policing from the general public. Nevertheless there are indications from some studies that public satisfaction with policing in the UK, and in Scotland specifically, is falling. The difficulty in obtaining consistent data that measures this issue over time is discussed in the next section, but there is adequate evidence to indicate that failure to provide feedback is one of the biggest sources of service user dissatisfaction.
  - 8.** Based on the evidence from these surveys and the views of a range of stakeholders, this inspection has found that, when dealing with less serious and high volume crimes and incidents, providing feedback is an area of relative weakness for the police service. It found that feedback to all complainers is expected as a norm across the police service in Scotland, but it is rarely, if ever, published as a standard to which the Service or the public can refer.
  - 9.** We also considered the large number of calls made to the police to provide information, e.g. “I’ve seen something suspicious” or “I think you should know where these drug dealers are operating”. We found little evidence of any systematic approach to either following through this contact (although information is invariably acted upon fairly quickly or considered for future action) or capturing callers’ views on how they had been dealt with. It appeared that very few were given any feedback, unless they were needed as witnesses. As a result, the Service may be missing valuable opportunities to encourage further future contact from these members of the public, for example, or to improve their perceptions of its responsiveness.
  - 10.** Many of the police personnel we consulted expressed a strong desire to improve the way feedback to callers is dealt with, by managing callers’ expectations and negotiating an appropriate police response at the time of the call. However, we found the various approaches in place for achieving this to fall far short of a properly thought-out strategy.
  - 11.** Overall, it appeared to us that the Service’s focus on quality management had diminished recently. It may be that the increased emphasis on performance management, through process improvement and target-setting, has diverted attention from quality of service. Nevertheless, we would argue that service quality is a major part of performance management. Analysis of this issue is complicated by greatly increasing demand on policing services which means that it is difficult to accurately assess the reasons for changes in performance. However, the inspection team was told repeatedly that because of growing demands on services, it was difficult for operational officers and those in contact centres to deliver the quality of service to which they aspired.
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- 12.** Whatever the reasons for this apparent reduction in focus, we are encouraged by the Scottish Government's view on the importance of user-focused public services. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) echoes this principle and underscores the importance of excellence in service delivery in a draft version of its new strategy document which was made available to the inspection team.
- 13.** We have also been an instigator of the increasing performance management agenda in Scottish policing. We support current ACPOS developments in this area and believe that performance management and quality of service are complementary drivers of improvement. Indeed the Scottish Policing Performance Framework (created by Scottish Government, ACPOS, the Scottish Police Conveners Forum, Audit Scotland and HMICS) seeks an emphasis on quality of service in its indicators. In addition, the ACPOS Performance Management business area has very recently agreed to carry out further work on establishing service delivery standards. These developments and this report should help to signal a renewed understanding of the place of quality of service within performance management.
- 14.** This inspection found no recognisable standard of service for providing feedback to public callers. Force publications contained a range of references to the broad issues of user focus, but limited detail on the issue of feedback. There are also some national documents that contain references to the subject, for example the Scottish Strategy for Victims, and (for England and Wales) the Home Office Code of Practice for Victims. Existing variations in approach are discussed in some detail later in this report, but we believe that more clarity is needed in this area. There is certainly a need for flexibility in the way the police service deals with service users, and indeed we would encourage more recognition of *policing according to need*. However, we suggest that this can still be achieved within a more directed and structured process than exists at present.
- 15.** In order to improve in this area, we believe that forces need to put in place a programme of work that will produce the following:
- published standards for members of the public who may need to use policing services, setting out what can and cannot be expected in a police response and the ways in which individual needs will be identified and taken into account;
  - internal management processes that make clear to all police staff what is expected when responding to service users;
  - recruitment, selection and training arrangements that have a focus on quality and customer service; and
  - better use of technology and partnerships to help meet service user expectations for feedback with minimal impact on police personnel.
- 16.** The main part of this report contains the discussion leading to our recommendations. Commentary on other aspects, areas of good practice, and other suggestions for improvement are included in Annex A. In addition to the specific recommendations, in reviewing their processes forces and their police authorities/boards will wish to consider the content of Annex A.
- 17.** Further details of the inspection methodology are given in Annex B.
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## Quality of Service and Feedback to Service Users – Understanding the Issues

**18.** In the introduction to this report we discussed the risk associated with falling public support at a time when tackling local crime and combating terrorism are key police priorities. However, there are other equally significant drivers for striving to maintain public support. Policing in this country requires the support and agreement of the public. It is this traditional and valuable model of *policing by consent* that makes UK policing different from most of that found elsewhere across the world. Its aim is to allow police officers to carry out their role and use their considerable powers in an environment of public support and encouragement, without the need for greater force or powers.

**19.** Furthermore, the National Intelligence Model (NIM) is the business model designed to drive all operational policing activity. It relies on intelligence, as the name suggests, to identify priorities and then to tackle the problems identified. For all these reasons, pro-active public support for policing is vital.

**20.** In order to understand public perceptions of service delivery, police forces have developed a range of consultative mechanisms. These have evolved over many years and have included public survey methods with differing approaches, question sets, frequencies and sample sizes. Some forces have used private companies while others have enlisted support from academic institutions.

**21.** There are two common purposes to this survey work. The first is to gauge the general public's opinions on policing priorities, in order to inform decisions on future force activity. The second is to seek the views of users on the service received. This inspection focuses on the latter aspect, while the former will feature in a separate inspection on community consultation by surveys.

**22.** Against a backdrop of varying methodologies it is difficult to assess the extent to which there is a common set of service user problems that forces should be addressing. It is also difficult to paint an accurate picture of user satisfaction in Scotland. While we acknowledge that societal and geographical variations will produce differences across and within forces, it is highly probable that there are as yet unidentified common service delivery shortcomings, some or all of which would be best addressed consistently across Scotland.

**23.** During the inspection we conducted a broad desk-top examination of these force public or user surveys. Of the seven forces for which we had up-to-date information, only three surveys contained some results specifically relating to feedback to service users. In two of these, problems about feedback or being kept informed came top or equal top in terms of either reasons given for lower satisfaction rates or areas in which the force could improve. In the third survey, respondents indicated that the element of service they felt least likely to receive was feedback. In other words, the latter piece of work also confirmed failure to provide feedback as a major shortcoming of the force. Only one survey attempted to look at different aspects of feedback.

**24.** Looking at wider possible factors affecting user satisfaction, four force surveys were able to offer some pointers. Their results indicated that speed of police attendance at the scene tended to be the other major contributor to user dissatisfaction. However, it is important that these results are interpreted carefully. None of the force surveys attempted to analyse the results in greater depth in order to explore what the *key* drivers were and/or other possible explanatory trends underlying satisfaction. There were also some other methodological limitations that made interpreting the results slightly problematic. Examples of this included low response rates or closed response-options, and it not being clear how the questions were phrased. And while some forces broke down their results to divisional level, there appeared to be no attempts to understand differences between sets of users e.g. by reasons for contact, type of crime, demography and so on.





**25.** Audit Scotland publishes figures based on force satisfaction surveys at three-yearly intervals. The most recent results showed that the proportion of service users who were very or fairly satisfied with the way in which the police dealt with their matter fell from almost 83% in 2000 to just over 77% in 2006. Conversely, the number of people either very or fairly dissatisfied rose from 8.5% in 2000 to 14.4% in 2006.

**26.** There are other sources of information that provide some information on user satisfaction (for example the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey), but they do not really provide any greater depth of information than do the force surveys referred to above. Nevertheless, the findings of research conducted in Europe appear to provide further confirmation of the situation in the UK and Scotland:

“Rates of satisfaction among victims of serious crimes show a remarkable downward trend in several countries. Between 1996 and 2005 victim satisfaction went down from 72% to 62% in England and Wales, from 71% to 62% in The Netherlands, from 74% to 67% in Sweden and from 67% to 61% in Scotland. Nation-specific crime victim surveys in England/Wales and the Netherlands, using much larger samples, have also registered a decline in satisfaction in recent years.”<sup>2</sup>

**27.** Because of methodological shortcomings, we cannot actually say from much of the current force survey findings how important feedback, or other factors, are to victims of volume crime. Nor is it clear how levels of satisfaction with feedback correlate with overall reported satisfaction rates. However, other qualitative work tends to suggest that feedback is a significant factor.

**28.** One group of police service users who seem to be largely overlooked in much of this work are those who call the police to provide information that does not directly affect them, often out of an admirable sense of civic duty. For example, someone who hears breaking glass in the middle of the night unconnected to their property may call the police to advise them of this. While in many cases the reason for the noise may be innocent, such calls are the mainstay of police activity. Many calls for a police response that lead to arrests and detected crime are initiated by such callers. And yet the possibility of contacting them again to thank them and explain the outcome was routinely overlooked or perhaps simply considered unnecessary. Only where the caller was required as a witness was further contact made.

**29.** We simply do not know with any certainty whether these callers feel that they received an adequate service or would have liked feedback. However, it seems reasonable to assume that feedback would encourage, and lack of feedback may well discourage, continued support of this kind. Given the large numbers of callers involved, we think it is important that forces test this assumption. It is also reasonable to assume that a proportion of these helpful people may *not* wish to receive feedback. However, this could readily be covered at the time of the initial call by asking callers if they would like to receive an update and offering a range of means by which this could be achieved (e.g. telephone call, text message or e-mail).

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<sup>2</sup> Benchmarking Victim Policies in the Framework of European Union Law. Jan Van Dijk and Marc Groenhuijsen



**30.** We believe that there is a need to reconsider the way in which service users are consulted on quality of service. During the inspection, the team became aware of work to develop more meaningful data-sets under the auspices of the new Scottish Policing Performance Framework (SPPF). This will include the results from force surveys, an improved version of the Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey, and data on complaints against the police.

**31.** We also learned of work being conducted by the Consultation Working Group, which is part of the ACPOS Performance Management business area. This work was considering how a national approach to survey work might be achieved and is entirely in keeping with the points discussed above. Without wishing to anticipate its findings, evidence suggests that qualitative methods of consulting with service users would be more helpful than just asking the kind of top-line questions currently used when identifying areas for improvement and ways of resolving these. In other words, satisfaction surveys may be improved by measuring *experience* as opposed to attempting to ascertain degrees of satisfaction which are less tangible.

**32.** It may also be more informative to separate out different groups of users, rather than aggregating their views and satisfaction levels. Such an approach, where all surveys gather the same demographic information, would build up a picture of how services are experienced by different groups in society and across Scotland. This approach would allow forces to make informed decisions about the service issues which require to be altered and improved. We also noted that the Improvement Service, in a joint project with the Scottish Consumer Council, is initiating similar work which may lead to the inspection of other public services being more closely aligned, in particular local authorities.

**33.** We commend the efforts already underway to improve the Service's understanding of victims' experiences. However we make the following recommendation to extend this to all potential service users.

**Recommendation 1: That forces agree a national approach to user surveys to explore the needs of all service users, their satisfaction with the services received and the service improvements needed to increase user satisfaction.**

**34.** As mentioned above, there are at present no national service standards for the police service in Scotland to inform the public of what to expect. Nor is it clear what, if any, local standards individual forces have adopted. This is about to be addressed by ACPOS and is discussed more fully in the next section of this report.



## Setting Standards

**35.** As part of our thematic inspections we will always try to identify a standard or norm against which the aspect of policing being examined can be measured or considered. In many cases this will be a set of protocols, procedures or guidelines that have been endorsed by ACPOS and agreed by forces. It may also involve inspecting policy and process against a piece of legislation that prescribes certain practices, as in the case of vulnerable witnesses. Alternatively, the main point of reference may be a key government or ACPOS policy, such as the objective to shape services around customer needs as outlined in the introduction of this report. On a wider front, we are also encouraging ACPOS to identify and assemble all its existing standards into one accessible database so that police forces and their stakeholders (including the public) understand what to expect in terms of service delivery. This will also help forces themselves, HMICS and other scrutiny bodies to assess the extent to which the Service is meeting expectations.

**36.** The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland co-ordinates activity in developing police policy and acts as the principal voice of police leaders. We consulted ACPOS during this inspection and considered how its structure of business areas is designed around key policing functions and subject areas. We believe that aspects such as quality of service, which straddle many aspects of policing, may not be well co-ordinated under such a structure, as the following examples demonstrate:

- Quality in contact centres – falls under ACPOS Information Management business area, national call handling standards working group.
- Victims and witnesses – falls under ACPOS Criminal Justice business area, victims and witnesses sub-group.
- Victim and service user surveys – falls under ACPOS Performance Management business area, consultation sub-group.

**37.** It is of course for ACPOS to decide how these matters are dealt with. And it is certainly the case that however its business is sub-divided there will always be cross-cutting themes. But we believe that it would be worthwhile considering how the focus on improving quality of service might be better co-ordinated, at least in the short term, perhaps under the auspices of a smaller group liaising with relevant business areas and reporting directly to ACPOS Council. Such a group could also be responsible for co-ordinating the development of quality standards.

## What are the public told?

**38.** As we have said above, with regard to keeping service users informed through feedback on the progress of their case, we found no published service standards. Similarly, on the more general issue of quality of service for victims, witnesses and accused, we found no comprehensive or consistently applied and published standards, either agreed by all forces or applied locally. There were many documents stating the Service's aspirations to deliver a high quality service, but most of these fell short of specifying the quality of service that individual service users might expect in their dealings with the police. This is a significant omission that may already be creating professional confusion about what constitutes good service delivery as well as mixed public expectations about the level of service that can and should be achieved.



**39.** The publication of the Justice Charter for Scotland in 1991 set out some quite basic quality of service standards for policing but did not address the issue of keeping users informed. Subsequent work on improving policing services has increased our understanding of the need to provide high quality services, including the provision of feedback. Some of the Justice Charter measures are still in place, but these relate to recording or measuring activity such as the time taken to attend urgent calls and to answer emergency telephone calls. The remainder of the Justice Charter referred to many of the quality of service issues raised in this report, but it is now archived. It can be found through the following link:

(<http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/servicefirst/1998/list/justice.htm>)

**40.** We consider many of the aspirations of the original Justice Charter to be valid even in today's policing environment. We further believe that the need to inform the public of what levels of service can and cannot be achieved is even more acute at this time of higher and more critical demand. During the inspection many of those whom we consulted, at all levels within and out with the police service, endorsed this notion. There is evidence from public consultation exercises to indicate that people recognise the demands on policing and are, in the main, sympathetic to the challenge of meeting increasing demands with broadly finite resources.

**41.** There is a range of helpful publications connected to this discussion. Though some of these were produced in England and Wales, in our opinion most of their content is equally applicable to Scotland. They include the following:

- Citizen Focus – A practical guide to improving police follow-up with victims and witnesses, published in March 2007 by the Home Office<sup>3</sup>
- Customer Service Standards (Quality of Service Commitment), published in 2005 by the Home Office following joint work with ACPO<sup>4</sup>
- Scottish Strategy for Victims, published in 2001 by the Scottish Executive<sup>5</sup>
- National Standards for Victims of Crime, published in 2005 by the Scottish Executive<sup>6</sup>
- Public Reassurance Strategy, published in September 2007 by ACPOS<sup>7</sup>

**42.** We should emphasise that we also found many examples in Scotland of efforts to improve the quality of policing services and to understand what is being achieved. Some of these include the public survey work referred to earlier, while others were apparent in the significant efforts underway to refine the operation of call centres and call-grading policies. Audit Scotland completed a major review of the development and operation of police call handling in 2007 and made 15 recommendations. The recommendations in this report are designed to support the work emerging from that exercise.

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3 (<http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/police-reform/CF-victimsandwitnesses.pdf>).

4 (<http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/police-reform/reform-programme/citizen-focus/customer-service-standards?version=2>).

5 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2001/01/7963/File-1>).

6 (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/02/20746/53358>).

7 (<http://www.acpos.police.uk/News%20Items/News12-09-07Community.html>).



**43.** As indicated earlier, we found that the feedback given to members of the public who call the police was extremely variable. From the limited data available, the most common type of feedback appeared to be that provided after a crime or incident is reported. This might take the form of a follow-up telephone call or letter to the caller, giving information about developments or the outcome of police work. Some forces had systems to generate letters, either automatically or manually, to victims of crime. In some cases a letter was sent as soon as the crime was recorded, while in others an *incident information form* was handed to the victim at the time of reporting. Several forces provided one or more updates to the victim by letter. However most said that this did not prevent officers giving further feedback to a complainer or victim, either by telephone or in person, at various stages of an enquiry.

**44.** We found conflicting opinions on the effectiveness of these various approaches, something that we will return to later on in this report. However, we were told that although forces expect service users to be given feedback, it was frequently the case that officers did not meet that expectation. Moreover, force systems were often failing to capture such shortcomings.

#### **The growth of process, demand and ‘customer service’**

**45.** We feel, as intimated above, that the development of new police processes such as the National Intelligence Model and the performance management framework has unintentionally detracted from a focus on service quality. One senior officer told the inspection team that the NIM control strategy dominates the business, driving out the softer issues: “*sub divisional officers live and die by the control strategy, crime and absence*”. We believe that a remedy to this can be achieved with relatively little effort.

**46.** As we have said, despite forces’ expectations that service users will be given feedback, many officers were unable or unwilling to do this. In a series of focus groups that we conducted as part of the inspection, operational officers reluctantly admitted that they could not find the time to contact service users. This could have been due to competing demands on their time, the constraints of shift-working which meant that calls could not be made at anti-social hours, or a range of other limiting factors. Interestingly these findings had been replicated in work commissioned by one of the forces we visited as part of our pre-inspection research phase.

**47.** While many of those interviewed were frustrated by this situation, others did not see feedback as a major problem, provided that they had completed or resolved the enquiry. In fact, some of those we spoke with suggested that it would be important to give feedback to some complainers but less so for others. This implies that value judgements were being made about the relative worth of individual complaints or the type of person making them.

**48.** Three issues emerge from this. First, we were told that few forces have published internal policies about feedback. Nevertheless, officers and police staff were apparently expected to understand that giving feedback should be normal practice and that all callers whose reported crime or incident remains unresolved should be kept informed of progress. While it may seem obvious to expect feedback to be provided, it can be argued that, without a specific policy or protocol, officers are free to decide themselves on the relative importance of doing so. Furthermore, if police staff are ignorant of the organisation’s expectations, how can service users know what to expect?



**49.** Second, the constraints on some officers' time, which prevent them providing even basic levels of feedback is a major factor. The police service needs to find ways of managing service users' expectations and reducing the need for officers to give feedback while still providing a high standard of customer service. This is partly about managing expectations through education, and partly about making full use of technology which can be used to good effect in this context. This is discussed in more detail later in a later section.

**50.** Third, and perhaps most important, is the fact that officers lacking a customer service ethos may not see feedback as an important element. This is worrying, and needs careful consideration at a time when service user satisfaction levels may be falling. We found a clear divergence in force's approaches to *customer service*. Some were making significant efforts to drive forward a customer service philosophy and officers from these forces were able to demonstrate an understanding of relevant issues. Others rejected the concept of police service *customers* and considered only the terms *prisoners*, *victims*, *witnesses* and *complainers* to be acceptable. This point is discussed later in relation to training. In the meantime, we repeat our support for the use, at least internally, of the term *customer* to describe people who use policing services.

**51.** That is not to say that police forces should adopt a commercial or retail business approach to the public they serve. Rather it is intended to point out to all concerned – police, public and other stakeholders – that policing has to be designed with the public, including service users, in mind. For instance, conducting an excellent investigation into a sexual assault which contributes to conviction of the offender is important but it is equally important that the victim is not unnecessarily traumatised further by the investigative process. It is of course important to carry out the best investigation possible, but skilled detectives who use their experience and initiative can do this and balance the needs of the victim at the same time.

**52.** We also support the publication of a quality of service commitment. This is normal practice for most private sector organisations, public and private utilities, and a commitment of this kind has been in place for forces in England and Wales since 2006. We have suggested to ACPOS that, as a first step in the process of bringing together all policing standards for Scotland, the Association might produce a similar public-facing document that summarises the service standards people can expect for the most common or critical interactions with police. This would be similar to the previous Policing Charter but updated to contain more detail. Its contents could include an explanation of what police action will be taken when, for instance, people report a property crime, a sex crime, a road collision or a missing person, when it is necessary to close streets or footways temporarily for police operations, or what happens when police receive found property.

**53.** In designing these standards forces will have to be careful to ensure that any associated performance systems do not simply measure things like attendance times or the time taken to complete an investigation. The improvements which are being made in community policing, problem solving and neighbourhood focused activity will have to be integrated with the standards so that community based preventative policing can continue to be developed.



54. However, we also believe that any published standards for policing services should also be specific about what the public *cannot* expect. That is, it should articulate normal practice and describe in what circumstances this may not be achieved. It should also set out clearly the standards that these practices should achieve and the reasons why they might not be met. This will help to improve service users' understanding of some of the difficulties in delivering policing services and would thus be part of the process of managing expectations. Finally it will be equally important to clarify the responsibilities of service users in any published standard.

**Recommendation 2: That all forces publish details of the service that members of the public can expect to receive when they call the police. In order to promote a consistency across the Service that nevertheless acknowledges local force variations in service delivery, we propose that this take the form of a national minimum standard agreed by ACPOS that can then be tailored to take account of local differences. Publications should be sufficiently detailed that the public can understand what the police can and cannot do in various circumstances.**

55. Feedback to victims of crime in particular also has to be seen against the wider background of the criminal justice system as a whole. It is true that more crimes remain unsolved than are solved. However, it remains the case that for those that are solved and reported to the procurator fiscal, feedback from the various parts of the criminal justice system is at best uncoordinated and at worst confusing or duplicative, with the consequential risks of communication failure.

56. The prosecution of crimes and the management of policing in Scotland have always been managed separately, for sound ethical and practical reasons. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) relatively recently attempted to improve its communication with victims, primarily by creating the Victim Information and Advice service (VIA). Likewise, Victim Support Scotland (VSS) – a charitable status organisation which uses volunteers to provide assistance to victims of most types of volume and serious crime – has created a very welcome court-based service for victims and witnesses in cases that go to trial.

57. The Scottish Court Service too, communicates with victims who also become witnesses. The Scottish Prison Service is also obliged to communicate with victims of certain serious crimes as the date of the offender's release approaches. Add this to the victim feedback services provided by eight different forces and it is clear that victims of crime may well be on the receiving end of various related but separate and uncoordinated pieces of information about a process with which most are generally unfamiliar.

58. Worse still, when attempting to find specific information there is a strong possibility that a member of the public will either fail because s/he doesn't know where to turn, or give up before starting because the task is too confusing. There is also the possibility that the organisations themselves are not sufficiently proactive in pushing information out to individual members of the public, either because of anachronistic cultural barriers or because responsibility to do so falls between two or more agencies. Both of these factors may have been at play, for instance, in past failings to inform victims about bail conditions. This seems to be neither an efficient nor effective way to deliver joined-up public services. Nor does it appear sufficiently sensitive in dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.





**59.** Most of the developments that have taken place in the various parts of the criminal justice system have been needed at different times for different reasons. All have resulted in improvements in services. However, we suggest that it is perhaps now necessary for an overall review of the way in which the separate arms of the criminal justice system communicate with victims in particular, but also witnesses, with a view to combining efforts in a more efficient and effective way. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, for example, to imagine a single 24-hour contact centre for this purpose (or as part of an existing facility). Such a centre could provide a one-stop shop for the public, where necessary pulling relevant data from the ICT systems of each constituent service to ensure that victims are given the most up-to-date and comprehensive information available.

**Recommendation 3: That the Scottish Government together with the relevant criminal justice agencies consider a review of all information services provided by the criminal justice system to crime victims and witnesses, with a view to co-ordinating the information flow to victims in a way that respects the respective duties of different agencies but minimises the burden and uncertainty for victims and witnesses.**

### **Managing Expectations and Demand**

**60.** Many managers and supervisors told us that they saw managing demand and service user expectations as one of the major challenges for the service. Because of the high volume of calls received, there are times when forces are simply unable to respond quickly to requests for assistance. This is particularly acute at traditionally busy times, such as the mid-evening hours during weekdays when calls about young people are predominant and the weekends when the night-time economy is at its height. There is no doubt that despite planned injections of extra resources in the busiest areas, the Service is still overwhelmed at these peak times.

**61.** We are well aware of the significant efforts of forces to manage this kind of pressure and provide the best possible response at peak times. Nevertheless, demand for police to respond to calls concerning the behaviour of young people and, in particular, the night-time economy, have a disproportionate impact on police officer deployment at other times of the week. As a result, attempts to control a disorderly minority of young people in town and city centres during evenings and at weekends mean fewer officers available at other times and places when needed. Police authorities/boards also need to be aware of this situation if they are to be able to pursue possible solutions with, for example, local authorities and licensing boards.

**62.** Conversely we found parts of the country where officers, particularly those in community policing roles, did not feel under as much pressure. It is this variability in demand that has to be considered when balancing the need to provide a high quality service with public expectations. The highest possible level of service should always be provided. However, what that level looks like, and how local expectations need to be managed as a result, will vary according to the volume of demand.





### **Force contact centres**

**63.** We have already referred to Audit Scotland's 2007 report on police call management in an earlier section. We also explained that in order to minimise any possible overlaps we liaised with that agency when preparing this report. However, the importance of managing expectations around service quality and user feedback requires that further consideration be given to call centre management and process.

**64.** Clearly much of the initial task of managing demand falls to force contact centres. The inspection team visited a number of these facilities and interviewed staff whose job it was to take calls from the public and those who communicated by radio with police officers deployed to calls (known as *dispatchers*). In most cases the two functions are treated as discrete elements, with call-takers and dispatchers physically separated in the centres.

**65.** We were generally impressed by the dedication shown by the staff we spoke with, many of whom referred to the difficulties they had experienced in the early years of the centres. Nevertheless, many of those taking calls from the public felt neither empowered nor encouraged to try to manage the expectations of callers.

**66.** All forces have adopted a system of call-grading which helps to assess the type of police response to be given when a call is received. This framework sets out the type of calls that merit an urgent response and those that do not, usually on a sliding scale of five or six grades. The difficulty for some staff was their inability to influence this grading in certain circumstances. For example, it may be that an elderly or otherwise vulnerable member of the public reporting a crime or incident would benefit from a visit by police officers even though the nature of the incident would not normally merit this. Members of staff felt that this lack of flexibility was unhelpful and detracted from their ability to provide a high quality, i.e. more responsive, level of service where this was required. We were told of occasions when a request to a dispatcher to upgrade a call because of the caller's vulnerability could not be accommodated precisely because of the inflexibility of systems. Conversely we also met call-takers who felt perfectly able to influence the police response.

**67.** We understand the need to separate the call-taking function from the dispatch function. However, there are also needs to be more emphasis on managing the expectations of callers at certain times and/or in certain circumstances. Most contact centres were able to predict demand with reasonable accuracy, while dispatchers could tell us the times when fewer officers would be available to attend calls. It should not be difficult to train call-takers to deal with callers who are simply not going to receive police attention at times of peak demand, and to recognise and respond appropriately to more vulnerable members of our society. The process of negotiating what form the police response will take should start at the first point of contact, on the assumption that urgent calls always receive the prompt attention they require.



**68.** The following points highlight some of the views and concerns expressed by call centre staff (some of which echo findings revealed by the Audit Scotland study):

- There are various levels of service – there is a strong focus on numbers and throughput in some places and, while staff are told the emphasis is on quality, they feel under pressure to conclude calls quickly.
- Staff are told to deal with the call properly but are assailed with statistics – “*we know that’s what matters. Management don’t care about quality – its time etc that matters*”.
- Contact centre supervisors lack the skills to tackle staff with poor call handling skills. There are also various monitoring and mentoring systems, some of which do not provide adequate performance information.
- Call centre staff do not feel part of the police family.
- There is no training on how to negotiate a response with callers, and therefore no confidence in telling callers explicitly that it may be some time before they receive a response, e.g. “*we are very busy tonight but I can arrange for a police officer to call at a time convenient to you tomorrow...*”.
- Public misuse of the 999 system is widespread but the performance culture is focused on the 999 response times. A large proportion of 999 calls are not emergencies and focusing on these to the exclusion of other calls to the police may skew performance and affect the service delivered.
- There can be a significant number of repeat calls about the same incident (e.g. as a result of a motorway accident), causing unnecessary additional activity for call-takers.
- Police failure to attend results in further calls to the contact centre. Because call-takers do not know the availability of officers they cannot then negotiate the response with the caller.

**69.** Nevertheless, a great deal of activity is underway to improve the service provided by contact centres, to which the Audit Scotland report has supplied a helpful impetus. The ACPOS national call handling standards working group, which is a sub group of the ACPOS Information Management business area has responsibility for developing the response to the Audit Scotland report. During the inspection we were told that the work of that group focused more on the technical aspects of call-handling – such as time taken to answer and deal with the call – and less on qualitative issues. We did note that the working group was promoting soft skills training for call handlers and this is a positive step but we believe that more needs to be done with regard to the issue of quality in these facilities.

**70.** During the inspection we encountered a mixture of approaches to leadership in call centres. Some were managed by professional call centre managers from out with the police service, while others were overseen by senior police officers and police staff with a mixed management model. It is understandable that the Service used its own staff to aid the transition to centralised call centres from the various configurations previously in place. But with these facilities now established and performance beginning to improve, it may be useful for forces to review their position and consider what could be gained from importing external expertise. We believe that forces should make full use of existing, highly rated national networks, e.g. the Institute of Customer Services and the Institute of Call Centre Operators, in order to learn as much as possible about call centre management from other professionals in this area. We consider it to be good practice to maintain close links with these organisations.



### **Separate call handling units**

**71.** Most forces had established new arrangements for dealing with calls that do not require immediate or imminent police attendance. In these areas ‘call handling units’, or their equivalent, had been established, separate from force call centres and staffed by a mixture of police officers and support staff. Their purpose is to make contact with members of the public whose calls to the force are considered less urgent or could be resolved by further telephone contact.

**72.** In our opinion these call handling units are a helpful development. Some officers we spoke with felt that the units were no more than a return to more tried and tested methods of dealing with callers and similar to what had been in place before force call centres. While there may be parallels with earlier arrangements, we believe that these units offer a more consistent and more customer-focused flexibility than was possible previously. They also serve as a useful safety valve at times of high demand.

**73.** A full evaluation of the units’ effectiveness is beyond the scope of this inspection. However, we believe that calls dealt with by them may actually receive a better quality of service than those requiring urgent or timed officer attendance. For example, the units had time to deal with callers, staff had ready access to useful information and were briefed to provide as good a service as possible to these members of the public. They could also negotiate with callers and were empowered to do so. In contrast, members of the public expecting a police officer to attend in person often feel frustrated when this is delayed or the police officer appears to be trying to minimise the time taken before moving on to the next call.

**74.** In considering the use of call-grading, we believe there may be scope for further work to consider how it has evolved, how it is being applied and what the actual overall effect is – intended or otherwise. We will discuss the best way to approach this work with colleagues in Audit Scotland.

**75.** Forces need to be careful not to create different tiers of service without being fully aware of the effect this may have on the public. Managing expectations needs to be considered from a number of different perspectives to ensure that service delivery is equitable and transparent.

### **The role of sergeants**

**76.** As line managers, sergeants told us that they often had little time to concentrate on service quality. Requirements for recording police activity in response to domestic violence and sex offending for example, and for accurate crime recording, meant that much of their time was taken up by monitoring the compliance of officers and recording systems. This was particularly the case for sergeants working in busier, higher volume areas.

**77.** These findings were echoed in the recent report ‘Review of Policing in England and Wales’<sup>8</sup>, which found sergeants there facing similar pressures and requesting a return to ‘on-the-ground’ supervision arrangements which allow them to visit their teams of officers in their public contact duties and provide appropriate leadership, guidance and counselling as required. The same themes also emerged during our recently completed thematic inspection on productivity.

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<sup>8</sup> Final Report of the Review of Policing, Sir Ronnie Flannigan, Feb 2008



78. The above findings appear to imply that a sergeant's appraisal of an officer's work is more likely to consider process compliance than service quality. Therefore, officers are unlikely to be held to account if they have not provided feedback to a caller. Some forces do survey service users after the event to establish their level of dis/satisfaction. But we do not feel that this approach, which has been in place for some years in different forms, is adequate to tackle the underlying issue of service failure (we discuss this matter further under the section on training). It would also be helpful to use the terminology of customer service in staff appraisal processes. The competency against which officers are currently assessed in appraisals is 'relationships with the public'.

79. Such has been the increase in the range of tasks that sergeants now perform, there is little clear idea, either locally or nationally, of what these consist. The view beginning to form within HMICS, as a result of this inspection and that on police productivity, is that sergeants are spending most of their time on back-office processes and compliance monitoring. A great deal of this activity involves administrative tasks which need not be undertaken by such valuable and expensive resources.

80. We appreciate that there is no easy fix to this. At the time of the inspection, Central Scotland Police was experimenting with one means of introducing more police staff support to the front-line with the intention of reducing the administrative burden on Sergeants. However, it is no easy matter to separate out those activities that need to be performed by a sergeant and those that do not. In addition, there may be other ways of providing 24-hour administrative support to operational sergeants. At this stage we simply strongly suggest that all forces note this concern and consider means of addressing it. We may need to return to the subject of the role of the sergeant in a future inspection.

81. For the time being, all public-facing members of police forces should receive better guidance on providing a high quality service and feedback in particular. Competencies around customer service should then be assessed through staff appraisals. However, as we have said earlier, the introduction of new processes alone will not resolve this matter. The issues of empowerment, reward and recognition are all important in changing the culture of the service to achieve a better balance between law enforcers and service deliverers. Achieving this will take time, thoughtful leadership and careful management.

**Recommendation 4: That all forces have clear internal guidance on dealing with members of the public. This should focus on quality of service and with a specific requirement to manage expectations *and* provide feedback about progress as necessary. This guidance should set out the entire process for dealing with service users, from beginning to end, and define the relationships between the various parts of that process. Appropriate systems to promote compliance will be required.**

**Recommendation 5: That the appraisal systems/performance development reviews for all police officers and police staff be amended to include an assessment of both the quality of service delivered by the individual and any associated training needs.**

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### **Training in delivering quality policing services**

**82.** Audit Scotland's report on call management also highlighted the need to train centre staff comprehensively so that they could provide a high level of service both to the public and to officers attending calls. Whilst acknowledging the need for technical skills training, it also identified the emerging emphasis on customer service training.

**83.** During this inspection we noted that local versions of a course developed by Tayside Police had been introduced or were being used in most forces. We were impressed by Tayside Police's approach and pleased to see that it had adopted the term *customer* to describe all its service users, as recommended earlier in this report. The same force also told us of its intention to extend customer service training to all public-facing staff. Strathclyde Police also applied similar terminology, referring to staff in its contact centre as *customer service representatives*.

**84.** We fully recognise the high standard of public service already provided by many police officers and police staff. The police service is generally held in high esteem in this regard. However, there is a risk that this apparent success is masking failings in service delivery. The increased focus on customer service in call centre management and training is welcome, though we believe it is important to develop this awareness far beyond contact centre staff. As discussed in the preceding section, the need for a customer-focused approach applies equally to all public-facing staff, including operational police officers, public counter staff at stations and those in departments who have contact with the public.

**85.** During the inspection some call centre staff told us that they felt insufficiently trained in aspects of policing and were therefore uncomfortable dealing with the public in some scenarios in case they said the wrong thing. Furthermore, operational officers were unhappy at the extent to which they found themselves having to apologise to members of the public for the delay in responding to their calls at certain times. This is directly linked to the need to manage expectations, as discussed earlier, and again underscores the need for training. Staff must be given the confidence to explain to callers why it may be difficult to respond immediately to their request, without fear of management recrimination. But they must also be trained to deliver these messages in a way that does not alienate the caller. This is a key aspect of good customer service training.

**86.** As part of this inspection we examined the training currently given to police officers and police staff, taking account of Audit Scotland's findings but also considering the wider issues of service delivery beyond police contact centres. Because of the differing roles of police officers and police staff, approaches to training these two groups varied.

**87.** Newly recruited police officers are formally trained at the Scottish Police College. We were shown a particularly good lesson note on quality of service and the role of the constable, which is delivered to recruits in their second week of training. We took the opportunity to discuss the subject of customer service with focus groups of recruits who had recently received this training and found that it had not quite achieved its intended impact. Consequently, the College has undertaken to consider how it might more fully embed the theme of quality of service in all of its training courses.





**88.** New members of police staff receive varying degrees of training, depending on their role. However, it appeared that only those working in force call or contact centres were formally trained in the kind of customer service issues described above.

**89.** The Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) is now responsible for providing police training in Scotland. In our last primary inspection of the Scottish Police College we recommended a more strategic approach to training as part of which the Authority, in consultation with ACPOS, should “conduct an exercise to:

- assess the service need for the training currently provided by the College;
- examine those additional national and local training needs of the service which are not currently met by the College, including training in specialisms such as firearms and public order, and the extent to which local training fits or does not fit with the College syllabus; and
- scope the medium to long-term training needs of the service and review this periodically (e.g. every three to five years).”<sup>9</sup>

**90.** The findings of this report point to the need for a cultural change. This suggests a move away from thinking about service users as victims, witnesses, suspects, or criminals (and all the other categories of people who need police help) to the idea of providing customer services. It also points away from that part of the existing culture where the need for quality of service is driven by a fear of complaints. We found the beginnings of a move in this direction and we commend this. However, we also believe that all training for new members of staff should contain a strong focus on delivering high levels of service and good customer care. This should be embedded in training and reinforced at every available retraining opportunity. Furthermore, the Service should consider ways to address training for existing staff members.

**91.** The police service in Scotland has worked hard at making the recognition of diversity part of its mainstream business, and has deservedly won plaudits for doing so. Recognising diversity must also be interwoven with quality of service. Sir William Macpherson, in his report less than a decade ago on the way in which police handled the death of Stephen Lawrence, concluded that victims and their families had not been treated according to their needs<sup>10</sup>. There followed a fundamental change in policing across the UK which is still underway today.

**92.** Previously police forces and services had prided themselves on being *colour blind* in dealing with race and of undertaking their role “without fear or favour” (a quotation from the oath still used today). What Sir William pointed out was that this is no longer good enough and, in fact, can be unfair. People’s needs differ for many reasons, including those relating to their cultural perceptions and abilities. Policing must recognise this and tailor the service provided to these different needs. As far as feedback is concerned that may mean, for instance, using translation services for those for whom English is not their first language, text-based messages for those with hearing impairments, and plain English or third-party intermediaries for those with learning difficulties.

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Police College Primary Inspection: A report by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary 2007

<sup>10</sup> The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report Of An Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson Of Cluny, February 1999



**93.** At the time of the inspection we were aware of plans to consider a national approach to recruiting police officers in Scotland. Potentially this presents a Service-wide opportunity to recruit in customer focus skills. Many of the members of staff, both police officers and police staff, with whom we spoke had been recruited from occupations where they had received formal customer service training. The customer service skills that these people bring with them are clearly of benefit to the Service. In contrast, those who had not previously been involved in service industries were less aware of these issues.

**94.** We believe it would be helpful to consider customer focus specifically in the recruitment process for both police officers and police staff. This is particularly important at a time when changing demographics mean that some new recruits to the service may be younger than their predecessors and may therefore have had less prior experience in dealing with the public.

**Recommendation 6: That selection arrangements for all staff who will come into contact with the public should seek not just good communication skills but also a strong customer focus.**

**95.** We make the following recommendation in the knowledge that work is underway in response to our last primary inspection report of the College. However, we wish to acknowledge that the SPSA has the authority and capability to become the co-ordinator and provider of all police training across Scotland.

**Recommendation 7: That forces work with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) to ensure that all training for new members of staff is strongly focused on achieving at a minimum the service standards referred to in recommendation 2, but also good customer care. Both elements should emphasise the need to recognise the individual requirements of customers. These principles should be embedded in probationer and induction training and reinforced at every available training and re-training opportunity.**

#### **How was it for you?**

**96.** We have already alluded within this report to the lessons that can sometimes be learned from the private sector. One of these concerns feedback in the other direction, that is, *from* the customer/ member of the public to the service provider. There are already well-publicised and highly regulated means of dealing with complaints about the police from the public. Additionally, forces now record and count complaints about quality of service, not least because these provide good intelligence (and therefore *learning opportunities*) about the quality of organisational performance.

**97.** In terms of positive feedback from users, all forces received letters of appreciation and in some cases these outnumbered the complaints received to a considerable degree. That said, forces were less proactive in encouraging this positive kind of useful organisational intelligence.

**98.** Most forces invited feedback on the accessibility and coverage of information on their websites, by means of a feedback facility on their website. But only two (Grampian and Lothian and Borders) encouraged visitors to their websites to praise good service generally by e-mailing the force. Indeed the latter force provided a pro-forma for the purpose. We commend this as good practice and encourage all forces to explore this further. For instance, adding some text to incident information forms or even providing contact details on the liveries of marked police vehicles to encourage positive or negative feedback, need not necessarily incur great expense.







### The use of technology in service delivery and feedback

**99.** The inspection team took the opportunity to visit some non-police call management facilities during the fieldwork, in order to look for parallels in the way different services are delivered. There are many aspects that are unique to delivering policing services, but there are also areas of similarity with other providers. For example, operational departments in local authorities such as Social Work and Housing receive many calls for assistance that are comparable to those dealt with by the police. And *out of hours* calls to health services are often similar to the urgent non-emergency calls dealt with in police call centres. In addition, some of the public contact and patrol experiences of environmental and community wardens are similar to those of patrolling police officers.

**100.** The first point of contact for many of those requiring police services is the call or contact centre. Audit Scotland's report dealt with many aspects of call centre operation, highlighting the fact that the police service in Scotland receives some 16,000 such calls every day. It also identified the potential benefits of greater collaboration between emergency services and other public services that are centralising their call management.

**101.** We have avoided revisiting the areas covered by Audit Scotland, but we endorse their findings and would encourage forces to look more closely at emerging trends in other call handling environments in the public and private sector. We also believe that imaginative use of new technology and taking account of changing public expectations, both offer real possibilities to improve service user feedback and reduce demand.

**102.** An informative and imaginative government working paper from 2006, entitled *Mobile Telephony and the development of public services*<sup>11</sup>, recognised the opportunities for improving service delivery that the huge increase in mobile phone ownership presented. It described the change in ownership trends amongst the elderly and disabled, and drew attention to the fact that more than 90% of those under 65 years and half of those over that age own and use mobile phones.

**103.** The same paper also mentioned the police mobile data project, which was then being piloted and at the time of our inspection was being rolled out in forces across Scotland. The project involves police officers using portable data assistant (PDA) devices to gather and store incident and crime information electronically in one action. This negates the need for officers to re-submit information by manually transferring their previously written notes to electronic systems, and improves police officer visibility by reducing the amount of time spent in police stations.

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<sup>11</sup> Mobile telephony and the development of public services – A working paper by the Cabinet Office 2006





**104.** While acknowledging the obvious benefits in terms of victim safety, the police and other emergency services have often referred to the enormous challenge that mobile phones present to them as public services. Specifically, the ease with which the public can now contact them has brought about a significant increase in demand on 999 systems and non-emergency police numbers. However, we believe that many opportunities to enhance service user feedback and reduce demand on police services through the use of mobile phones, home computers and other mobile technology, so far remain unexplored. Familiarity with text messaging and e-mail amongst a large and increasing proportion of the population suggests that forces could adapt their information systems to give service users the option of receiving automatic updates about their incident, crime or complaint. (The same level of updates would have to be available to those without access to this technology.) These same systems could also be used to inform the public about general policing matters – a further aspect of managing expectations – and, conversely, as a means of public consultation.

**105.** During the inspection we discussed some of these suggestions with staff and managers, both those working in call management and those involved in front-line operational policing. We found that over the past few years the demands of creating and then consolidating police call management centres, allied to other demands arising from the national integration of police ICT systems, had limited any exploitation of emerging technological opportunities to improve user focus.

**106.** We also encountered some explicit resistance to the use of text and e-mails from those who felt this to be an inappropriate way of dealing the public and who believed that service users would not wish to be contacted in this way. We found no systematic approach in forces to gathering the mobile numbers or e-mail addresses of service users. We believe that this ignores recognised trends, and fails to take account both of the growth in this technology and the indications that users are attracted to it.

**107.** For 12-15 year olds, using a mobile phone is the second most popular activity beyond watching television<sup>12</sup>. The police service must be able to communicate effectively with young people, and other user groups, and mobile phones offer a further opportunity to enhance that public contact. We fully acknowledge the divide between those who use or have access to information and communications technology (which should decrease in future) and recognise that any arrangements that are put in place must be able to take account of those who do not have access to these technologies. In other words forces must offer multiple approaches to communication to ensure that the service is accessible by all. It will be important in designing new communication arrangements to consult different groups of service users to ensure that, as far as possible, their needs will be met.

**108.** We believe that opportunities to make rapid progress in this area may be lost if plans for ICT development do not have a strong user focus. We would encourage all those involved in service planning and ICT development work to take account of current and emerging customer service approaches in the wider public and private sectors when designing and commissioning new police systems.

**Recommendation 8: That, in developing new IT solutions for police functions, improving the quality of service provided to the public is one of the primary business benefits of all new systems. There should be a particular emphasis on using mobile phone technology and e-mail to supplement existing methods of communicating with the public and reduce demand on operational officers.**

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<sup>12</sup> Mobile telephony and the development of public services – A working paper by the Cabinet Office 2006



## Annex A

### SHARING EXPERIENCES – THE OUTSIDE WORLD

1. During the inspection we visited the contact centres of the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS 24 in South Queensferry. Themes emerging from these visits that may be of particular interest to practitioners were as follows.

#### Training

2. Core training for NHS staff who are not nurse advisors consisted of four weeks, followed by two weeks on a protected 'pod' and supported by an experienced staff member. Training for nurse advisors lasted a minimum of six months. The police service could compare this with its own training arrangements. The skills needed for advising and understanding policing and legal issues are often as complex as nursing skills, yet in some cases much less training is given to police call handlers. The NHS has found that telephone triage requires a new and different set of skills compared to the face to face triage in hospitals and therefore they cannot simply use an untrained nurse. There are parallels here with the use of experienced police officers who staff call centres.

#### Supervision

3. On our visits to police and other call management facilities we found that effective supervision in call centres was extremely important. We were told by senior NHS 24 managers that good supervision is the key to good service and that supervisors require focused training and free time to allow them to confront, coach and mentor staff who are having difficulties. Regular monitoring of calls by supervisors is necessary to ensure high levels of service, but we were told that in many places there was little time to do this. We also found supervisors in police facilities who admitted that they did not have either the time or the confidence to do this as they had not received relevant training.

#### Surveys

4. We found an example in the City of Edinburgh call centre where 500 customers each week are surveyed by telephone and the results fed back to staff individually and collectively. Staff knowledge of the survey process and the follow-up activity was intended to generate a spiral of improvement.

#### Victims

5. This inspection focused on feedback and quality of service for all users of police services. Nevertheless, we do of course recognise the need to ensure that certain victims of crime particularly receive appropriate and timely information. We had the opportunity to speak to representatives of the Scottish Government Victims Unit and Victim Support Scotland, and found that there may be opportunities for increased focus in some areas of that department's work.



**6.** The Scottish Executive launched the first ever Scottish Strategy for Victims in 2001, which was reviewed in 2004/05, with an emphasis on the practical outcomes needed to deliver the Strategy. In addition, the National Standards for Victims of Crime were published in 2005 and these were endorsed by agencies within the criminal justice system, who undertook to incorporate the principles behind the Standards into their own procedures. Since then, the emphasis has been on improving and expanding existing victim services, e.g. the Victim Information and Advice service provided by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, streamlining and focussing the work of Victim Support Scotland and taking forward some of the practical issues outlined in the review of the Strategy, such as the provision of an information pack for the families of homicide victims. In addition, other improvements have been advanced, such as the expansion of Victim Notification Scheme and the introduction of a national scheme that allows victims to provide statements to the court.

**7.** The effect of looking at existing services and at detailed projects meant that there was less emphasis on developing a national approach across all agencies, and this was confirmed during the inspection. Those we consulted spoke of the need to renew the efforts of agencies to ensure that the good work of the last few years was not lost. In our opinion, the role of the police, as set out in the National Standards, is not described in sufficient detail, although we appreciate that achieving agreement across eight forces is not easy. If victims are to understand fully what services they can expect from the police service in Scotland, then we believe that this should be reconsidered when recommendation 2 of this report is being addressed.

**8.** We have discussed earlier how the arrangements for victims of serious crime are well developed. The Scottish Government recognises the difficulties that victims face in finding their way through the criminal justice system, and has two dedicated websites, one for victims and the other for witnesses, as well as an information leaflet, all of which provide generic information explaining each agencies' role, how to contact them and how to complain. Victims of minor crime, however, may encounter a variety of responses from the police. Many forces provide all victims of crime and incidents with an initial information form or something similar. This gives the details of the officer who dealt with the crime, the force's contact details and normally some victim advice and victim support contact details. It is given to the victim at the time the incident is reported. In other forces a letter is sent to all victims of crime shortly after the incident, giving similar details to those described above. In some cases this letter is followed by correspondence advising victims that the enquiry is complete and informing them of the outcome.

**9.** We believe that these are helpful attempts to provide initial information to victims and, in some cases, to give feedback on the outcome of police activity. However, we recognise that some victims may view these as they might view 'junk mail', in other words these victims may not see automatically generated correspondence as a quality service. We suggest that a more consistent national approach to feedback, linked to the publication of policing standards, would help to give victims a better understanding of policing activity. Police forces may in fact be selling themselves short by not advising victims of the standard actions that will be taken in response to certain types of incident, as in the following example:





- a) *Your crime has been permanently recorded on our computer database, which is itself accessible to all police officers. This means that if your property turns up elsewhere in the future, it should be matched with this record.*
- b) *Furthermore, if a suspect in a different crime admits to or is suspected of committing this crime then the connection should be simple to make.*
- c) *The crime and its details will contribute to our overall knowledge of crime in your area, through analysis and statistical interpretation, for the purpose of investigation and working with other agencies to prevent future crimes.*

### **Victim Support Scotland (VSS)**

**10.** All forces have liaised with this organisation over the years. Contact is usually instigated in one of two ways: victims are automatically referred to VSS unless they actively refuse the offer of its services (opt-out schemes); or, victims must agree to their details being forwarded to VSS (opt-in schemes). The latter option is still exercised by some forces despite the ACPOS policy agreed in 2001 that all forces adopt the former (opt-out) procedure. This decision had followed lengthy discussion with the Information Commissioner and other interested parties to identify ways of increasing the previously disproportionately low numbers of referrals.

**11.** We believe that VSS could assist the police service further, by helping to provide feedback and updates to victims. As we have mentioned earlier, many officers told us that they had difficulty finding the time to contact victims. Discussions with VSS suggested that Victim Support volunteers could work with the police service to provide these updates. We appreciate the difficulties that facilitating external access to internal police IT systems may present, and we understand that this may give rise to concerns around data protection. However, we believe that these obstacles are not insurmountable. VSS is a strategic partner of the police service, and we know that workable solutions to other information-sharing partnerships have been established in other areas. We suggest that a small pilot scheme be conducted involving the creation of a volunteer *victim feedback unit* linked to a force contact centre and the new divisional call handling units referred to earlier in this report. If successful, this could result in greatly improved feedback services to victims that have few resource implications for the police service.

### **Central Scotland Police – Victims First Project**

**12.** During the inspection we took the opportunity to review Central Scotland's Victims First project. The project itself was informed by external research into staff views of various victim issues. The results were analysed and a range of measures then developed to address the emerging findings. Importantly this work considered victims from a multi-agency perspective and consequently the force has been working with criminal justice partners to develop solutions. The following actions have been taken or are planned:



- themed DVDs for staff have been produced to tackle perceptions and improve victim and service user focus;
- by the end of summer 2008 the force intends that the Public Assistance Desk (PAD) will call back all crime victims;
- staff on the PAD will call victims back to explain delays in officer attendance where this occurs; and
- the force will no longer send letters to victims of crime, and the money saved will pay for a victim care administrator. In future the force will only contact victims in writing if they secure a detection.

**13.** While this was clearly work in progress, we were impressed with the force's clear focus on victims and the steps being taken to improve feedback and customer care.

#### **HMIC England and Wales**

**14.** In this report we have referred to papers on call management produced by our colleagues in England. These two reports, *First contact*<sup>13</sup> and *Beyond the call*<sup>14</sup>, explored practices in forces south of the border only. While there are many similarities between our recommendations and the findings of these reports, we would urge forces to consider their content which goes beyond simply call centre management. There are many differences in policing across the country but many similarities too.

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<sup>13</sup> A thematic inspection of police contact management 2005

<sup>14</sup> A thematic inspection of police contact centres' contribution to incident management

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## Annex B

### METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Thematic reports by HMICS are prepared after careful but focused inspection of the subject matter. Our broad methodology is explained on our website. This shorter report contains less detailed evidence than has been presented in past thematic inspection reports; this is a deliberate effort on our part to present accurate but concise and focused reports on a wider range of issues than has previously been the case.
  2. The project initiation document (PID) was adapted from our standard inspection format, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model and circulated to forces, the SPSA and the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum. Following an initial consultation exercise and desktop research, we visited selected police forces in Scotland and the Scottish Police College. We also sought professional opinion from the Scottish Consumer Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and NHS 24.
  3. Liaison was established with the following: representatives of ACPOS; the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents (ASPS); the Scottish Police Federation and UNISON.
  4. Analysis of the responses provided a great deal of detailed information, permitting the inspection team to focus on the most relevant issues during the fieldwork visits. Fieldwork consisted of interviews with police officers and police staff across operational policing; quality of service; performance management and call management functions. We are grateful for the valuable assistance of the nominated liaison officers and all those involved in the fieldwork. In particular we would wish to thank Mr Martyn Evans, Director, Scottish Consumer Council for his invaluable guidance on consumer related issues.
  5. The report focuses very specifically on the areas related to the eight recommendations. In addition to these recommendations, we identified significant areas of good practice and opportunities for further improvement. These are listed in Annex A. We anticipate that forces will consider all of the comments in the report and the annex in reviewing their own internal selection processes.
  6. The inspection was carried out by HMICS staff under the direction of Malcolm R Dickson QPM, HM Assistant Inspector of Constabulary.
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