



STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD 6th DECEMBER 2016

Force Contact Update

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Strategic Policing and Crime Board with an update on the performance of the Force Contact department and set out upcoming changes and improvement plans.

BACKGROUND

2. The West Midlands Police Force Contact Department operates four call handling functions, two external - Emergency (999) and Non-Emergency (101) and two internal – Force Service Desk and the Crimes Service Team (CST). The emergency and non-emergency functions are staffed fully by police staff, the CST predominately police staff and the Service Desk is a mix of police staff and police officers. The Service Desk is also part of the Control/Dispatch element.
3. In addition, face to face contact is provided by Police Staff in the ten Public Contact Offices across the force area.
4. This update will concentrate on the emergency and non-emergency call handling functions and will reference the Service Desk function through its link to emergency call handling as its resilience support.

CHANGE UNDER WMP2020

5. Force Contact is currently undergoing significant change as part of the WMP2020 programme; to increase the resilience and flexibility of the department to deliver a quality service to the public.
6. The Force Contact project brings emergency and non-emergency call handling under one function and is developing operators, trained to handle both types of call. This is a significant piece of work that has necessitated staff moves, contract changes, shift realignment and a substantial degree of training. The

job descriptions for these roles are being reviewed and are subject of a consultation process with trade unions.

7. In addition to this change, within the Control/Dispatch function (within which the Service Desk sits) there has been a reduction of five control rooms to three to increase workforce resilience and align with the force strategy around estate reduction. This also involved a change in shift pattern for staff in these functions to better meet demand needs.
8. As a consequence of the significant changes outlined above, the performance data within this report will only portray a historical picture and it is difficult to compare to current performance or project future performance.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR EMERGENCY AND NON-EMERGENCY CALL HANDLING AND SERVICE DESK

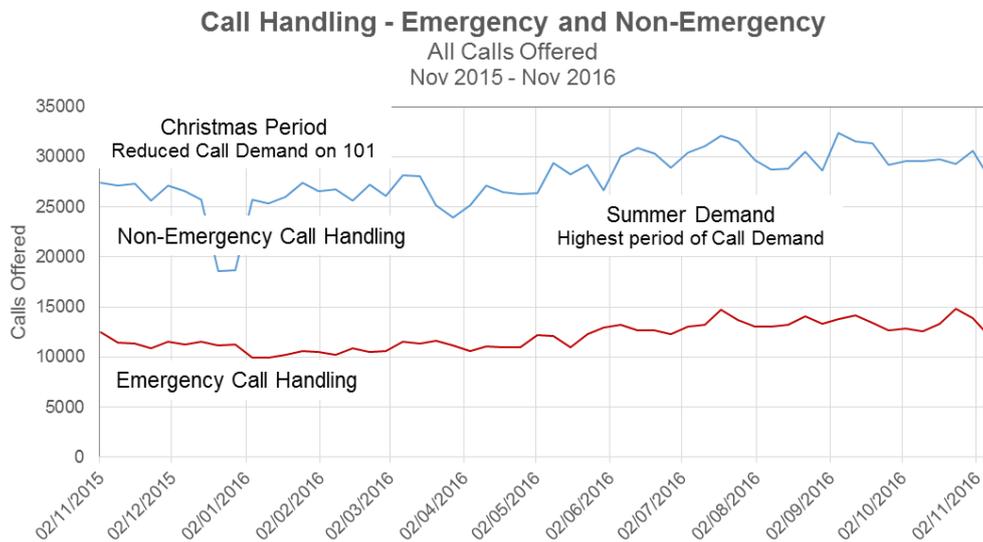
9. Force Contact has a sophisticated understanding of service delivery based both upon the rich data sets available and on staff knowledge and experience. This includes both call management and individual staff performance. Data forms the basis for daily reporting and monthly service delivery meetings.
10. Call handling within Force Contact is measured against a wide range of metrics with the predominant one being the Service Level Agreement (SLA). The current SLA measures for External Call Handling are:

Year to Date¹ Performance (since April 2016)		
	Emergency	Non-Emergency
SLA Target	90%	90%
	To answer 90% of all calls within 10 seconds.	To answer 90% of all calls within 30 seconds.
SLA	84%	48%
Total Calls	425,910	973,119
Abandoned Calls	9,303 (Abandoned after 10 Second Threshold)	172,381 (Abandoned after 30 second Threshold))
All Calls Answered	98%	82%
Average Time to Answer	12 Seconds	48 Seconds

11. Calls to West Midlands Police follow a regular pattern over the year. With the exception of specific spikes at New Year and Halloween, the summer is the period of greatest demand on both the emergency and non-emergency numbers.

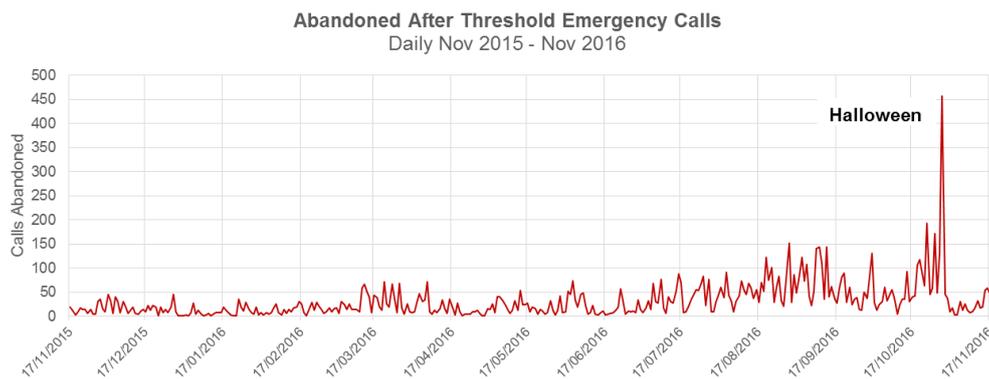
¹ Data cut off point - 21st November 2016

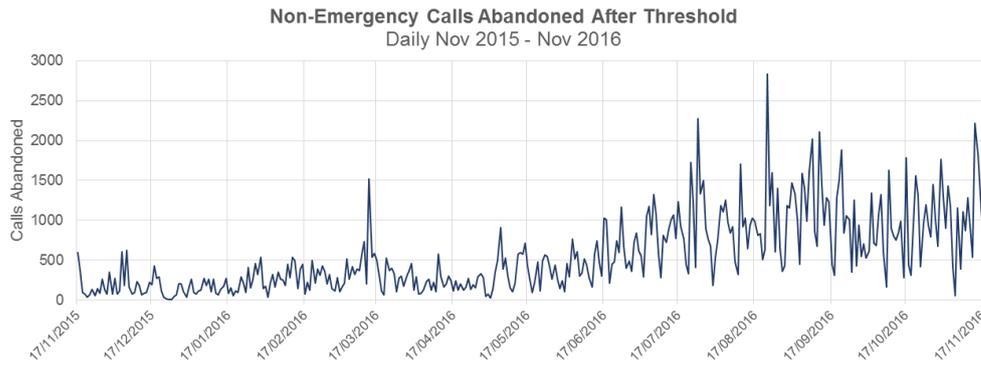
12. The figure overleaf demonstrates the call demand for the last twelve months, highlighting the steady increase from winter, through the summer, and tailing off into the autumn. This fluctuating demand brings with it challenges for the department in matching staffing resources to peak periods. This situation has been exacerbated this year by a higher than usual turnover in staff and increased and more sustained call demand over the summer.



13. A significant proportion of the increase in overall non-emergency calls can be attributed to repeat callers; callers redialling or retrying a number of times (up to 20% of additional calls). This has also has an impact on emergency call handling as some callers switch to trying 999 if they have been unable to get through on 101.

14. A further consequence of increased demand and staffing issues in the department has been a significant rise in the number of abandoned calls in both the emergency and non-emergency functions as demonstrated in the figures below.

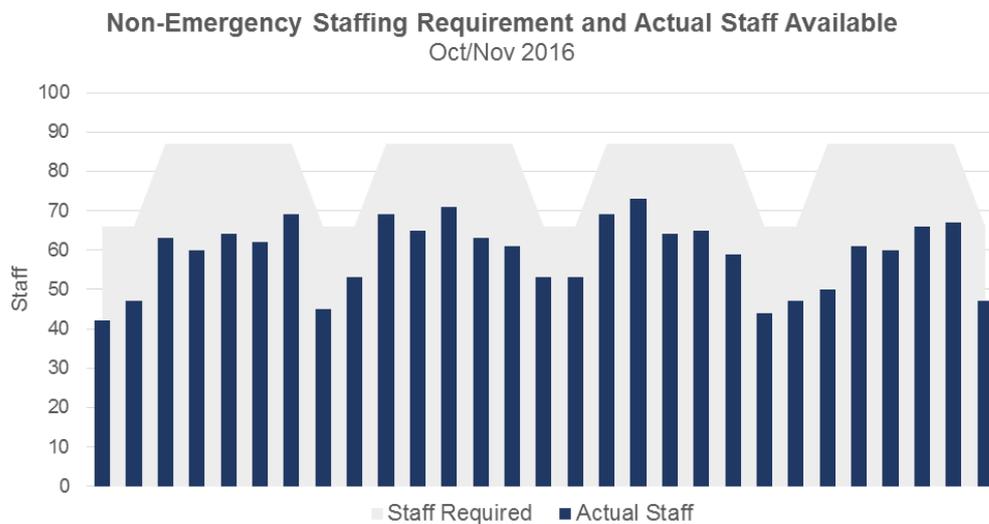




15. Given the critical nature of emergency calls, the department has ensured that answering these calls is the priority and that staffing in this function does not fall below the required number.

16. GMT Planet software is utilised to plan the numbers required to ensure full staffing for the emergency call handling function. This takes account of factors including previous demand and seasonal variations to predict call demand and determine the required numbers of staff to manage this. Any shortfalls in staffing identified are covered from other functions, predominately police officers in the internal control function (Service Desk). These police officers, who ordinarily control and manage incidents, are utilised either where there have been staffing gaps or where there are unexpected spikes in demand. This may be for an entire shift or portions of it. Currently 20% of all emergency calls are taken by staff other than emergency call handlers.

17. Staffing challenges have been more predominant within the non-emergency function, with the department unable to provide the required number of staff to meet expected demand as demonstrated in the figure below. This is in part a conscious choice to prioritise the emergency call handling function but also with the training burden for non-emergency call handling being higher than for emergency call handling it is more difficult to fill this role with staff from other functions.



18. As part of the WMP2020 programme Force Contact is bringing the emergency and non-emergency functions together which will start to provide benefits over the coming months as all call handlers will be able to manage both kinds of calls increasing the flexibility and resilience of the workforce in these functions. This, coupled with an ongoing recruitment campaign to bring the department back to full operating strength, will reduce the need to call staff from other functions to answer emergency phone calls.

IMPACT ON OPERATIONAL POLICING

19. Force Contact call handlers are not a switchboard function, they operate to first contact resolution principles, aiming to resolve as many requests for service as possible at the point of initial call. This ensures that only around 20% of calls translate into a requirement for a police officer to be dispatched.

20. As a consequence of the staffing challenges in the department, particularly within non-emergency call handling, there has been pressure on call handling times which in turn has reduced some of the capacity to maintain the high levels of first contact resolution. In particular over the summer this has seen an increase in incidents requiring a police officer to deal rising to 28%.

21. As previously described, resilience support to emergency call handling is currently drawn from police officers in the control function. Their primary role is the dispatch of police officers to and management of incidents. Whilst the telephony aspect of this support (Service Desk) has come under pressure during the past few months the abstraction of police officers is kept to a minimum and often for only parts of a day. The performance of the internally facing Service Desk is monitored in the same way as the rest of the department's functions.

Service Desk YTD Performance (since April 2016)	
SLA	90%
	To answer 90% of all calls within 30 seconds.
SLA	80%
Average Time to Answer	19 Seconds

22. Internal service desk support to emergency call handling does not impact on the radio support to officers on the street. The service desk function is for officers' use in non-urgent/non-threatening situations.

WORKFORCE OPTIMISATION

23. The most significant factor having an impact on the ability of the department to deliver the service that is expected is that the workforce is currently under-establishment. While the department is working through a number of methods to reduce demand and to make the existing workforce more flexible to create further

capacity to support the public need, the current focus is on bringing the workforce back up to strength.

24. Force Contact has an establishment of 238 staff in the call handling functions and there has been a long-held ambition to both over recruit and early recruit into roles in the department acknowledging that there has historically been a high turnover of staff in the department.
25. Due to the high turnover of staff the vacancy level within the function has increased to a point where it has had a detrimental impact on service delivery. Over the last year, recruitment has not kept pace with staff leaving the department so while 50 staff were recruited, 73 left resulting in a net loss of 23 staff.
26. The reasons for the high turnover are varied including, but not limited to; police staff recruited to join as police officers, fixed term contracts used to meet short term demand not being seen as attractive for prospective employees and some acknowledged fatigue and uncertainty over job security within the department as a result of successive change programmes, causing staff to apply for other roles.
27. The current recruitment plan is projected to deliver 37 new call handlers, fully trained operational and competent by April 2017. This plan has been enhanced by a more robust and coordinated strategy by the WMP Human Resources Department to bring the workforce back up to strength by recruiting up to 65 new staff. Measures including the following are being employed;
 - a. Posts are no longer on fixed term contracts making the option more attractive to potential applicants,
 - b. Delays for vetting and medical checks being reduced through investment and a changed approach in these areas;
 - c. Authority is given for the department to over-recruit and to recruit early according to projected staff shortfalls in order to keep staffing levels at establishment,
 - d. An accelerated recruitment process has been developed to incorporate an assessment centre, interview and medicals in one day,
 - e. Personnel from the Shared Services department are being used to manage the recruitment process reducing the burden on Force Contact staff.
28. Other options being explored to optimise the workforce and reduce demand include;
 - a. Options to bring police officers on restricted duties into the department to undertake certain functions,
 - b. Staff across the organisation who have the requisite skill set for call handling to be identified to give an option to bring them back into the function at times of unusually high demand,
 - c. Staff in the department working in other roles such as Service Delivery and project work to be pushed back into call handling at peak times,
 - d. Consideration being given to use of seasonal agency workers.
 - e. ICT developments such as Individual Voice Recognition and maximising the opportunity of the Digital Engagement for Citizens project.

ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT

29. There are over 900 staff within Force Contact with an average attendance rate of 91% for the past year. The rate of attendance varies across the year however some

of the lowest attendance has occurred at times of highest demand (Summer 2016). Whilst there has been an increase in attendance compared to similar period last year it still remains below the force average of 95%.

30. A significant factor in understanding the absence within the department is the age profile of staff with an older workforce than the rest of the force.
31. All staff returning to work following absence are supported with plans and staff with a higher than average absence rate are supported with specific Wellbeing Plans (approx. 100 staff currently).

LEAVE MANAGEMENT

32. All annual leave within Force Contact is managed centrally by the department's Resource Management and Performance Team. This ensures that resources are correctly managed and that individual need is balanced against operational necessity, including forecasted demand. The ability to grant a leave request will vary from section to section dependent on staff numbers but is predominantly influenced by the anticipated demand.
33. Granted leave requests range across the department from a high of 84% within the Public Contact Offices to a low of 47% in Non-Emergency Call Handling. This is a direct reflection of the staffing position within the respective functions. Across the department, since April 2016, 74% of leave requests have been granted with the 26% of refusal including multiple requests for the same, or similar periods.

PEOPLE DEAL

34. In order to support staff through the ongoing change processes, to ensure staff feel valued and that their welfare needs are being catered for, Force Contact has developed a plan to deliver the WMP People Deal within the department.
35. A detailed audit was conducted with Force Contact staff in order to establish a baseline for understanding of the force vision and values and to establish what mattered most to staff in the department.
36. The audit entailed staff;
 - a. Assessing themselves as teams and individuals,
 - b. Undertaking a 30 day challenge to encourage staff to accept responsibility for their own workplace and behaviours,
 - c. Analysing current ways of working and formulating a consistent way of working
37. The recommendations from this audit were as follows;
 - Use the opportunity that the change (TS1) presents to change ways of working and culture.
 - Provide a professional physical environment to encourage consistency and efficiency – set standards of service and behaviour.
 - Deliver and evaluate empathy training.

38. Force Contact aims to achieve consistency of standards, behaviour and values and to offer equality of opportunity and development across the entire department.

CALL HANDLER TRAINING

NEW STARTER TRAINING

39. All 'new starters' to Force Contact receive a two week induction training course which incorporates an overview of the force and department along with an understanding of the THRIVE+ assessment model, the force vision and values, standards and working practices. This is followed by a three to four week period of IT courses delivered by the Learning and Development department.
40. After all IT courses are completed the new starters are released to training office teams where they undertake a period of intensive practical training. This builds on the theory delivered in induction training and the IT courses they have received to ensure that they are fully prepared and ready to join their teams. During this phase they undertake live call handling under the supervision of experienced staff.

CURRENT CALL HANDLERS

41. Emergency Staff Training - Induction courses are planned for current 9s operators to get a clear insight into some of the areas of non-emergency call handling that were not undertaken on the emergency system (e.g. first contact resolution and other aspects that may be time consuming). Topics such as public protection, domestic abuse, mental health/triage car, legislation, crimes, forensics scene investigation, missing persons and crime prevention are covered.
42. Non-Emergency Staff Training - non-emergency call handlers are receiving training in the handling of 9s calls with a large group of approximately 60 staff trained by the 28th November. This training involves theory and then live-time call handling in a controlled environment.
43. Training will continue until all call-handling staff are up-skilled in both the emergency and non-emergency functions. This training will be phased, gradually increasing the number of up-skilled staff over the coming months with completion currently expected to be in May/June 2017.
44. Other than specific IT systems training, this training is delivered by two abstracted staff members from within Force Contact. The specialised nature of the department and the training requires the skills and knowledge that these staff bring. The training environment also includes live call handling which necessitates the trainer's experience.

WMP2020 FORCE CONTACT PROJECT

45. Force Contact holds a significant amount of data, from volumes of calls through to operator performance. Every call and how it is managed in terms of time, nature, etc. sits as part of the dataset that is available to understand demand and to plan future needs (over 5.3 million calls and 300 million associated data points since the inception of Force Contact as a department at the end of 2013.). This assists the department to be confident in predicting needs over time. Any changes in trends are closely monitored and the future impact on Call Handling and demand is assessed.

46. The process for designing the new working model (which commenced on 14th November 2016 in advance of WMP2020 Transition State 1 on 28th November) made use of all the data available to model future demand over peak periods of day and year.
47. The WMP2020 Force Contact project documentation details a number of benefits for the force that are expected to be realised throughout the life of the project. The Force Contact project has a number of interdependencies with other projects such as the Mobility project which will provide frontline officers with mobile devices, reducing the demand on the Service Desk for certain functions, and Digital Engagement for Citizens which will allow the public to self-serve in relation to certain activities.
48. The benefits realisation for the Force Contact project is currently under review by the WMP Organisational Change Board following a request from the Force Contact project team. The original benefits outlined for the Force Contact project are heavily dependent upon demand being driven down as other projects deliver their benefits.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

49. None apparent.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

50. None apparent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

51. The Board is asked to note the contents of this report.

Assistant Chief Constable Gareth Cann
ACC (Operations)