

# Police call management

An initial review



Prepared for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission  
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### Note:

Prior to September 2007 the Scottish Administration was generally referred to as the Scottish Executive. It is now called the Scottish Government. When dealing with the earlier period this report refers to the Scottish Executive. Recommendations for the future refer to the Scottish Government.

### Acknowledgements:

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# Summary

All Scottish police forces have recently centralised how they manage calls. More calls are now being answered but performance information is limited.



All Scottish police forces have recently centralised how they manage calls from the public. More calls to the police are now being answered and members of the public are generally satisfied with the service they receive when they call. However, limited performance information means forces are unable to demonstrate whether the new arrangements are delivering value for money or fully achieving the anticipated benefits. The lack of a national strategy has resulted in wide variations in approach.

### About the study

**1.** Using the phone is the most common way people get in touch with the police. The police receive about 16,000 calls a day, and half the adult population in Scotland have called the police at some time in their lives. The number of calls to the police has grown significantly in recent years and there have been major changes in the technology used both to make and to manage calls.

**2.** The police deal with a wide range of calls, some of which may require urgent police attendance or sensitive handling, and calls are often very important to the people making them. The effectiveness with which the police manage their calls contributes both to the quality of service the public receives and the efficient use of police resources.

**3.** This study is the first in-depth review of how police forces in Scotland manage calls from the public. We looked at the number and types of calls that police forces have to deal with and the effectiveness of their arrangements for managing these calls. The study covered both 999 and non-999 calls. While many of the calls made to the police result in officers attending an incident, this study focuses on call management and dispatch, rather than on how the police manage the resulting incident.

**4.** Over the last four years, all police forces have either partially or entirely centralised their call management arrangements. This has been a major change for all forces and it will take time for the new systems to bed down. This study reviews the impact of these changes and identifies where further work is needed in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness of police call management in Scotland.

**5.** We collected the evidence for this report during 2006 and 2007 through:

- a survey of forces' approaches to call management, covering the number of calls received, staffing levels, expenditure and performance in handling calls
- a survey of staff who work in police call handling and dispatch
- a survey of the general public, supported by a series of focus groups with people who had called the police
- a sampling exercise reviewing all the recorded incidents in two 24-hour periods in all forces
- interviews with force contact centre managers, officers who attend incidents and members of force executives
- a review of relevant documentation, including board and committee papers, performance reports, strategies and policies.

**6.** The report is arranged in six sections:

- **Part 1. Setting the scene** – gives an overview of the police service in Scotland and the background to recent developments in call management.
- **Part 2. Calling the police** – looks at the number and types of calls the police receive and how people know who to call.

- **Part 3. Call management arrangements** – reviews the new arrangements police have for managing calls from the public.
- **Part 4. Staff management** – covers issues relating to the staffing of call management and dispatch.
- **Part 5. Financial and performance management** – reviews how the police are currently managing the costs and performance of their call management services and public satisfaction with this service.
- **Part 6. Recommendations** – pulls together all the recommendations identified in the previous sections.
- **Appendices** include a glossary of technical terms, call management information in force performance reports and Study Advisory Group members.

### Key messages

**7.** Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of calls made to the police (primarily driven by the increase in mobile phones). More recently, UK forces were required to move to a national secure digital radio network. As a result, forces have had to make considerable changes in how they manage calls, in particular developing contact centres and introducing new technology.

**8.** The new police call management arrangements vary considerably across the country. Forces have different structures, policies, technology, call grading criteria and levels of expenditure. While some local variation is appropriate there needs to be more agreement about best practice to ensure the new arrangements deliver consistent and high-quality services to the public.

**9.** Information about call handling needs to be more consistent to provide a better national picture of demands, types of calls received and how the police respond. This would help police authorities, chief constables and the Scottish Government to scrutinise performance more effectively and decide how to use resources to improve services and provide value for money.

**10.** The key findings of our study are:

#### Calling the police

- The police receive nearly 16,000 calls from the public every day. Most people use the phone to contact the police, and call about a wide range of issues.
- The police receive more than half of the 999 calls that request an emergency service. However, most calls to the police are not 999 calls and do not require an officer to attend an incident.
- People do not always know the most appropriate number or service to call in different situations, resulting in the police receiving 999 calls that are not emergencies and handling calls that should be dealt with by other organisations.
- Forces' different recording practices make it difficult to obtain a national picture of types of calls to the police and to compare demands on different forces.

#### New arrangements to manage calls

- There was no national strategy to assist forces in establishing their new call management systems.
- Forces have developed their own local structures, strategies and policies in relation to call management, underpinned by different types of technology.
- Information technology (IT) systems to manage calls vary, preventing the easy transfer of information between forces, and some systems do not provide comprehensive management information. However, forces have now made a commitment to converge their systems to address these issues.
- Under the new call management arrangements more non-999 calls are being answered and forces report an improved service.

#### Staff management

- Forces find that matching staffing levels to demand is a continuing challenge and have adopted different approaches to managing this.
- The specialist requirements for staffing within contact centres are not always effectively supported by the forces' corporate human resources strategies and departments.
- Most staff working in police call management enjoy their work, but many find it stressful and do not feel their role is valued within their force.
- Forces need to do more to understand and meet the training needs of their staff.

#### Financial and performance management

- Forces spend between two and five per cent of their revenue expenditure on call management, but measures relating to value for money and cost-effectiveness are undeveloped.
- Members of the public are generally satisfied with how the police handle their calls but they are less satisfied with how the police keep them informed about the issue they had called about.
- The new call management systems have improved the availability of information about how calls are handled, but there are few nationally agreed performance indicators, making it difficult to compare the performance of forces.
- Existing performance information on call management does not adequately support police authorities, chief constables or the Scottish Government in fulfilling their strategic responsibilities or in scrutinising effectiveness.

#### Recommendations and future work

**11.** The report makes 18 recommendations which are set out at the end of each section and collated in [Part 6](#). As this is an initial review of how police forces manage calls from the public, we intend to follow up these recommendations in about three years' time. This timescale will enable forces to agree relevant performance indicators and subsequently provide us with consistent performance information against which to assess efficiency and effectiveness of police call management in Scotland.

# Part 1. Setting the scene

All Scottish police forces have recently centralised their call management functions.

## The police service in Scotland

**12.** About £1.3 billion is spent on policing in Scotland each year, primarily delivered by the eight Scottish police forces. Force areas vary widely in size, each covering a unique mix of urban and rural communities, with some very different policing needs. [Exhibit 1](#) summarises some of the main differences between the eight forces.

**13.** The basic arrangements for policing in Scotland were laid down by the Police (Scotland) Act 1967. This established that responsibility for delivering police services in Scotland should be shared between local police authorities (six joint boards and the two unitary councils, Dumfries and Galloway, and Fife), the chief constables of each of the eight forces and Scottish ministers, through the Scottish Government. This sharing of responsibilities is commonly referred to as the 'tri-partite arrangement'.

**14.** Police forces have experienced considerable change over the last ten to 15 years. Both demands and expectations have risen. The increased emphasis on tackling antisocial behaviour, on developing partnership working to improve community safety, and the introduction of the National Intelligence Model (NIM),<sup>1</sup> have all had a significant impact on how police manage their business.

**15.** Modern day policing is not just about the detection and prevention of crime. The 2005/06 annual report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland (HMCIC) describes the realities of policing today as being concerned with 'public reassurance; investigating crime; helping victims and those at risk of harm; and supporting the criminal justice system'.<sup>2</sup> Police receive and need to manage calls relating to all aspects of this wide-ranging remit.

## Recent developments in police call management

**16.** The need for police forces to improve their management of calls from the public has been highlighted for a number of years.<sup>3</sup> All forces report that the number of calls they receive has risen dramatically in the last decade, mostly due to the significant rise in mobile phone ownership. The number of mobile phone subscriptions in the UK has increased from seven million to 70 million in the last ten years.<sup>4</sup> In addition, all public services are now expected to be more customer-focused and responsive to the needs of their users.

**17.** In the first part of this decade, police forces throughout the UK were required by national government to replace their VHF and UHF radio systems. Forces co-operated to

## Exhibit 1

### Contextual information on Scottish police forces

Force	Population	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Number of local authority areas covered	Total police officer strength at 31 March 2007 (FTE)	Total police staff <sup>1</sup> strength at 31 March 2007 (FTE)	Annual revenue expenditure in 2006/07 (£000)
Central Scotland	286,390	2,643	3	828	386	66,588
Dumfries and Galloway	148,030	6,426	1	497	262	42,510
Fife	358,930	1,325	1	1,059	526	89,421
Grampian	529,890	8,736	3	1,374	780	115,281
Lothian and Borders	911,570	6,456	5	2,793	1,335	266,347
Northern	283,310	31,187	4	707	383	65,576
Strathclyde	2,207,100	13,625	12	7,822	3,046	601,263
Tayside	391,680	7,527	3	1,154	634	98,432
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>5,116,900</b>	<b>77,925</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>16,234</b>	<b>7,352</b>	<b>1,345,418</b>

Note:

1 The term 'police staff' refers to people employed in a police force who are not police officers.

Source: General Register Office for Scotland, Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate for Scotland, Scottish Government Police and Community Safety Directorate and Audit Scotland fieldwork

1 The National Intelligence Model is the mechanism used by the police for deciding operational priorities.

2 *Annual Report 2005/2006*, Her Majesty's Chief Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland.

3 For example, *Metropolitan Police Service: responding to calls from the public*, National Audit Office, 1995 and *Narrowing the Gap*, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, December 2002.

4 Ofcom.



procure a common system known as 'Airwave', a secure digital radio network for the exclusive use of the UK emergency services. The introduction of Airwave encouraged the consolidation of control rooms, linked to contact centres, in order to reduce the capital cost of installing the required technology. Some of the new arrangements for call management have been specifically designed around the increased flexibility and improved contact between officers that Airwave provides.

**18.** Over the same period, the growth in commercial call centres has led to the availability of improved technology for call management and demonstrated how customer-focused services can be delivered efficiently and effectively through a more centralised approach. People have become more familiar with dealing with contact centres<sup>5</sup> and expect similar ease of access and high levels of service from the public sector.<sup>6</sup>

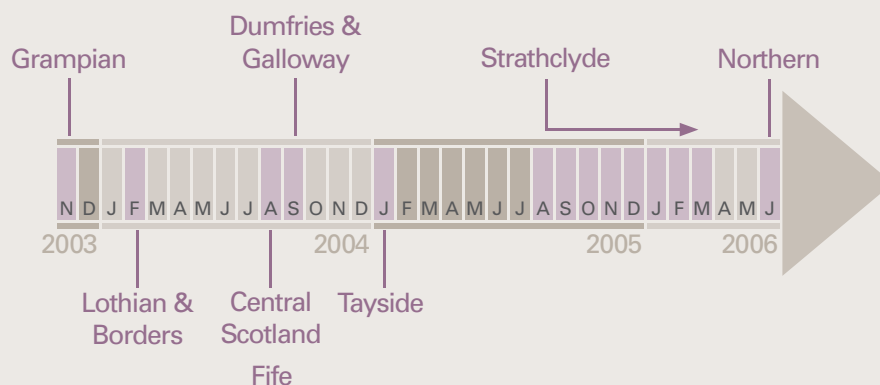
**19.** As a result of this combination of factors, all police forces in Scotland have had to review and reorganise how they manage calls from the public, resulting in each force adopting a more centralised approach to call management. To provide the infrastructure to support these changes, a total of £30.1 million has been invested in capital projects related to police call handling since 2000/01 (this figure excludes the capital investment in Airwave).

**20.** Centralising their call management functions has been a major change for the police and it is taking time for the new systems to become fully established and operate efficiently. In some forces, the new arrangements have only recently been implemented (Exhibit 2).

**21.** Overall, the new systems are intended to enable forces to manage

## Exhibit 2

### Timeline of new call handling systems going live in Scottish police forces



Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

the increase in call demand more efficiently and effectively and in particular to:

- provide a better service to the public, both by answering more calls and by providing more consistent information in response to enquiries
- free up police officer time by resolving more calls at the first point of contact
- make best use of the recent changes in telephone and radio technology
- improve the resilience of forces to manage calls in an emergency.

**22.** Prior to the introduction of the new centralised systems to manage calls, non-999 calls to the police were usually made to a local police station and answered by a station assistant or duty officer. Forces reported that these arrangements were failing to meet public demand. It was estimated that, at busy times, up to 50 per cent of calls went unanswered.<sup>7</sup> 999 calls were

answered separately at command and control centres, which were either centralised or based in divisions.

**23.** Many forces south of the border have also rationalised their call management arrangements. In April 2005, the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Association of Police Authorities published a set of National Call Handling Standards for England and Wales.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a thematic review of call management in the police service, undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in England and Wales, with input from HMIC in Scotland. Their report, *First Contact*, was published in November 2005 and contains recommendations aimed primarily at forces in England and Wales, although forces in Scotland have been encouraged to follow the same good practice. *First Contact* looked at the initial processes involved in managing calls from the public. In March 2007, HMIC in England and Wales published a second report, *Beyond the Call*, which reviewed incident management.

5 *First Contact*, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for England and Wales, November 2005.

6 *Good practice guidelines for the establishment of contact centres*, Scottish Executive, 2003.

7 *Local Connections: Policing with the Community*, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, March 2004.

8 *National Call Handling Standards*, Association of Chief Police Officers, April 2005.

**24.** Our report provides more detailed information on how Scottish forces manage calls from the public and builds on recommendations from the two HMIC reports.

**25.** This study focuses on police call management. However, similar changes have occurred in other public services in Scotland. For example, the establishment of NHS 24, the move to three call handling centres serving the Scottish Ambulance Service, and the introduction of centralised call management in a number of councils (for example, Stirling and West Lothian). Proposals for how the fire and rescue services in Scotland should manage emergency calls are currently being developed. Call handling procedures across the emergency services share similar characteristics and require the same types of resources (for example, similar IT capabilities and call handling skills). There may be potential for increased efficiencies if the emergency services in Scotland adopted a more partnership based approach to how they manage calls.

### Managing calls to the police is a complex process

**26.** People who call the police either use the 999 emergency line<sup>9</sup> or a non-emergency number. However, calls that come in on 999 lines may not always be emergencies, and calls coming in on other numbers may or may not require police attendance. Consequently, all police forces grade their calls depending on the immediacy with which an officer is required to attend. Currently there is no national call grading standard, but forces use four or five similar response grades:

- Immediate – there is, or is likely to be, danger to life or a risk of serious injury to a person or damage to property.

- Priority – deployment of resources is required as soon as possible but not immediately.
- Routine or scheduled – police attendance is required when resources are available or at a mutually convenient time for an officer to attend. Some forces split this into two separate grades.
- No attendance – police attendance is not required but it is necessary to record the incident. Some forces also record calls not involving an incident but which require some other action, such as providing advice or referring to another organisation.

**27.** Call grades are concerned primarily with the immediacy of police response required. So calls falling into immediate and priority response grades cover many different kinds of incident, and those graded routine, scheduled or no attendance cover an even wider range of issues.

**28.** Although routine, scheduled or no attendance calls do not require urgent officer attendance, they may be as important as immediate or priority calls, for example, where callers are providing intelligence to the police.

**29.** Once a call is graded by a call handler, if a police officer is required to attend, the call handler will pass information about the incident to a dispatcher. Call handlers and dispatchers have quite different functions. Call handlers answer calls, grade them and input details into the force systems. Some forces have separate call handlers for emergency calls and for non-emergency calls. In other forces, call handlers are trained to answer both types of calls.

**30.** Call handlers provide the bridge between the caller and the dispatcher. Dispatchers link with the officers on the street. They assess

the incident's priority in relation to other demands, assign the incident to a particular attending unit, or pass it to a local station to attend. Dispatchers also provide continued support and information to operational units, whether they are attending an incident or not. In some forces, dispatchers also handle emergency calls. The effective management of both these groups of staff is a crucial element in good call management. Staff management is discussed in detail in [Part 4](#).

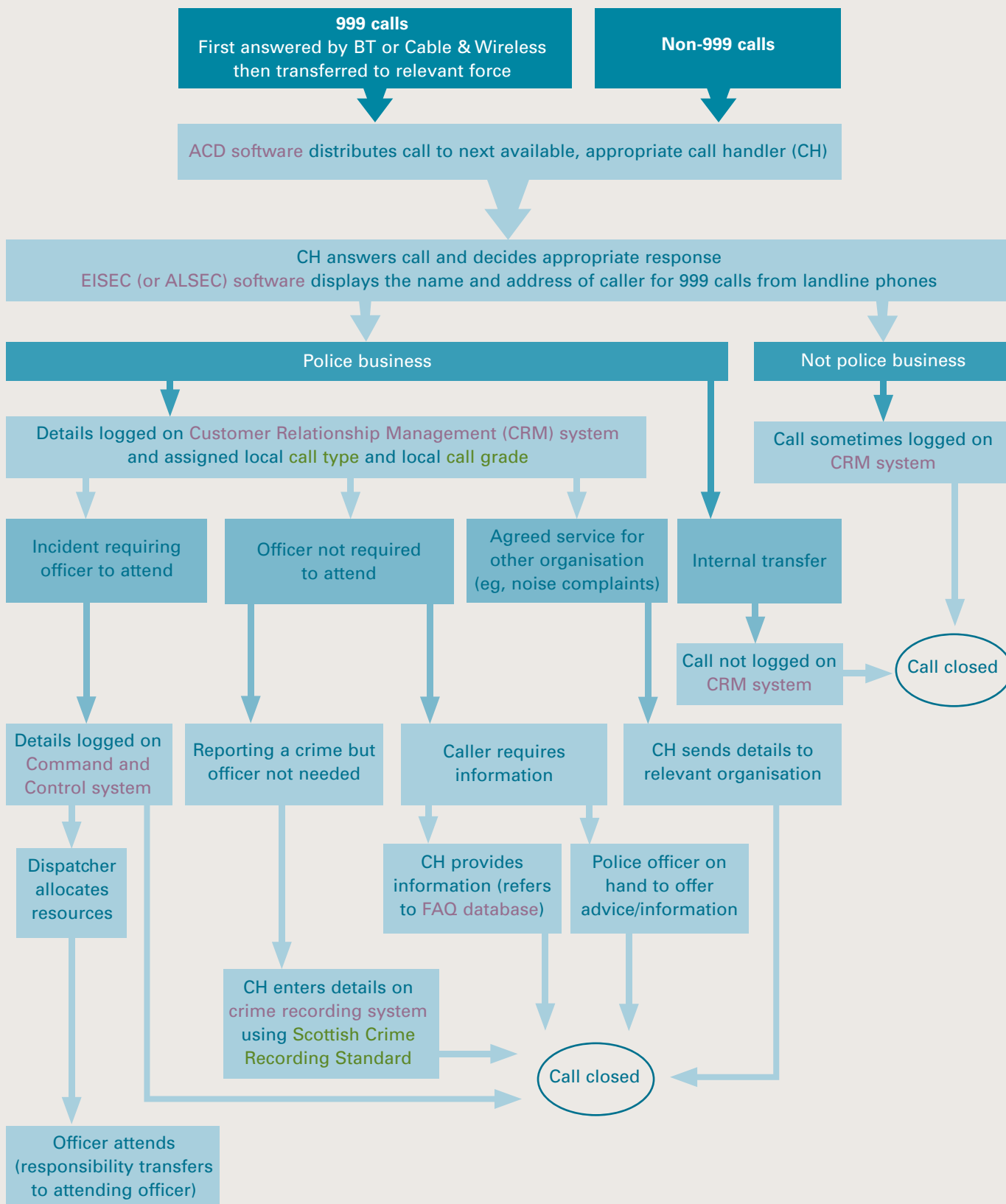
**31.** The application of information technology (IT) is central to effective call management. Forces use a variety of IT systems at different stages of the call handling process, typically these cover automatic call distribution (ACD), customer relationship management (CRM) and incident handling. The brand of software used, its configuration, and the functions it performs vary across forces. A discussion of these systems is included in [Part 3](#).

**32.** The processes involved in managing calls to the police are complex. Different standards cover different stages of the process. Some of these standards have been agreed nationally (for example, Scottish Crime Recording Standard), others have been developed locally (for example, call grading policies). [Exhibit 3](#) gives a general overview of how police manage calls from the public, showing what happens to different types of calls, and also the main IT systems and national standards used at different stages.

<sup>9</sup> References to 999 throughout this report include 112 calls. 112 is the single European emergency number. 112 calls in the UK are put through to the 999 service and are dealt with in exactly the same way as if the caller had rung 999.

### Exhibit 3

Generalised model of what happens when people call the police



# Part 2. Calling the police

Police receive about 16,000 calls from the public every day. Most calls are not emergencies, but people do not always know the right number to call in these situations.



## Key messages

- The police receive nearly 16,000 calls from the public every day. Most people who contact the police use the phone, and call about a wide range of issues.
- The police receive more than half of the 999 calls that request an emergency service. However, most calls to the police are not 999 calls and do not require an officer to attend an incident.
- People do not always know the most appropriate number or service to call in different situations, resulting in the police receiving 999 calls that are not emergencies and handling calls that should be dealt with by other organisations.
- Forces' different recording practices make it difficult to obtain a national picture of types of calls to the police and to compare demands on different forces.

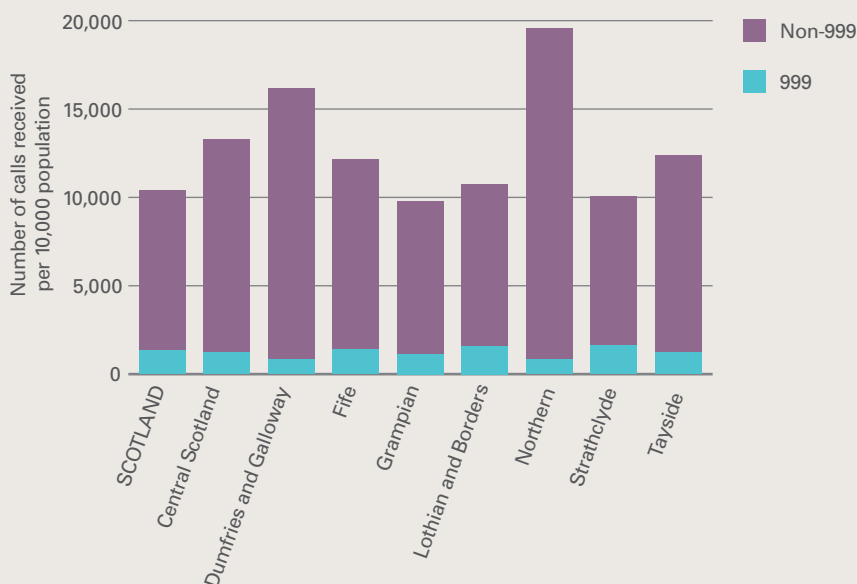
### Police deal with a large number of calls from the public each year, but the proportion of the population calling the police varies across forces

**33.** In 2006/07, the police received 5.8 million calls from the public, an average of 15,900 calls per day.<sup>10</sup>

**34.** The total number of calls received per head of population varies across Scotland, with forces serving the larger urban centres receiving proportionally fewer calls in relation to their population than more rural forces. However, a higher proportion of calls received by the forces covering these urban areas are 999 calls (Exhibit 4). For example, people living in Strathclyde are almost twice as likely to have called 999 than those living in the Northern area. Across

## Exhibit 4

Numbers of calls received from the public per 10,000 population in 2006/07



Note: While Northern had the highest rate of calls, this is an inflated figure as some calls from non-public numbers cannot be separated out from its non-999 calls from the public. Northern is continuing work with its systems to separate out more of these calls.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

the whole of Scotland, 13 per cent of the calls to the police from the public were 999 calls, but this ranged from five per cent in Dumfries and Galloway to 16 per cent in Strathclyde.

**35.** Our survey of 2,500 adults across Scotland found that half (52 per cent) had previously called the police.<sup>11</sup> In the year preceding our survey, 22 per cent of adults had called the police, with eight per cent having called 999 and 16 per cent a non-999 number (two per cent had called both) (Exhibit 5, overleaf).

**36.** Young adults (16-24 years) and older people (65+ years) were the least likely age groups to have called the police during the previous year on a non-emergency number. Those aged 65 years and older were also the least likely to have called the police on 999.

**37.** Using the phone is the most common way people contact the police. From our sampling exercise, 76 per cent of all the incidents police dealt with over two days were reported by phone by members of the public (most of the other incidents were from reports created by police officers themselves).

### Mobile phone use has increased the number of calls made to the police

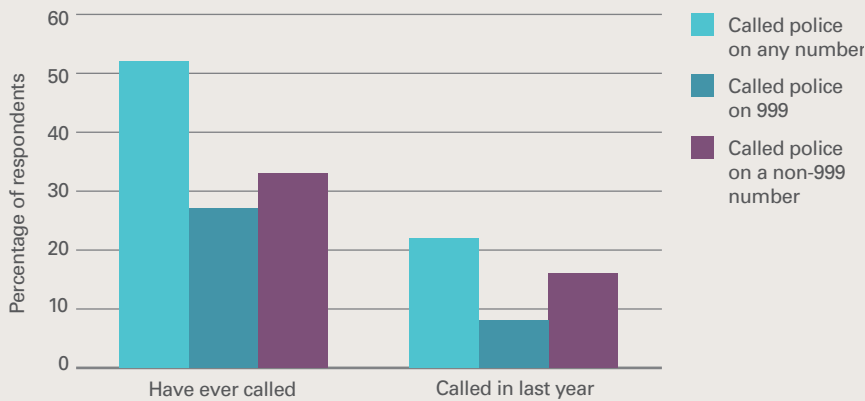
**38.** Many people now call the police using mobile phones. In our public survey, a third of those who had called 999 and nearly a fifth of those calling a non-999 number in the last year used a mobile phone. Four forces were able to provide some information on the proportion of calls received from mobile phones. The available figures show that on average

<sup>10</sup> 2006/07 was the first year that all Scottish police forces were able to record fully and systematically the number of calls they received from the public.

<sup>11</sup> 2,500 members of the general public (aged 16 and older) across Scotland were surveyed by TNS System Three through face-to-face interviews carried out in their homes during late August and early September 2006. Further details concerning the survey's methodology and full results are available from Audit Scotland.

## Exhibit 5

Proportion of adults in Scotland who have called the police



Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (general public survey)

nearly half the 999 calls and a fifth of the non-999 calls were from mobile phones during 2005/06. In our two-day incident sampling exercise across all the forces, half of the recorded 999 incidents and 16 per cent of the recorded non-999 incidents arose from calls made from mobile phones.

**39.** The increased use of mobile phones has also increased the number of multiple calls about the same incident, resulting in sudden influxes of calls. In our two-day exercise where call handlers in two of the forces manually noted details about the type of incoming 999 calls, a significant proportion of the incidents people were reporting had already been reported (38 per cent in Central Scotland and 19 per cent in Grampian). As forces do not wish to discourage anyone, particularly potential witnesses, from reporting incidents, their structures and systems must be flexible enough to accommodate these calls.

**40.** The increase in mobile phone use has also led to more accidental calls to the 999 emergency service. More than a quarter of the 27.2 million 999 calls made in the UK<sup>12</sup> in 2006/07 were 'silent' mobile calls, mostly caused by people accidentally knocking 999 on their keypad. If calls remain silent after repeated requests from the 999 operator, they are forwarded to an automated message service operated by the Metropolitan Police, where the caller is asked to press 5 twice if they require an emergency service. If they press 55, their call is connected to the appropriate force,<sup>13</sup> otherwise it is disconnected. Following the murder of Farah Noor Adams,<sup>14</sup> procedures for silent 999 calls were changed; if there are three calls from the same mobile within thirty minutes, they are now connected to the appropriate police force, even without the caller pressing '55'. Consequently, forces now receive more silent 999 calls from mobiles.

## Many 999 calls to the police are not emergencies, with some people using 999 when they don't know who to call

**41.** In the UK police received more than half (56 per cent) of the 999 calls in 2006/07 requesting an emergency service. Ambulance services received 36 per cent of the calls, and fire and rescue services eight per cent.<sup>15</sup>

**42.** People should only call the police on 999 for situations requiring urgent police attendance, either for an emergency incident relating to public safety or for a crime that is about to happen, currently occurring or where the offender has just left the scene. All other calls to the police should be on a non-999 number.

**43.** Forces' call and incident information systems are designed to capture detailed information on the individual calls they need to respond to, but most are unable to provide aggregated information on the extent to which 999 is being used inappropriately in their force area.

**44.** However, data from a number of sources show that the proportion of 999 calls which are not police emergencies varies:

- Dumfries and Galloway reports that 29 per cent of its 999 calls in 2006/07 were not police emergencies.
- In a two-day manual sampling exercise in Central Scotland and Grampian, 39 per cent of 999 calls were not police emergencies.
- In a one week manual recording exercise in Lothian and Borders, 51 per cent of 999 calls did not require immediate or priority attendance.

<sup>12</sup> British Telecom estimates approximately 22,000 of the 999 calls it receives per day are silent mobile calls.

<sup>13</sup> 1.5 per cent of silent 999 mobile calls from Scotland had the caller press '55'.

<sup>14</sup> In October 2005, Farah Noor Adams was raped and murdered after making five silent 999 calls on her mobile, sparking a review of the silent 999 call handling process.

<sup>15</sup> With the coastguard accounting for less than 0.1 per cent.

**45.** In our two-day sampling exercise of all police recorded incidents across Scotland, only a third of the 999 calls resulted in a recorded incident requiring immediate or priority attendance. In addition, a quarter of the people in our public survey who had called the police on 999 in the last year should, according to police guidelines, have called a non-999 number instead.<sup>16</sup>

**46.** When a call comes in on a 999 line, that line remains unavailable for other calls until the end of the call, even if the call is transferred to a non-emergency line. Dealing with inappropriate calls ties up lines which may be needed for genuine police emergencies. It is therefore in the interests of the police and the public to ensure 999 is used appropriately.

**47.** All forces report that a significant proportion of their call demand is non-police business, in particular people asking for a service or information provided by other organisations; however, forces' systems cannot identify these calls systematically. From our staff survey we found the majority of staff in five forces (Central Scotland, Grampian, Lothian and Borders, Strathclyde and Tayside) who had worked in call management in the force prior to the restructuring thought their force now received more calls for other organisations.<sup>17</sup>

**48.** In our survey of the public, we asked all respondents who they would call in different scenarios where police should not be the first agency contacted. For most scenarios the majority of respondents who would report the situation knew the appropriate agency to call. However, some would still call the police (Exhibit 6).

**49.** When asked, most people in our public survey would call the police on 999 for an emergency situation (88 per cent) and on a non-999 number for a non-emergency (79 per cent). However, 14 per cent did not know

### Exhibit 6

Proportion of people calling the police in situations where the police are not the most appropriate agency to contact

	Police	Relevant parties	Would not report	Don't know
Neighbours playing loud music at night	32%	15%	52%	2%
Saw a dead animal on the roadway	22%	36%	34%	8%
Need traffic information	16%	31%	43%	15%
Saw truanting children	8%	27%	62%	5%
Locked out of your house	8%	72%	16%	3%
Saw a fire in a rubbish bin	9%	79%	13%	2%
Saw an injured person	17%	89%	2%	1%

Note: Rows may add to more than 100% as multiple responses were allowed.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (general public survey)

what type of number they would call the police on for a non-emergency, while six per cent would call 999.

**50.** The most common reasons given by respondents in our public survey for having called 999 instead of a non-999 number were that 999 was the first number they thought of, they thought 999 was the right number to call, and they felt the situation was important enough to call 999.

**51.** Despite the many recent changes, three-quarters of all respondents in our public survey did not recall seeing any publicity during the past year on how to call their local police. Also, almost two-thirds did not recall seeing any publicity on when it is appropriate to use emergency and non-emergency numbers to call the police.

**52.** Participants in the focus groups commented that it can be difficult to call the police on a non-999 number if you do not have access to a local phone book, yet everyone knows 999. Despite the move to centralised call

handling, many participants found it difficult to find the right police non-999 number in the phone book. Until recently phone books usually listed many local station phone numbers and people sometimes did not know which station corresponded to their local area. Participants also felt that listing local numbers was misleading when, in reality, calls were answered at a contact centre. Most forces, however, have now updated the information in their phone books so they reflect the new arrangements more accurately.

### There has been limited progress in implementing a common approach to non-emergency numbers

**53.** All forces agree that they need to make it easier for people to know the right number to call when they have a legitimate non-urgent police enquiry. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) has explored the possibility of a single non-emergency telephone number across the eight Scottish police

<sup>16</sup> The proportion may be higher, as people sometimes regard incidents as more urgent than forces' incident attending policies.

<sup>17</sup> Everyone working in police contact centres and control rooms in Scotland in May 2006 (n = 1,709) was given a questionnaire. Seven hundred and eighty-nine surveys were returned, with an overall response rate of 46 per cent and ranging from 37 to 78 per cent across forces. Further information on the survey's methodology and full results are available from Audit Scotland.

forces. However, the costs involved in establishing a system which would accurately route mobile and VOIP<sup>18</sup> calls to the closest force are currently unknown and might be substantial. This is not an issue for 999 calls, as these calls are all initially answered at central UK locations which British Telecom (BT) and Cable and Wireless have to provide as part of their licence agreement.

**54.** In 2003, Grampian introduced a single non-emergency number for the whole force area, using the 0845 prefix. While ACPOS is trying to address the issues in establishing a single non-emergency number for all of Scotland, it has agreed to adopt a sequence of 0845 numbers, one for each force, building on the existing Grampian number.<sup>19</sup> Three forces (Dumfries and Galloway, Fife and Grampian) have implemented their 0845 number and now advertise it locally. Lothian and Borders and Tayside intend to implement theirs in mid-2008. Northern has the technology to implement its 0845 number, but does not yet have an agreed date to go live. Central Scotland and Strathclyde have not yet formally adopted an 0845 number and do not have a timetable for doing so. There are a number of reasons for this delayed implementation, including current call management restructuring within some forces and a concern about capacity to deal with the potential increase in demand that the introduction of the number may bring.

**55.** Some forces also expressed concern about introducing a new non-emergency number for their force if it is to be replaced with a national number at a later date, as this might further confuse local communities. 0845 numbers are not generally regarded as easy numbers to remember and some forces think

that people may not be sure which number in the series to call if they are in another force area. The adoption of eight different numbers also prevents national publicity, so forces have to meet the cost of advertising their number locally.

**56.** Improving information and access to services is not just a challenge for police forces, it is important for all public services. This is an area where there is potential for greater co-operation between different public sector organisations, at both a national and local level. This would enable costs and expertise to be shared between organisations and local communities to get improved information and access to a wide range of local services from fewer contact points.

**57.** Some initial work was undertaken by the Scottish Executive investigating the potential of police and local authorities sharing a non-emergency number. This included a review of the five areas in England and Wales currently piloting the use of 101 as a 24-hour shared police and local authority non-emergency number for community safety and antisocial behaviour calls.<sup>20</sup> The 101 service was introduced to improve access to, and delivery of, non-emergency services and to resolve as many calls as possible at the first point of contact. It was anticipated that the number of calls to the 999 service would then reduce. Initial assessments of the 101 service, however, have shown that up to 70 per cent of calls are not about community safety and antisocial behaviour, calls to 999 have not reduced, and there has been double-handling of calls, with details entered into the 101 database having to be re-entered into a partner's different, unlinked system.<sup>21</sup>

**58.** Further work is required nationally to look at different options for improving access to non-emergency services. In the meantime the police need to improve their information systems so they can monitor the types and volumes of inappropriate 999 and non-999 calls. Identifying these calls will also identify the partners they need to work with in order to reduce the demand these calls place on their force. Given that it can be confusing for people to know which organisation to call in different situations, police and their community planning partners need to work together locally to improve public knowledge about who to call and what numbers to use.

#### **Forces have introduced some alternative methods of contact, but use of these is limited**

**59.** All forces provide facilities for the public to contact the force through other means, for example, by fax or email. However, forces receive very low volumes of contact through these methods. Our public survey also indicated very low levels of alternative contact, although 12 per cent of respondents had visited a police station during the previous year.

**60.** People with speech or hearing difficulties, or who speak little or no English, can find it hard to use phone-based services. All forces are able to receive calls from landline text phones (used by those with speech or hearing difficulties), and all except Northern have telephone interpreting services available. Fife has taken the lead in developing and promoting SMS text messaging facilities for people with hearing difficulties, and other forces are currently considering introducing this approach. While forces report little to no contact by these methods, they have a statutory duty to promote equal access as they develop their contact centres.

<sup>18</sup> Voice Over Internet Protocol.

<sup>19</sup> However, one number in the series is already used by a private company, interrupting the sequence.

<sup>20</sup> The specific incident types that 101 is intended to deal with are vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property; noise nuisance; intimidation and harassment; abandoned vehicles; rubbish and fly tipping; drunk or rowdy behaviour; drug related antisocial behaviour; and street lighting. In each 101 area, the police force is the accountable body for the service.

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished data from research commissioned by the Scottish Executive.



### Forces' different recording practices make it difficult to obtain a national picture of different types of calls to the police and to compare demands across forces

**61.** Each force has different policies and practices for recording the types of calls they receive. As a result, it is difficult to make systematic comparisons across forces on the number of calls for different types of incidents, and also makes their subsequent management difficult. For example, if a caller reported that their garage had been broken into, depending on the force contacted, this call could be categorised as:

- crime
- property violation
- dishonesty
- housebreaking or housebreaking – garage, or
- no set category (two forces use a free text description of incidents).

**62.** In our two-day sampling exercise we examined the different types of incidents reported to each force, most of which were reported by the public by phone ([Exhibit 7, overleaf](#)). While there are some variations between forces, the most frequently reported type of incidents were a nuisance or disturbance, road traffic incidents and reports concerning specific crimes.

**63.** If the incident is confirmed as a crime, it is formally recorded on the force's crime recording system (in addition to its original recording on the command and control system), where there is a national standard for recording types of crime, and the incident record is closed.

**64.** ACPOS has also recently agreed a national standard for incident recording, linked to the agreement to use a common command and control system. This should provide more consistent information on how reported incidents are recorded in future.

**65.** In addition to different incident recording practices, forces' policies on call grading also vary, but to a lesser extent, with forces broadly following the four or five categories described in paragraph 26. Call grading is important both for the efficient deployment of officers (so the most urgent incidents for attendance are prioritised) and in managing the expectations of callers, as the call grade describes the level of police response they might reasonably expect to their call.

**66.** In practice, each force's grading of calls depends to some extent on the force's strategic priorities and, in particular, how it is working to meet the policing priorities of different local communities. Standard criteria for call grading have been agreed in England and Wales. Agreeing similar criteria in Scotland should improve the consistency of police responses across the country, while still allowing forces the flexibility to tailor response times to meet local community needs.

### Recommendations

- The Scottish Government, together with the emergency services, should explore the potential for increased efficiencies in handling 999 calls through improved partnership working and sharing of resources.
- Forces should improve their information systems to identify the extent of the inappropriate use of 999, work together to agree and implement best practice in how to handle these calls and work with the Scottish Government and other emergency services to improve the public's awareness of when to use 999.
- Forces should work with their community planning partners to improve awareness within local communities of what numbers to call in different situations.
- The Scottish Government should liaise with ACPOS, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum and other public services to look at options for providing easily accessible non-emergency numbers across police and local authorities.
- Forces should ensure that the new Scottish Incident Recording Standard is designed to provide more consistent and comparable information on call demand and is implemented consistently.
- Forces should agree standard criteria for call grading.

**Exhibit 7**

Types of incidents reported to police over a two-day sample period

Force	Number of initial call types	Most frequent types of incidents (% of all incidents)	Most frequent sub-category (% of all incidents)
Central Scotland	99 categories, which group up into eight higher level categories.	Disturbance (41%)	Quality of life issues (11%)
		General policing (20%)	Information/advice (6%)
		Road traffic (16%)	Vehicle issues (7%)
		Crime (11%)	Theft other (4%)
Dumfries and Galloway	22 categories which do not group up.	Assistance required (21%)	Sub-categories are assigned to incidents, however, the sub-category is not provided on incident reports.
		Advice call (17%)	
		Road traffic (9%)	
		Crime (9%)	
Fife	45 categories which group up into eight higher level categories.	Antisocial behaviour (34%)	General disturbance (8%)
		Crime (21%)	Dishonesty (10%)
		Admin (17%)	For information (5%)
		Police services (12%)	Suspicious incident (4%)
Grampian	186 categories which do not group up.	Disturbance (9%)	No sub-categories of call classification.
		Road traffic other (8%)	
		Alarm (7%)	
Lothian and Borders	No set categories – free text descriptions of incidents		
Northern	83 categories which do not group up.	Disturbance/noise (31%)	No sub-categories of call classification.
		Road traffic collision (8%)	
		Dishonesty (7%)	
Strathclyde	74 categories which do not group up.	Complaint (18%)	No sub-categories of call classification.
		Assist member of public (12%)	
		Disturbance (7%)	
Tayside	No set categories – free text descriptions of incidents		

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

# Part 3. New arrangements to manage calls

The police now answer more calls, but the lack of a national strategy when systems were being established has resulted in wide variations in approach.

## Key messages

- There was no national strategy to assist forces in establishing their new call management systems.
- Forces have developed their own local structures, strategies and policies in relation to call management, underpinned by different types of technology.
- Information technology (IT) systems to manage calls vary, preventing the easy transfer of information between forces, and some systems do not provide comprehensive management information. However, forces have now made a commitment to converge their systems over time to address these issues.
- Under the new call management arrangements more non-999 calls are being answered and forces report an improved service.

## Since 2000/01, £30.1 million has been invested in capital projects related to call handling

**67.** The Scottish Executive made additional capital funding available to support the move to centralised call management systems. **Exhibit 8** shows the capital funding received by each force for call management since 2000/01 (excluding funding for Airwave). The amount of capital funding varied, depending on a number of factors, including the forces' approach to centralising call management, as well as the level of demand and resources required.

## There was no national strategy to assist forces in establishing their new call management systems, resulting in wide variations in approach

**68.** In order to receive the capital funding, each force had to submit a business case to the Scottish Executive. These were then reviewed to ensure they met the business objectives related to the funding. However, no attempt was made at a national level by the Scottish

Executive, ACPOS and the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum to establish national objectives, technological compatibility or consistency of approach among the eight forces.

**69.** The need for a coordinated approach during this time of fundamental change was highlighted by HMIC in 2002 in *Narrowing the Gap*.<sup>22</sup> However, forces considered that the development of their call management arrangements was a matter for each individual force, and systems needed to reflect local requirements. In addition, forces started with different technology, staffing levels, working practices and accommodation.

**70.** While all forces have introduced new systems centralising their call management arrangements, there is variation in how they have done this. Under the new arrangements all forces receive 999 calls at centralised sites. Five forces also receive their non-999 calls centrally. Northern and Tayside receive their non-999 calls at multiple sites that are 'virtually' connected, while Strathclyde receives them

## Exhibit 8

Capital expenditure on police call management from 2001/02 to 2005/06

Force	Capital expenditure (£000)					
	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Total
Central Scotland	0	0	1,400	0	0	1,400
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fife	0	24	1,922	1,483	89	3,518
Grampian	130	883	33	0	0	1,046
Lothian and Borders	117	2,528	6,696	955	70	10,366
Northern	0	0	994	842	833	2,669
Strathclyde	159	1,801	2,174	4,204	1,256	9,594
Tayside	0	872	276	328	0	1,476
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>6,108</b>	<b>13,495</b>	<b>7,812</b>	<b>2,248</b>	<b>30,069</b>

Note: Dumfries and Galloway has absorbed the cost of call handling (restructuring, new IT systems and additional staff) into its revenue budgets. This has been paid for by making efficiency savings elsewhere.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork



centrally then transfers those requiring specialist assistance to multiple sites. [Exhibit 9](#) summarises the differences in approach to call handling.

**71.** There is also variation in forces' strategies and policies for managing calls and in the IT systems they use. In addition, call handling practices vary. For example while most forces (except Dumfries and Galloway, and Northern) have an initial recorded message, the information in the messages and options offered to callers differ.

**The variety of IT systems used to manage calls prevents the easy transfer of information between forces and some systems are unable to provide comprehensive management information**

**72.** In *First Contact*, HMIC noted that the IT systems used by police forces in call management fall into two broad categories. Customer-facing systems are used to capture information about the call and the caller. Inward-facing systems capture information about the incident to help determine an appropriate police response and to provide attending officers with relevant information about the incident.

**73.** Customer-facing IT systems include automatic call distribution (ACD) systems (which route calls to the next most appropriate and available call handler) and customer relationship management (CRM) systems (which provide call handlers with the caller's recent contact history). Inward-facing technologies include command and control systems (which store information about the incident). Inward-facing systems are also used to manage staffing levels and monitor call quality aspects (eg, time taken to answer calls). The IT systems used to fulfil these roles vary across the eight forces, with more than 25 call and incident management IT systems operating in forces across Scotland ([Exhibit 10, overleaf](#)).

## Exhibit 9

### Different approaches to call handling in the eight Scottish police forces

Force	Model
Central Scotland	A centralised contact centre on one site deals with all calls and dispatches resources. There are dedicated 999 call handlers, dedicated non-emergency call handlers and dispatchers.
Dumfries and Galloway	
Fife	
Grampian	Call handling and dispatch are dealt with via a centralised service based at two sites. The force command room has dedicated 999 call handlers and dispatchers. The force contact centre has dedicated non-emergency call handlers.
Lothian and Borders	Call handling and dispatch are dealt with via a predominantly centralised service. A contact centre on a single site deals with all 999 calls and dispatches resources. The majority of non-emergency calls go to the contact centre; calls to stations outwith the City of Edinburgh go to these stations during station hours and to the contact centre out of hours, or if not answered. Non-emergency calls to the contact centre go through a switchboard. There are dedicated 999 call handlers, dedicated non-emergency call handlers and dispatchers.
Northern	Two contact centres deal with all 999 calls and dispatch resources. Depending on where the caller is phoning from, non-emergency calls go to either one of the two contact centres or one of nine inspector stations. Call handlers take 999 and non-emergency calls and dispatch resources.
Strathclyde	Call handling is dealt with via a centralised service based at two sites. All calls go directly to one of two contact centres, each of which has dedicated 999 call handlers and dedicated non-emergency call handlers. Call handlers answer what queries they can and transfer other calls to an area control room for dispatch or divisional call handling unit for police advice.
Tayside	Two contact centres deal with all 999 calls and dispatch resources. Non-emergency calls go to the virtual contact centre (VCC), which consists of 18 local stations and dedicated non-emergency call handlers at one of the contact centres. Dispatchers within the two contact centres answer the 999 calls, dispatch resources, and answer non-emergency calls outside the VCC hours, or if not answered by the VCC.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

**Exhibit 10**

The range of IT systems used to manage calls in Scottish police forces

Force	Customer-facing systems		Inward-facing systems		
	Automatic call distribution	Customer relationship management	Incident handling	Workforce management	Quality monitoring
Central Scotland	Vivista and VIP Semap	STORM	STORM	CARM	None
Dumfries and Galloway	Vivista, Cisco Call Manager and ARC Solutions	In-house system	In-house system	IMAGE	None
Fife	Symposium	In-house system and Visionware	STORM	CARM/In-house system	NICE
Grampian	HiPath Procentre and Meridian	STORM and EasySpeak	STORM	CARM	NICE
Lothian and Borders	Affiniti's Pro 100 and Frequentis ICCS	VANTAGE	CAPTOR	NSPIS CEDAR	None
Northern	HiPath Procentre and Vivista	INTERGRAPH	INTERGRAPH	None	NICE
Strathclyde	Avaya Communications Manager	ASPIRE	STORM	IEX TotalView Workforce Management	NICE
Tayside	HiPath Procentre and Realitis ISDX	HiPath Interactivity Manager and Siemens Contact Management Application	CAPTOR	FOCUS/SCOPE	NICE

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

**74.** This variation has resulted in a lack of integration between IT systems, preventing information being passed between the different internal systems, and making electronic transfer of information between forces difficult. In addition, opportunities for forces to share expertise in using IT systems are limited and their potential position in the IT marketplace weakened. As a result, force requirements (for example in relation to interoperability and reporting) may not be a high priority for suppliers.

**75.** An important function of contact management systems is the collation and reporting of management information. Although call handling technology allows effective tracking of individual calls, forces are often unable to extract and collate relevant call data for management purposes; for some IT systems this can only be done manually.

**76.** Over the last two years, there has been increased collaboration among chief constables and senior police officers in relation to IT. ACPOS has established a Business Change Programme Board, with senior level representation. The focus of the Board's work is on changing business processes and delivering IT systems to support these changes (rather than managing IT systems in isolation). The Board works in close liaison with the new Scottish Police Services Authority, through a Memorandum of Understanding agreed between ACPOS and the Scottish Executive in June 2006. Through the Business Change Programme Board, forces have given a commitment to converge their existing systems over time.

**77.** The need to manage incident response effectively and efficiently is considered a core operational requirement for all forces. One of

the first areas where agreement on convergence has been reached is in relation to a common command and control system.

**78.** There are several elements to the command and control project, the primary one being an agreement that all forces will purchase the same software (STORM MA) as their existing systems come up for renewal. The introduction of the same command and control system across all forces in Scotland is designed to deliver a number of benefits, including easier exchange of information about incidents between forces and efficiency savings through reduced costs for upgrades, maintenance and training.

**79.** However, it will be some years before all forces in Scotland have the new system. Lothian and Borders plans to implement STORM MA in

November 2007 and Dumfries and Galloway in late 2008/early 2009. Tayside has provisional plans to introduce STORM MA in late 2009, while the timescale for Northern has yet to be confirmed. The four forces already using STORM software will simply need to upgrade their existing systems.

**80.** As well as supporting the move to STORM MA and developing a national incident recording standard, the command and control project also includes plans to develop a common geographic information system and the team is working with the Scottish Government to develop a national gazetteer of all place names.

#### Under the new call management arrangements more non-999 calls are being answered

**81.** In 2006/07, 92 per cent of all non-999 calls to the police from the public were answered (Exhibit 11). While there is no nationally comparable information for the period prior to the centralisation of call management, forces consider this to be a significant improvement in performance.

**82.** In centralising call management arrangements, one of the aims was to provide a more consistent response to enquiries from the public, as well as releasing front line officers for policing duties. Forces report that they are now resolving more calls without the need for officers to visit the caller. A number of forces have analysed some of the business benefits from the introduction of their centralised call management arrangements to identify the level of resource which has been freed up by centralising call management (Exhibit 12, overleaf).

**83.** Most forces are now able to measure the number of calls resolved by their contact centres, but they have different approaches to how they define and report this (for example, some separate resolution rates for 999 and non-999 calls, some define a transferred call as being resolved while others only define a call as

**Exhibit 11**  
Proportion of non-999 calls from the public that police answered in 2006/07

Force	Non-999 calls received	Non-999 calls answered (%)	Non-999 calls abandoned (%) <sup>1</sup>
Central Scotland	345,183	91.6	8.4
Dumfries and Galloway	227,207	91.8	7.7
Fife	386,693	92.3	7.7
Grampian <sup>2</sup>	458,376	80.7	19.3
Lothian and Borders <sup>3</sup>	832,454	94.2	5.8
Northern <sup>4</sup>	530,868	91.6	8.0
Strathclyde	1,868,644	94.1	5.9
Tayside	438,181	92.8	7.2
Scotland	5,087,606	92.1	7.8

Notes:

1 Where abandoned calls were those where the caller had hung up before their call was answered, irrespective of whether it was during a force's recorded message or within the first ten seconds (see paragraph 141). Answered and abandoned percentages do not necessarily total 100 per cent as a small proportion of calls received an engaged signal.

2 Grampian reported having less than their required level of call management staff to answer non-999 calls during 2006/07, due to high levels of staff vacancies (up to 23 per cent of FTE posts), and a seven per cent sickness absence rate.

3 Fifty-three per cent of Lothian and Borders' non-999 calls were put through to the assistance desk after the switchboard; of these, 14.5 per cent were abandoned before the assistance desk answered. Also, although the overall rate of calls abandoned before first answered was 5.8 per cent, this was 4.3 per cent during switchboard hours, but 17.2 per cent outside of switchboard hours, when the assistance desk answered calls.

4 Northern's number of non-999 calls is an inflated figure as calls on some non-public numbers cannot be separated out from their non-999 calls from the public. Northern are continuing work with their systems to separate out more of these calls in the future.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

resolved if it requires no further police attention). This prevents valid comparisons of the proportion of calls resolved by the contact centres across the forces.

**84.** In setting up their new call management arrangements, all forces developed databases of frequently asked questions (FAQs) to assist call handlers in providing consistent and accurate responses to callers' enquiries. These were usually based on a database used by another force. A number of forces used the FAQ database developed by Cumbria Police as a starting point. However, individual FAQ databases are expensive to maintain, and much of the information is generic to all forces.

**85.** Many forces in England and Wales subscribe to the Police National Legal Database (PNLD), which is maintained on behalf of subscribing forces by West Yorkshire Police. This is a comprehensive web-based information service which both call handlers and the public can access for information on a wide-range of legal questions ([www.askthepolice.co.uk](http://www.askthepolice.co.uk)).

**86.** Scottish forces have agreed in principle to subscribe collectively to PNLD. This would enable PNLD to provide and maintain information on Scottish law and to include local information relating to individual Scottish forces. The use of PNLD could improve the consistency of response across Scotland to

## Exhibit 12

### Examples of the impact of centralising call management on officer time

In **Fife**, the contact centre now takes details of minor traffic incidents (where there is no injury) primarily for insurance purposes, resulting in police attending 1,400 fewer incidents a year.

**Grampian** records the number of crime files completed by call handlers. A crime file records information on a specific incident and is usually completed by the attending officer. Each crime file completed by a call handler represents a saving, as an officer does not have to attend. About 750 crime files are completed each month by call handlers, saving around 1,000 officer hours, which equates to around £65,000 per month.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

members of the public and, with national advertising, has the potential to reduce call demand by encouraging people to check information via the Internet. ACPOS should progress the Scottish subscription to PNLD as soon as possible.

### Centralising call management has affected both forces themselves and the communities they serve

**87.** Before setting up their new systems forces tried to estimate their level of call demand. However, their existing technology and structures prevented accurate measurement and most forces underestimated the number of calls they would receive, the number of staff required to answer those calls and the extent of the cultural change required to make a centralised approach to call management successful. As a result, many forces experienced significant teething problems when their new systems were launched.

**88.** Although performance in answering calls is improving, forces still need to convince local communities of the benefits of the new arrangements. The perceived loss of a locally-based police service, coupled in some forces with initial poor performance in answering calls, led to community dissatisfaction with the new arrangements in some areas. This was reflected in adverse comments in the local media and complaints from local councillors.

**89.** A number of forces encourage local community groups to visit their contact centres to build community understanding about the level of demand faced by forces and the range of calls received. There is also scope for forces to improve communities' understanding of the role and performance of their contact centre by publishing more customer-focused information. Only three forces, Fife, Strathclyde and Northern, had a marketing strategy for their new contact centres.

**90.** In reorganising their call management arrangements, forces have concentrated on improving the service to the public by handling their calls more effectively. However, the new arrangements have also had a significant impact within forces. As part of the study we interviewed a number of officers who attend incidents about their experiences since their force introduced centralised call handling.

**91.** A consistent perception which emerged from these interviews was that the new arrangements had not delivered all the anticipated benefits. The most common problems that officers reported were not getting the information needed to handle incidents effectively, as the call handler had not asked the right questions, and a lack of local knowledge about a particular community or area. However, a number of officers also agreed that they were now attending fewer incidents which did not require a police visit.

**92.** Most attending officers we interviewed felt they could have been more fully consulted about the changes, both in the early stages of reorganisation and once the new contact centres were established. Some forces are taking steps to address this, for example, Grampian has established contact centre liaison officers in each division who are responsible for dealing with complaints about calls. In Central Scotland, the contact centre managers run focus groups with divisional officers to discuss service improvements.

**93.** A number of forces have recently undertaken reviews of their new systems to improve performance. These have tended to focus on more effective ways of ensuring there are sufficient numbers of trained staff to meet demand and that IT systems are meeting forces' needs. There is scope for forces to improve their understanding of the needs of both their internal customers and local communities, and to put measures in place to meet those needs more effectively.

## Recommendations

- The Scottish Government, ACPOS, and the Scottish Police Authority Conveners' Forum should work together, and with the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA), to agree a national strategic approach to developing call management in Scottish police forces.
- Forces should implement the new command and control system consistently across all forces, ensure it delivers the anticipated benefits, and monitor the impact.
- Forces should do further work with other agencies, local communities and their own staff to build greater understanding of their needs and to improve awareness of the functions and benefits of a centralised approach to call management.



# Part 4. Staff management

Matching staffing levels to demand is a continuing challenge. Call management staff generally enjoy their work but many find it stressful, and training needs to improve.



## Key messages

- Forces find that matching staffing levels to demand is a continuing challenge and have adopted different approaches to manage this.
- The specialist requirements for staffing within contact centres are not always effectively supported by the forces' corporate human resources strategies and departments.
- Most staff working in police call management enjoy their work, but many find it stressful and do not feel their role is valued within their force.
- Forces need to do more to understand and meet the training needs of their staff.

### Forces have made different strategic decisions for the deployment of staff within their contact centres and control rooms

**94.** Effective police call management relies on well trained and experienced staff. Contact centre staff are typically the public's first contact with the police, and the service they provide will influence callers' perceptions of the force as a whole.

**95.** Staffing is the most significant element of expenditure in call management, accounting for more than 90 per cent of expenditure in all forces except Northern (71 per cent) in 2006/07. There were 1,386 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in police call management across Scotland at 31 March 2007, and nearly 1,550 employees. These figures include staff involved in call handling and dispatch, as well as supervisors and managers.

**96.** Forces have made different strategic choices in relation to

## Exhibit 13

### Call handling staff contract details

Force	Shift patterns for majority of staff	% of call handler posts at 31 March 2007 that were full-time	% of dispatch posts at 31 March 2007 that were full-time
Central Scotland	Rotating	91	89
Dumfries and Galloway	Both	55	89
Fife	Rotating	7	87
Grampian	Fixed	64	75
Lothian and Borders	Fixed	70	67
Northern	Rotating	19	85
Strathclyde	Fixed	84	90
Tayside	Fixed	9	80

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

deployment of their call management staff. Salary grades,<sup>23</sup> shift patterns, numbers of staff entitled to shift allowances or weekend enhancements, and the proportion of full-time and part-time staff all vary (Exhibit 13).

**97.** While it is unlikely that one set of staffing terms and conditions is best for all forces' call management functions, there has not been any work done nationally on the relative advantages or disadvantages of different shift systems, appropriate pay grades, or balance between part-time and full-time staff.

**98.** Forces also vary in their approach to employing police staff,<sup>24</sup> as opposed to police officers, within call management (Exhibit 14). Except for Central Scotland where all the dispatchers are police officers, police staff make up the majority of forces' call handler and dispatcher posts, although the proportion of police officers is higher for dispatchers than call handlers. In *Beyond the Call*, HMIC concluded there is no ideal

ratio of police staff to police officers. Forces should, however, ensure that their ratio meets the needs of their particular call management structures.

**99.** Employing police staff allows forces to recruit specialised staff and release funding which can be used to increase the number of police officers operating on other frontline duties, such as patrol. It can also result in significant efficiency savings with reduced training, salary and pension expenses in comparison to police officers.

**100.** Police officers' employment conditions however, provide more flexible working hours and a contingency against the risk of police staff strike action. Officers also provide specialist police knowledge and expertise.

**101.** In some forces, police officers on 'light duties' (returning from injury, for example) are assigned to the force contact centre. This can enhance the level of police knowledge and

<sup>23</sup> Salary grades for police call handling and dispatch staff at 31 March 2007 ranged from £14,000-£15,000 to £17,000-£18,500. Salaries for police officers are the same across forces and based on rank.

<sup>24</sup> The term 'police staff' refers to people employed in a police force who are not police officers. Police staff can be employed in posts which do not require the use of police powers or specialist police skills.

**Exhibit 14**

Proportion of call management posts held by police officers and police staff at 31 March 2007

Force	FTE call handlers		FTE dispatchers	
	Police staff %	Police officers %	Police staff %	Police officers %
Central Scotland	100	0	0	100
Dumfries and Galloway	100	0	100	0
Fife	90	10	72	28
Grampian	89	11	61	39
Lothian and Borders	89	11	80	20
Northern	92	8	75	25
Strathclyde	95	5	77	23
Tayside	100	0	89	11

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

skills within the contact centre and improve communication between the contact centre and other parts of the force. However, in some cases, this has been done without assessing whether these officers possess the required competencies, providing them with customer service training, or accounting for their higher likelihood of sickness absence while recuperating. Not addressing these issues inevitably impacts on the effectiveness of the contact centre.

**102.** Some forces have enhanced the level of police skills and experience in their contact centres by employing retired police officers to handle calls. In order to ensure these retired officers have the required customer care and other competencies, they are required to complete the same assessment and training as police staff.

**103.** It is important for forces to make appropriate strategic decisions on the staffing structures of their contact centres and control rooms based on the needs of the call management service, and taking into account the costs of the different options.

**Matching staffing levels to demand is a continuing challenge for many forces and there is no consistency across forces on optimum levels of staffing**

**104.** Prior to the introduction of their centralised call management arrangements, many forces could not accurately assess the level of call demand or the extent to which officers were taken off operational duties to assist in managing calls in local stations.

**105.** Contact centre managers reported that this lack of information led to many forces underestimating the level of staffing required to provide a round-the-clock service. Insufficient numbers of staff when the contact centres first opened meant that calls were not answered quickly and resulted in increased overtime expenditure. Overtime is still used by forces as the most flexible way to meet demand.

**106.** In addition, once the full extent of demand was realised, changing the agreed grades and relevant terms and conditions (to provide more flexible staffing arrangements) has proved time-consuming for contact

centre managers, requiring extensive negotiation with police staff and their representative bodies.

**107.** All forces endeavour to match the number of available staff to their predicted call levels. However, not all forces have the IT capability to do this in a systematic manner, relying instead on experience and previous call levels to decide staffing requirements. Call demand is generally predictable. The challenge for forces is in providing adequate levels of staffing to meet predicted demand within the constraints of the staffing arrangements agreed when the contact centres were first established.

**108.** The number of calls per FTE post varies across the forces ([Exhibit 15, overleaf](#)). While the number of staff required depends to some extent on the force's policies for call handling (for example, the extent to which the force aims to resolve a call without sending an officer to attend), this variation raises questions about levels of efficiency across different forces.

**Forces' corporate human resources functions and policies are not always effective in supporting the specialist requirements of call management**

**109.** In many forces, senior managers of the contact centres spend the majority of their time dealing with human resources (HR) issues, in particular around recruitment, managing sickness absence and ensuring adequate staffing levels. Most forces' corporate HR departments are primarily focused on issues related to police officers. Policies for police staff tend to be less developed and are not always flexible enough to accommodate the specialist requirements of the contact centres.

**110.** Some force contact centre managers reported that a lack of corporate succession planning prevents the recruitment process starting as soon as future vacancies (such as retirements and maternity leave) become known. Call management

## Exhibit 15

Number of calls received in 2006/07 per FTE post at 31 March 2007

Force	Number of all calls received per FTE post <sup>1</sup>
Central Scotland	4,062
Dumfries and Galloway	5,064
Fife	3,675
Grampian	3,482
Lothian and Borders	3,127
Northern	Unreliable data <sup>2</sup>
Strathclyde	4,485
Tayside	5,004

### Notes:

1 Includes all staff posts within police force contact centres and control rooms. How forces have allocated staff (eg, proportion that are call handlers, dispatchers, supervisors, managers, trainers, etc) varies.

2 Northern's FTE call management staffing requirements were estimated as many calls are answered at local stations by staff with a number of other duties in addition to call management, and therefore the number of calls received per FTE post cannot be accurately assessed.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

vacancies at 31 March 2007 ranged from zero to ten per cent. Forces report that as they are operating with minimum staff levels they need to fill vacancies quickly.

**111.** Standard force recruitment processes often take around three months, and new call handlers may receive up to seven weeks' training and supervision before they can take unsupervised calls. [Exhibit 16](#) illustrates different approaches to ensure recruitment processes are undertaken speedily and result in high-quality applicants.

**112.** All forces reported sickness absence as a significant issue in their contact centres. While forces have corporate policies on promoting attendance, some contact centre managers consider their force attendance policies are not always effective in managing contact centre staff with poor absence records.

**113.** Although sickness absence rates were high for some forces ([Exhibit 17, overleaf](#)), the range is similar to other public sector contact centres. However, as with vacancies, sickness absence has a greater impact on remaining staff and call management performance when contact centres are operating with minimum staff levels.

### **Our survey suggests the majority of police call management staff enjoy their job, but many find it stressful**

**114.** In *First Contact*, HMIC recommended that forces conduct regular staff surveys and exit interviews, with results feeding into service improvement action plans. Although all forces conduct exit interviews, only half conduct staff satisfaction surveys of call handling and management staff to help anticipate and address problems. Dumfries and Galloway is the only force that uses questions tailored for call management staff, although these are more focused on the contact centre's performance, rather than staff satisfaction.

**115.** As part of this study we commissioned a survey of all police call handling and management staff in May 2006. Overall, 77 per cent of respondents in our staff survey said they enjoyed their job, and 82 per cent found their job interesting ([Exhibit 18, overleaf](#)). Despite Dumfries and Galloway having one of the higher rates of calls per FTE post, it also had the highest proportion of staff enjoying their job.

**116.** The majority of respondents in all forces except Grampian agreed they have a satisfactory working environment. Except for Tayside, the majority of respondents felt they had enough support on a daily basis to allow them to do their job well, with a particularly high proportion of staff in Dumfries and Galloway and Fife agreeing they had enough such support.

**117.** About half the staff who responded said they found their job stressful, and only around a fifth had received training in stress management. Half also felt under a lot of pressure to answer calls quickly ([Exhibit 19, page 29](#)). In most forces fewer than half of the respondents felt they always had suitable support available if they needed it following upsetting or distressing calls.

**118.** Fewer than half of all staff respondents across Scotland felt that their role was valued within the force, and that there were good relations between call management staff and the rest of the force ([Exhibit 20, page 29](#)).

### **Training needs assessments for call management staff are not well developed and the training provided needs to improve**

**119.** Only Grampian and Fife had systematically assessed the training needs of their call management staff at the time of our survey in 2006. The remaining forces identified training needs predominantly through issues raised in complaints or during call

assessments. Just over half the staff respondents thought they received enough ongoing training to meet the needs of their job, though this was closer to a third of staff in Dumfries and Galloway and Tayside. More recently, Tayside conducted a staff survey to help match appropriate training with staff perceptions of their skill requirements.

**120.** Given the specialisation of the call management function, *First Contact* suggests that forces would benefit from dedicated training staff. Dedicated trainers allow for more flexibility in the provision of training (for example, providing individuals with training at times when they are receiving fewer calls) and for onsite mentoring and support.

**121.** While the majority of forces have training staff dedicated to their contact centre or its relevant division, these roles are predominantly IT focused, with contact centre supervisors often providing any other training, in addition to their normal roles. Fife and Strathclyde are exceptions to this (Exhibit 21, page 30). There is potential for forces to work more collectively to ensure they get high-quality training across all contact centres.

**122.** Most forces reported that training on the IT telephony systems had been prioritised over other core skills training, such as customer care. Grampian was the first force to include customer service training along with IT induction training to contact centre staff. The force has since rolled out a similar version for their control room and front desk staff, as well as for new officers, with some call handlers now delivering the training (when shifts permit). Grampian also has the longest length of induction training (five weeks), and call handlers have to take calls alongside a supervisor for at least two weeks before they can work alone.

## Exhibit 16

Examples of different practices to improve recruitment to force call management functions

### Practices to reduce time taken to recruit call management staff

- **Fife** outsourced the recruitment of its call management staff. This reduced recruitment time, yet increased recruiting costs.
- **Lothian and Borders** and **Strathclyde** have both established a pool of successful candidates by interviewing more candidates than necessary for the number of vacancies. The additional suitable candidates are vetted and then contacted when future vacancies occur. This has been particularly helpful when needing to fill a position at short notice.
- **Grampian** and **Lothian and Borders** have a permanent web-based recruitment advertisement for call

management staff, with Lothian and Borders having a website tailored to the recruitment of call management staff ([www.voiceofthepolice.com](http://www.voiceofthepolice.com)).

### Practices to improve the recruitment of appropriately skilled staff to call management roles

- **Strathclyde** uses an assessment centre to assess computer, writing and listening skills and conduct role plays. **Fife** also use role plays.
- **Lothian and Borders** has introduced competency-based applications for call management staff. Potential candidates will soon need to complete an online 'talent screener' prior to downloading the application form. Both police staff and police officers are required to undergo the same recruitment process.



Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

### Exhibit 17

Sickness absence rates for call management and all force staff for 2006/07

Force	Police officers			Police staff		
	Call handlers %	Dispatchers %	Whole force %	Call handlers %	Dispatchers %	Whole force %
Central Scotland	No staff	*	4.5	6.0	No staff	4.7
Dumfries and Galloway	No staff	No staff	3.5	0.5	5.5	4.5
Fife	0.0	8.9	5.6	11.4	6.2	5.2
Grampian	8.0	7.0	3.7	7.0	10.0	5.0
Lothian and Borders	7.3		4.9	6.7		6.0
Northern	11.0		5.3	5.0		4.8
Strathclyde	No staff	6.2	5.3	6.7	5.9	6.8
Tayside	No staff	1.9	4.8	3.9	9.0	5.5

Note: Central Scotland was unable to provide sickness absence rates for police officers working in call management (indicated by \*). Lothian and Borders and Northern do not produce separate sickness absence rates for call handlers and dispatchers.

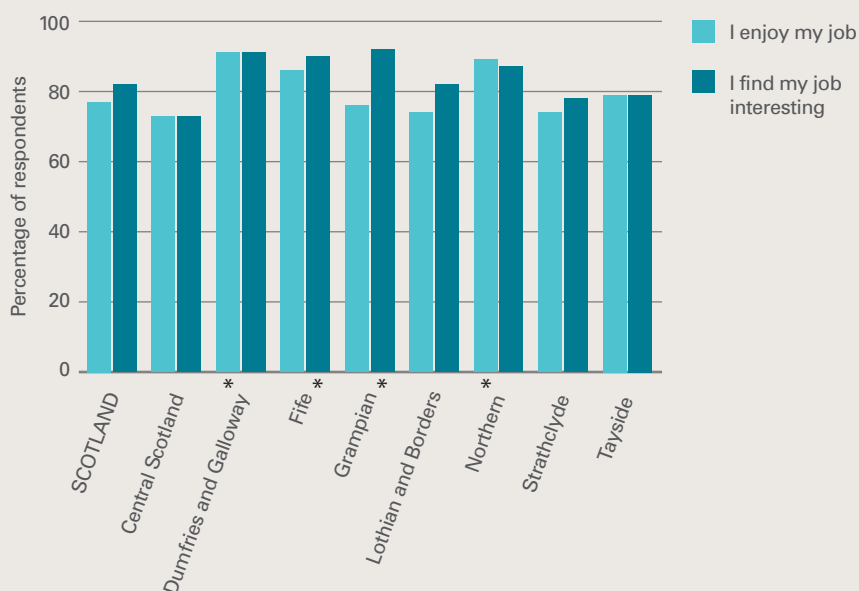
Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

**123.** Forces are now working together to improve the 'soft skills' training relating to customer care. Tayside have developed and implemented a customer service training programme that Central Scotland, Grampian and Strathclyde have since adopted. The four forces have since put the programme forward for consideration as a national training package.

**124.** Few staff have formal call management qualifications. In *First Contact*, HMIC recommended that staff attainment of formal qualifications be treated as a priority. Only seven per cent of staff surveyed had a formal call management qualification at the time of our survey. The Scottish forces, along with the Scottish Police College and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), have recently developed a formal qualification in police call management, but it is too early to assess its impact.

### Exhibit 18

Proportion of staff who agree or strongly agree that they enjoy their job and find their job interesting



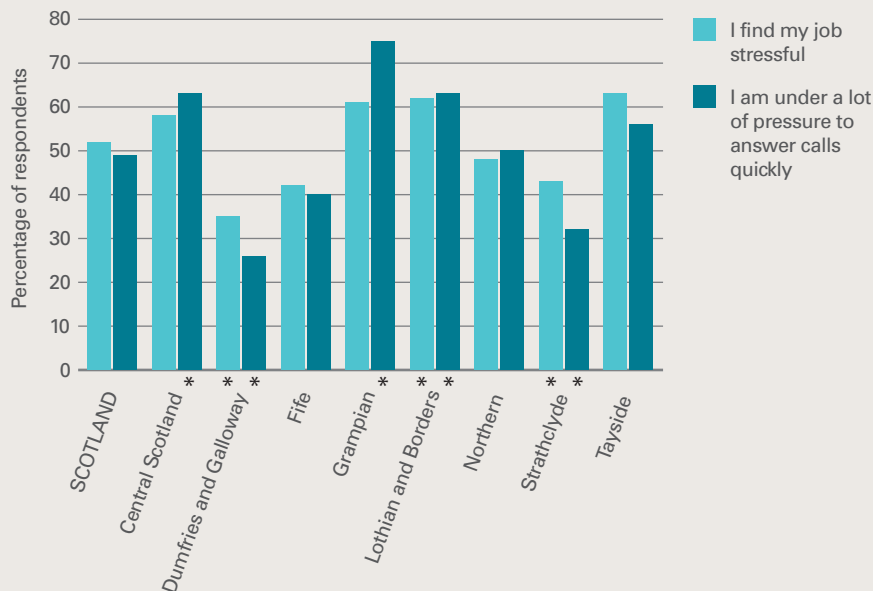
Note: \* indicates that the result is significantly different (statistically) from the Scottish average.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (staff survey, May 2006)



### Exhibit 19

Proportion of staff who agree or strongly agree that they find their job stressful and are under a lot of pressure to answer calls quickly



Note: \* indicates that the result is significantly different (statistically) from the Scottish average.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (staff survey, May 2006)

### Further training is required in order for call management staff to provide an effective service to attending officers

**125.** In interviews, police officers across all the eight forces who attend incidents commented that the information they receive from call handlers and dispatchers needs to improve. All officers we interviewed reported that call handlers often did not ask the right questions to provide the officer with enough information to handle the incident professionally.

**126.** In our staff survey, the proportion of staff who said they had received training in asking the right questions varied from 30 to 71 per cent, and the proportion who said they had received training in using their force's call grading policy ranged from 13 to 86 per cent (Exhibit 22, overleaf).

**127.** Forces acknowledge that more training is required to improve the service to internal customers. While many wish to provide this training for their staff, forces report that current staffing levels restrict the extent to which staff can be released for further training. Contact centre managers also reported that it was not unusual for planned training to be deferred due to shift cover not being available.

**128.** The majority of forces have recently introduced management training for their supervisors via the Scottish Police College's Initial Leadership Development Programme. This has the benefit of enabling supervisors to meet a wide range of police officers and staff from other police departments and forces which builds their overall understanding of police business.

### Exhibit 20

Comments from staff about their role being valued

"It would be nice to feel like a valued member of staff rather than a number. It often feels like you are taken for granted and your individual strengths are ignored."

"Some further support and understanding from the force executive would be welcomed to demonstrate they have a clear understanding of pressures call handlers face instead of simply looking at stats and expecting ever more enhanced performance from an already stretched resource."

"If senior management understood our role better they might be able to provide the kind of help, support and equipment we really need rather than what they think we need."

Comments from staff about the relations between call management staff and the rest of the force

"There is not a good relationship between staff that work in the contact centres and the rest of the force. Contact centre staff have to put up with negative attitudes and comments on a daily basis which does not help morale within the contact centre. Most staff within the contact centre feel this is not addressed well enough by senior management."

"Uniformed officers need to realise that call handlers are taking away a lot of trivial stuff from them and are, hopefully, improving the police profile within the public."

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (staff survey, May 2006)

### Exhibit 21

#### Examples of dedicated training for call management staff

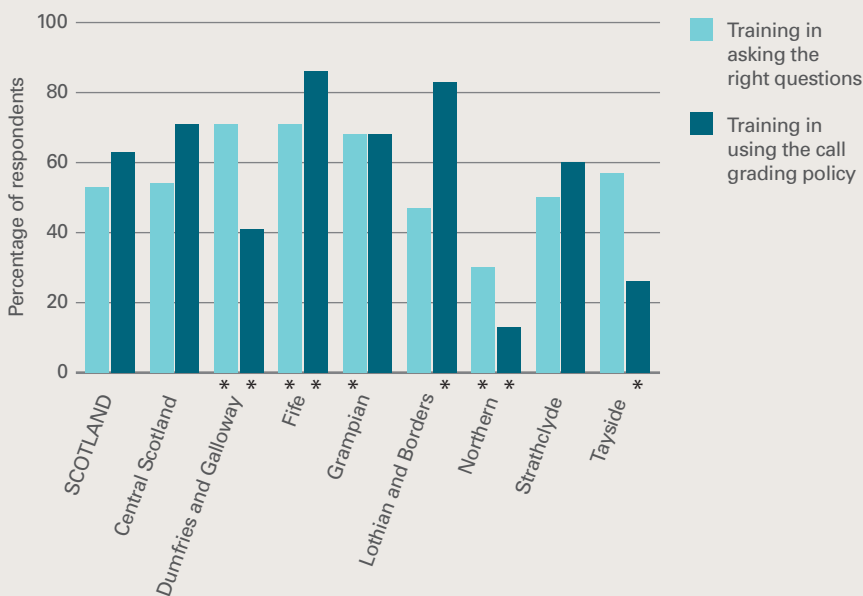
**Fife** recruited a trainer in 2006 who is a dedicated resource for the force contact centre. The training is centred around customer care and specialist skills for call handlers and dispatchers. Training in areas such as IT and diversity is provided by force-wide training staff. Fife reports that as a result of the recruitment of a dedicated trainer, call management induction and refresher training has improved, new staff are available to answer calls in a quicker timeframe, and the quality of customer service has improved. The dedicated trainer also conducted a training needs analysis, the results of which have informed the call management training programme.

**Strathclyde** has employed a full-time Quality and Training Manager (QTM) for call management since 2004. The QTM focuses on the customer service and call handling techniques modules for the induction training of new staff. Other induction training needs, such as IT and diversity, are provided by force-wide training staff. Strathclyde has 14 teams of staff across the two contact centres, with a training coach within each team. The QTM provides ongoing training to the training coaches (who then disseminate this to their team), monitors staff performance and deals with any resulting issues.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

### Exhibit 22

#### Proportion of staff who have received training in asking the right questions and using the call grading policy



Note: \* indicates that the result is significantly different (statistically) from the Scottish average.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (staff survey, May 2006)

### Recommendations

- Forces should continue their efforts to ensure they have appropriate staffing resources with sufficient resilience to meet anticipated call demand.
- Forces' corporate HR support should recognise the specific needs of contact centres; in particular in relation to recruitment and attendance policies.
- Forces should conduct regular staff surveys to help understand the experiences and views of call management staff.
- Forces should undertake systematic training needs assessment and, in conjunction with SPSA, develop a national training approach to address unmet training needs, including:
  - skills required to meet the needs of internal customers
  - staff management training for supervisors
  - formal call management qualifications.

# Part 5. Financial and performance management

People are generally satisfied when they call the police. Performance information is improving, but it does not yet support effective scrutiny.

## Key messages

- Forces spend between two and five per cent of their revenue expenditure on call management, but measures relating to value for money and cost-effectiveness are undeveloped.
- Members of the public are generally satisfied with how the police handle their calls but they are less satisfied with how the police keep them informed about the issue they had called about.
- The new call management systems have improved the availability of information about how calls are handled, but there are few nationally agreed performance indicators, making it difficult to compare the performance of forces.
- Existing performance information on call management

does not adequately support police authorities, chief constables or the Scottish Government in fulfilling their strategic responsibilities or in scrutinising effectiveness.

### In 2006/07, £45 million was spent by the police on managing calls

**129.** Forces spent £45 million on call management in 2006/07. The proportion of revenue expenditure spent on call management varies across forces, ranging from 2.5 to 4.7 per cent (*Exhibit 23*).

**130.** It is difficult to compare the costs of police call management because of the different approaches adopted by forces. Costs will be affected by, for example, the extent to which forces are resolving calls without an officer attending the incident (which may require more time being spent on each individual call) or the number of police staff in relation to police officers. Some force contact centres

may also provide other services in addition to call management (for example, crime data inputting).

**131.** Most force contact centres have delegated budgets, with financial monitoring along the traditional lines of staff costs, supplies and services, etc. Few forces have developed indicators to assist them in the financial management of their contact centres. For example, Grampian is the only force which regularly monitors cost per call.

**132.** The limited reference to costs in the *National Call Handling Standards* indicates the challenge forces face in developing meaningful financial indicators. However, it is important for forces to be able to assess the extent to which their call management arrangements are providing value for money. This is an area where forces need to undertake further work on a collaborative basis to identify areas where valid cost comparisons can be made.

## Exhibit 23

Revenue expenditure on call management, calls received and staffing in 2006/07

Force	Revenue expenditure on call management (£000s)	% of revenue expenditure spent on call management	Number of calls received from the public per 10,000 population	Call handling staff establishment per 10,000 population (FTE)
Central Scotland	2,800	4.2	13,283	3.35
Dumfries and Galloway	1,561	3.7	16,194	3.29
Fife	4,242	4.7	12,160	3.58
Grampian	3,977	3.4	9,787	3.02
Lothian and Borders	11,160	4.2	10,726	3.58
Northern	1,612	2.5	19,567	2.06
Strathclyde	16,591	2.8	10,071	2.39
Tayside	3,082	3.1	12,395	2.44
Scotland	45,025	3.3	11,366	2.81

Note: While Northern had the highest rate of calls at 19,567 per 10,000 population, this is an inflated figure as some calls from non-public numbers cannot be separated out from their non-999 calls from the public. Northern is continuing to work on its systems to separate out more of these calls in the future. Northern's staff establishment is estimated as many calls are answered at local stations by staff with a number of other duties in addition to call management.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

**Members of the public are generally satisfied when they call the police, but less satisfied with how the police keep them informed about the issue they had called about**

**133.** One of the reasons police forces centralised call management was to improve the service to the public. Forces are now adopting a more citizen-focused and systematic approach to assessing whether they are meeting the needs of people who call the police.

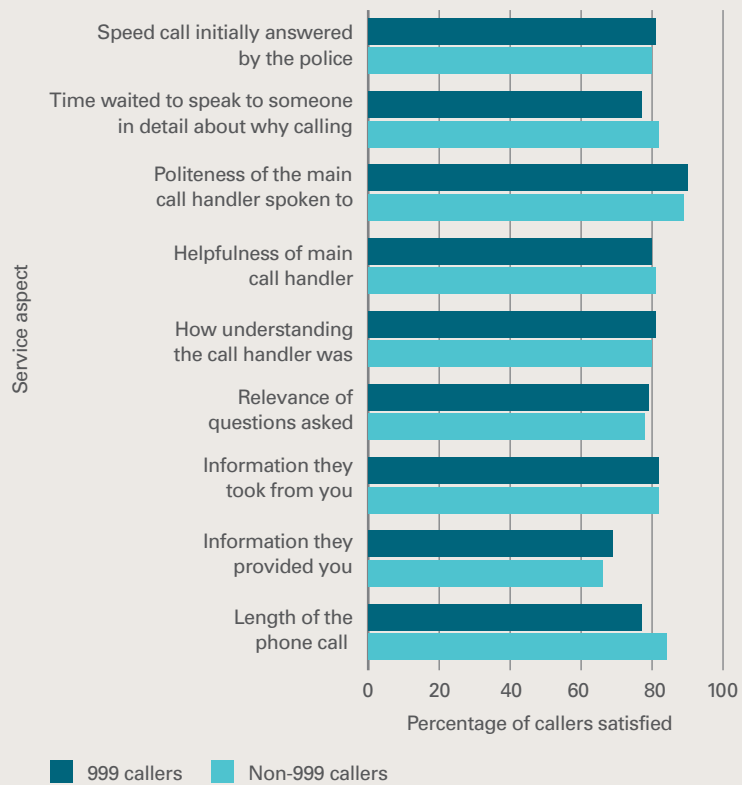
**134.** In the survey of the public conducted for this study, we found that people were generally satisfied with how their calls were handled, for both 999 and non-999 calls. This included satisfaction with how quickly their calls were answered and the understanding and helpfulness of the call handlers (Exhibit 24).

**135.** In our survey we specifically asked about satisfaction with being kept informed about the issue called about. Fewer than half the people who had called the police were satisfied with the way they were kept informed. Responsibility for keeping people informed about the action the police have taken in relation to a particular incident lies with the attending officer. Improving this aspect of performance would help forces develop a more citizen-focused approach. Poor performance in this area also impacts on the contact centres as it creates increased demand from callers enquiring about progress. HMIC in Scotland is intending to undertake a thematic inspection of forces' performance in providing follow-up information to callers during 2007/08.

**136.** Results from forces' own surveys conducted during 2005/06 (and reported through statutory performance indicators (SPIs)) show that members of the public are generally satisfied with police services as a whole. Across the forces, an average of 82 per cent were satisfied with their initial contact with the police and 77 per cent were satisfied with the way the police then dealt with the matter after their call (Exhibit 25).

**Exhibit 24**

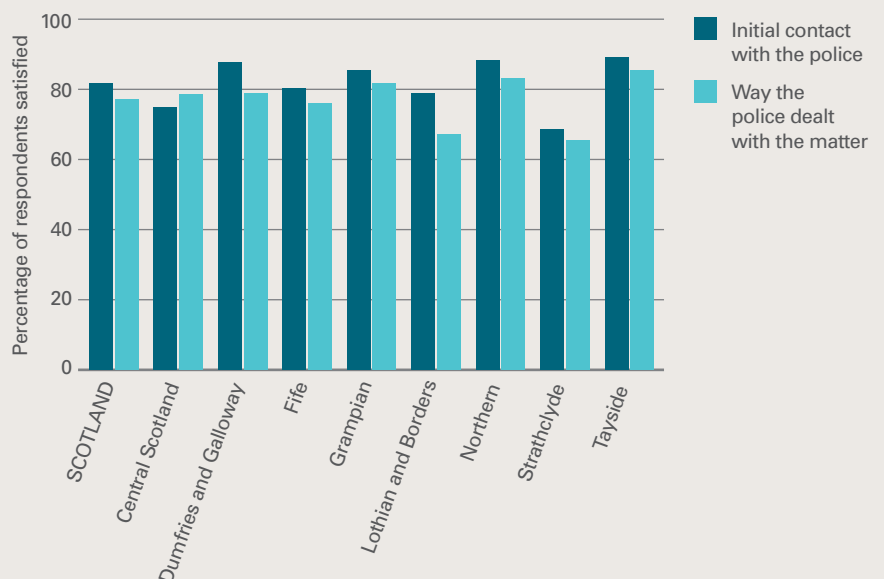
Proportion of 999 and non-999 callers in the public survey who were satisfied with different aspects of police call handling



Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork (general public survey)

**Exhibit 25**

Public satisfaction with the police service in 2005/06



Source: Audit Scotland (SPI data)



**137.** In addition to the general quality of service surveys reported through the SPI, some forces also undertake more focused customer satisfaction surveys specifically looking at people's experience of calling the police. However, there is little consistency across forces in how they assess caller satisfaction, so benchmarking in this area is not possible.

**138.** All forces carry out some quality assurance on their call answering. This is usually done through supervisors listening to a sample of calls and assessing them against a quality checklist. Other examples of approaches to quality control are given in [Exhibit 26](#).

### **New IT systems now provide forces with improved performance information on call handling, but definitions vary preventing effective benchmarking between forces**

**139.** Prior to the reorganisation of their call management functions, forces had no systematic data about the number or type of calls they received or the responses made to callers.

**140.** The implementation of more sophisticated IT systems has improved forces' ability to monitor and manage their call handling functions. The performance information routinely collected and monitored by forces varies, but all forces now collect and analyse information on the number of calls received, the number and proportion of calls answered or abandoned and the time taken to answer calls.

**141.** How forces report performance against some of these standard measures varies, making valid comparisons of performance difficult. For example, all forces measure the number of abandoned calls (where the person hangs up before the call is answered). However, calls abandoned during the first few seconds are often because the caller has misdialled or hung up after hearing information in the recorded greeting. So some

## **Exhibit 26**

### **Assessing quality of service through call monitoring and staff performance**

**Grampian** conducts regular performance assessments of contact centre staff. Call handlers have monthly meetings with their line manager to review their objectives and receive feedback on their performance. Staff are assessed on aspects such as the number and quality of calls they have taken and crime files completed, and their absence levels. The contact centre manager liaises with line managers to monitor and assist this process, and collates the results into monthly reports.

**Tayside** conducted a 'mystery shopping' exercise to assess the quality of responses given to callers. Calls were made to the force's two contact centres over a period of two weeks. For each call, the caller recorded how long it took to answer the call and the politeness of the call handler. For half of the calls made, the caller also assessed the response of the call handler to specific questions, such as asking for advice on antisocial behaviour, malicious calls and noisy neighbours.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

forces report the proportion of calls that are abandoned after a set time (eg, after the recorded message) as they consider this a more realistic measure of how the contact centre is performing (for example, Central Scotland), while others report all calls that are abandoned, irrespective of the length of time before the caller hung up (for example, Dumfries and Galloway, Northern and Strathclyde).

**142.** The speed with which calls are answered is another key measure of performance which all forces measure and report on. Currently, the statutory performance indicator on the proportion of 999 calls answered within ten seconds is the only consistent call handling indicator reported on by all forces. While all forces now also measure answering times for their non-999 calls, how they analyse and report on this again varies. For example, some forces report on performance against an agreed standard (eg, Central Scotland and Northern report on the proportion of non-999 calls answered in 30 seconds), while other forces report average answering times (eg, Fife).

**143.** The different performance information routinely reported by forces is summarised in [Appendix 2](#).

While some forces have set standards and targets relating to numbers of calls answered and speed of response, others manage these areas by comparing performance over time. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, but forces cannot compare their performance without agreement on these fundamental principles.

### **Forces do not have adequate information about the range of calls they receive to enable them to manage demand in a systematic manner**

**144.** Forces' call and incident management systems, in particular the command and control systems, allow effective tracking of calls relating to individual incidents. Some command and control systems also collate information on incidents for management purposes, for example, the types of incidents attended, the times when particular incident types tend to occur and the average time taken for officers to arrive for different types of incident. All forces will have this facility once STORM MA is rolled out across the country (see paragraphs 78 and 79). There may be benefits to forces in sharing expertise in extracting and analysing incident

data to inform strategic decisions about the use of police resources.

**145.** However, many calls to the police do not result in an incident record being created. The proportion of calls resulting in an incident record varies across forces (Exhibit 27). As forces have different recording policies, it is difficult to make a valid comparison of the level of incidents across the country. Some forces only create an incident record if an officer is required to attend, while other forces may also create incident records where, for example, only information or advice has been provided to the caller.

**146.** Forces' IT systems for call management are currently unable to categorise in any detail the different types of non-emergency calls they receive which do not result in an incident record. This information is important to enable forces to prioritise areas where initiatives to reduce demand would have most impact. Some forces have undertaken manual data collection exercises to identify different types of call demand (Exhibit 28, overleaf).

**147.** The lack of detailed data on the different types of calls received at different times of day also limits the potential contribution this information could make to strategic decisions about the deployment of police resources across the force or identifying potential areas for improved efficiency or customer service. While detailed information on crime levels is used proactively by forces for community safety, crime prevention and detection, similar approaches for using information from calls have yet to be established.

### Exhibit 27

Proportion of calls received by the police over two days resulting in an incident record

Force	No. of calls answered	No. of incidents	Incidents as proportion of calls
Central Scotland	1,829	732	40.0
Dumfries and Galloway	1,137	448	39.4
Fife	2,194	880	40.1
Grampian <sup>1</sup>	2,394	918	38.3
Lothian and Borders	4,892	2,047	41.8
Northern	2,577	430	16.7
Strathclyde	11,241	6,215	55.3
Tayside	1,857	1,078	58.1
Scotland	28,121	12,748	45.3

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Due to system difficulties, Grampian was unable to provide the number of non-999 calls answered for these two days, so this figure is estimated.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

### Existing performance information on call management does not adequately support police authorities, chief constables or the Scottish Government in fulfilling their strategic responsibilities or in scrutinising effectiveness

**148.** Performance reports on call management presented to force executives and police authorities vary in their content and level of detail. Generally the reports have minimal data analysis and no comparisons with other forces. Little is done to aid understanding of the information presented or to stimulate questions about performance. The only consistent reporting relates to the current SPI on speed of answering 999 calls.

**149.** In March 2007, a new Scottish Policing Performance Framework was launched. This is designed to improve accountability at local and

national levels, through the publication of consistent and transparent performance information, and to assist managers throughout the police service to provide more effective policing within Scottish communities. The framework was agreed by a multi-agency Senior Strategic Steering Group (SSSG),<sup>25</sup> which has overall responsibility for agreeing national performance indicators. Individual forces and police authorities are responsible for developing indicators most appropriate to their local circumstances.

**150.** The framework is still being developed, and further work is required to agree the range of performance indicators that should be included at the different levels, including those relating to call management. Grampian is the only force which has started using the framework as a performance management tool for the force's call

<sup>25</sup> The Senior Strategic Steering Group is convened by the Scottish Government Director-General for Justice and Communities and includes senior representatives from ACPOS, HMIC, Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum and Audit Scotland.

## Exhibit 28

### Examples of call demand exercises

**Lothian and Borders** gathered detailed information about all the 999 and non-999 calls received over a one-week period in June 2006. The aims of this exercise were to build a more complete understanding of its call demand, determine key data that should be recorded but are not currently, and identify areas for further service improvement. The demand analysis showed that:

- more than three-quarters of calls are transferred within the contact centre rather than dealt with at the first point of contact
- call grades for non-urgent incidents are not always used appropriately
- some departments' operating hours could be more effectively aligned with call demand (eg, Youth Action Teams)
- twenty-eight per cent of non-999 calls could be prevented (eg, callers wanting an update on their previously reported incident, calls that should go to other organisations, and unanswered direct dial or transferred calls).

As a result of the analysis, Lothian and Borders is planning to clarify the role of the contact centre within the force, re-examine its structure, and introduce projects to address calls that can be prevented in order to reduce demand.

**Strathclyde** collected detailed data on calls over a three-week period in early 2007. The purpose of the project was to increase understanding of the types of calls received with a view to reducing call volumes. Data analysis showed that the top ten reasons for calls were:

1. Incidents – approximately 770,000 calls per annum (35%).
2. Switchboard calls – approximately 450,000 per annum (ie, callers wanting connection to an individual officer) (20%).
3. Calls where an incident has already been created – approximately 178,000 per annum (8%).
4. Custody enquiries – approximately 141,000 calls per annum (6.5%).
5. Lost property – approximately 110,000 calls per annum (5%).
6. Internal switched calls – approximately 66,000 calls per annum (3%).
7. Fiscal enquiries – approximately 31,000 per annum (1.5%).
8. Lost pets – approximately 29,000 calls per annum (1.5%).
9. External forces – approximately 29,000 calls per annum (1.5%).
10. Why were police at my premises? Approximately 24,000 calls per annum (1%).

Apart from calls about incidents, the vast majority of calls occurred during the Monday to Friday period, from 9am to 5pm. Strathclyde is now using this information to identify how customer service could be improved by, for example, encouraging the use of direct dial.

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

management function (Exhibit 29), and the force acknowledges that further work is required to develop relevant indicators across all elements of the framework.

**151.** Following publication of this report, the SSSG, police authorities and individual forces now need to agree relevant performance indicators for call management within the context of the framework, both for reporting at a national level and for managing and reporting performance locally.

**152.** At a national level, performance indicators should cover both 999 and non-emergency calls, and cover both outcomes (for example, user satisfaction) and efficiency (for example, proportion of calls answered as well as speed of answering). Further discussion is also required on the current SPI on the proportion of 999 calls answered within ten seconds, and whether average answering times (or average answering times both within target and outwith target times), rather than one based on a target might be a better indicator of performance.

**153.** As part of the work to agree indicators for reporting at a national level, the Scottish National Call Handling Standards Working Group should progress the development of a more comprehensive suite of indicators for use by individual forces. These indicators, when taken together, should provide a rounded picture of each force's performance in relation to call management and enable comparison both between forces and within forces over time. The indicators are likely to cover issues relating to staffing (for example, sickness absence, staff training), customer satisfaction (both internal and external customers), performance in call handling and value for money. Any performance indicators agreed, whether for reporting at a national level or more locally, will need to have clear and agreed definitions that are consistently applied by forces. Scottish forces should also consider

**Exhibit 29****Grampian's use of the Scottish Policing Performance Framework for call management**

Framework	Service response	Public reassurance & community safety	Criminal justice & tackling crime	Sound governance & efficiency
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of letters of thanks.</li> <li>Number of customer surveys undertaken.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of visits to Force Service Centre (FSC) by public bodies and visits to public bodies by FSC staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of crime files processed and retained by FSC.</li> <li>Number of STORM incidents dealt with by FSC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value of efficiency and cost savings to operational policing.</li> </ul>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of referrals to Victim Support Scheme.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of days lost to sickness/absence.</li> <li>Number of presentations to visiting parties.</li> </ul>
Inputs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will ensure effective development of staff allowing the efficiency of the department to develop.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of vacancies within FSC.</li> </ul>
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total number of non-emergency calls to Grampian Police.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total number of crime files and STORM incidents dealt with by FSC as per cent of total for force.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of FOI requests.</li> <li>Number of complaints.</li> </ul>

Source: Audit Scotland fieldwork

participating in the National Contact Management Programme working group in England and Wales (set up under the auspices of the National Policing Improvement Agency) to enable them to share best practice and benchmark with forces south of the border.

**154.** The development of a suite of agreed performance indicators covering the range of call management activity would enable forces to:

- prioritise their improvement activities in areas where they will have greatest impact
- demonstrate the extent to which their contact centres are meeting the needs of callers and delivering value for money

- encourage a more consistent and improved quality of service to local communities across Scotland.

**155.** Call management is an important part of the police's response to the community. The current lack of robust and consistent performance information at either a national or local level limits the ability of forces to demonstrate they are providing an efficient and improving service and the ability of police authorities and the Scottish Government to scrutinise performance effectively.

**156.** In planning and implementing a more consistent approach to assessing call management performance across Scotland, forces should aim to have more robust performance information available by the time this initial review is followed up in about three years.

### **Police authorities and the Scottish Executive had a limited role during the establishment of the new call management arrangements**

**157.** The tri-partite governance arrangements for the police in Scotland outlined in paragraph 13 mean that police authorities, chief constables and the Scottish Government share responsibility for ensuring that the new arrangements for call management are operating efficiently and effectively.

**158.** Each police authority formally approved the establishment of the new contact centres and associated expenditure. In some areas, members were more directly involved, for example, Northern established a joint member/officer planning board to oversee the move to more centralised call handling, and Lothian and Borders

included two members of the police board on its programme board. However, in other areas, members of police authorities had more limited involvement in the planning or implementation of the new arrangements.

**159.** The extent to which members were able to exercise proper scrutiny is not always clear. Our analysis of relevant board and committee papers shows that in the majority of cases members were asked only to note the chief constable's recommendations for the new arrangements, unless approval was required relating to financial resources, for example, acceptance of tenders. While there may have been informal dialogue or discussion, there is little evidence that members were provided with a range of options to review or that any changes to the chief constable's proposals were made as a result of board or committee meetings.

**160.** At a national level, the Scottish Executive considered that the way in which each force centralised its call management arrangements was a matter for the chief constable and police authority. The Scottish Executive did not take an overview of the different business cases submitted to assess the extent to which they might meet the needs of Scottish policing. Once the business cases for the capital funding had been assessed and accepted, it did not ask for any evidence as to whether the objectives outlined in the individual business cases had been achieved.

**161.** While the existing tri-partite arrangements may be seen as a strength in relation to developing policing policies which reflect local needs, they can be a barrier to the full adoption of national standards or agreements. In addition, it is not always clear where proper accountability for national strategic decisions affecting local police services lies.

**162.** For example, ACPOS agreed that all forces should procure the same command and control system when each of their existing systems comes up for renewal. This is an important step forward in ensuring greater consistency in how individual forces manage incidents, and should lead to more efficient use of police resources within Scotland. However, as this is an area of significant importance and expenditure for individual forces, each force has to get approval from the relevant board or committee for this expenditure, although the decision as to which system will be procured has already been made. It is not clear, within the existing tri-partite arrangements, how ACPOS should be properly held to account for strategic decisions of this nature.

**163.** The limited and inconsistent performance information and significant variation in policies and practices in call management described in this report illustrate the difficulties that can arise when there is a lack of clarity about which decisions should be made locally and which require a national strategic approach, and who should be responsible for making those decisions.

## Recommendations

- Forces should improve their call management systems to provide information about the full range of calls received to enable demand to be more effectively managed.
- Forces should agree a consistent approach to measuring caller satisfaction, to enable them to share best practice and allow benchmarking.
- The Senior Strategic Steering Group, individual forces and police authorities, in consultation with contact centre managers, should agree a range of relevant performance indicators for call management.
- Police authorities should, as part of their responsibilities for the strategic oversight of police performance, ensure that they regularly receive and scrutinise reports by chief constables on the effectiveness and costs of local call management arrangements.
- In light of the inconsistencies in approach highlighted in this report, the Scottish Government should consider clarifying which policing decisions require a national strategic approach and how to strengthen accountability for these decisions.



# Part 6. Recommendations

These recommendations are intended to improve the effectiveness of police call management in Scotland.

**164.** The recommendations made in this report and listed below are intended to assist the Scottish Government, police authorities, chief constables and contact centre managers to improve the effectiveness of police call management in Scotland, and provide a framework against which to measure future progress.

### Calling the police

- The Scottish Government, together with the emergency services, should explore the potential for increased efficiencies in handling 999 calls through improved partnership working and sharing of resources.
- Forces should improve their information systems to identify the extent of the inappropriate use of 999, work together to agree and implement best practice in how to handle these calls and work with the Scottish Government and other emergency services to improve the public's awareness of when to use 999.
- Forces should work with their community planning partners to improve awareness within local communities of what numbers to call in different situations.
- The Scottish Government should liaise with ACPOS, CoSLA, the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum and other public services to look at options for providing easily accessible non-emergency numbers across police and local authorities.
- Forces should ensure that the new Scottish Incident Recording Standard is designed to provide more consistent and comparable information on call demand and is implemented consistently.
- Forces should agree standard criteria for call grading.

### New arrangements to manage calls

- The Scottish Government, ACPOS, and the Scottish Police Authority Conveners' Forum should work together, and with the SPSA, to agree a national strategic approach to developing call management in Scottish police forces.
- Forces should implement the new command and control system consistently across all forces, ensure it delivers the anticipated benefits, and monitor the impact.
- Forces should do further work with other agencies, local communities and their own staff to build greater understanding of their needs and to improve awareness of the functions and benefits of a centralised approach to call management.

### Staff management

- Forces should continue their efforts to ensure they have appropriate staffing resources with sufficient resilience to meet anticipated call demand.
- Forces' corporate HR support should recognise the specific needs of contact centres; in particular in relation to recruitment and attendance policies.
- Forces should conduct regular staff surveys to help understand the experiences and views of call management staff.
- Forces should undertake systematic training needs assessment and, in conjunction with SPSA, develop a national training approach to address unmet training needs, including:
  - skills required to meet the needs of internal customers
  - staff management training for supervisors

- formal call management qualifications.

### Financial and performance management

- Forces should improve their call management systems to provide information about the full range of calls received to enable demand to be more effectively managed.
- Forces should agree a consistent approach to measuring caller satisfaction, to enable them to share best practice and allow benchmarking.
- The Senior Strategic Steering Group, individual forces and police authorities, in consultation with contact centre managers, should agree a range of relevant performance indicators for call management.
- Police authorities should, as part of their responsibilities for the strategic oversight of police performance, ensure that they regularly receive and scrutinise reports by chief constables on the effectiveness and costs of local call management arrangements.
- In light of the inconsistencies in approach highlighted in this report, the Scottish Government should consider clarifying which policing decisions require a national strategic approach and how to strengthen accountability for these decisions.

# Appendix 1.

## Glossary

ACD	Automatic Call Distribution – software that routes telephone calls to call handlers (it can be programmed to route calls based on priority, next available call handler, or location)
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ACPOS	Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland
ALSEC	Automated Location for Service Emergency Calls
CRM	Customer Relationship Management – software that displays the call history of a caller based on the number they are calling from
CoSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
EISEC	Enhanced Information Service for Emergency Calls
HMCIC	Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary
HMIC	Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary
NIM	National Intelligence Model – a mechanism used by the police for deciding operational development priorities for crime and disorder
PNLD	Police National Legal Database
SPI	Statutory Performance Indicator – a statutory indicator set out in the Accounts Commission’s Annual Direction, under the Local Government Act 1992
SSSG	Senior Strategic Steering Group – a group convened by the Scottish Government Director-General for Justice and Communities, which includes senior representatives from ACPOS, HMIC, CoSLA and Audit Scotland

# Appendix 2.

## Call management information in force performance reports

Force	Information contained in a typical performance report <sup>26</sup>
Central Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff abstractions and attrition rates</li> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered within ten seconds</li> <li>• percentage of non-999 calls answered within 30 seconds</li> <li>• percentage of calls answered/abandoned</li> <li>• percentage of calls resolved by contact centre</li> <li>• average time to answer</li> <li>• average time to abandon.</li> </ul>
Dumfries and Galloway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered within ten seconds</li> <li>• average time to answer 999 calls</li> <li>• number of calls made to 0845</li> <li>• number and percentage of calls from mobile phones</li> <li>• top ten callers (to encourage direct dials)</li> <li>• percentage of calls resolved by contact centre, transferred to elsewhere in force or resulting in police attendance</li> <li>• percentage of internal calls answered within 30 seconds</li> <li>• percentage of incidents allocated to contact centre (ie, didn't need police attendance).</li> </ul> <p>Results from quality of service questionnaires identifying reasons for calling the police, levels of satisfaction and reasons for dissatisfaction are reported to the force executive and the relevant committee. The survey also includes other questions about force priorities.</p>
Fife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of calls answered/abandoned</li> <li>• average speed of answering</li> <li>• average call duration (not separated for 999 and non-999).</li> </ul>
Grampian	<p>Performance of the service centre and control room are reported separately. The service centre (non-999 calls) report includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of calls answered</li> <li>• numbers abandoned in less than 40 seconds and over 40 seconds</li> <li>• unavailable time</li> <li>• average call handling time</li> <li>• average queue time and average abandoned time</li> <li>• number of crime files created (translated into number of visits police officers didn't need to make).</li> </ul>

<sup>26</sup> All performance reports include the number of calls received as contextual information, some also include number of incidents logged.

Force	Information contained in a typical performance report
Grampian (continued)	Control room statistics cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of calls of different grades</li> <li>• response times for different grades by division</li> <li>• staffing levels</li> <li>• calls per shift</li> <li>• the 15 most prevalent call types by division.</li> </ul>
Lothian and Borders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered within ten, 15 and 20 seconds</li> <li>• percentage of switchboard calls answered with 30 seconds</li> <li>• percentage of switchboard calls abandoned</li> <li>• percentage of assistance desk calls answered within 30 seconds and percentage abandoned</li> <li>• number of complaints.</li> </ul>
Northern	Performance reports are still being developed. They currently report for both centres: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered within target times</li> <li>• percentage of non-999 calls answered within target times</li> <li>• percentage of calls abandoned.</li> </ul>
Strathclyde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• call distribution by division and call type</li> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered and answered within ten seconds</li> <li>• percentage of non-999 calls answered and answered within 30 seconds</li> <li>• average call handling time</li> <li>• number of incident records created</li> <li>• top ten most prevalent incident types</li> <li>• incidents by day of week and time of day</li> <li>• a breakdown of incident types at force division subdivision and local authority levels</li> <li>• percentage of incidents dispatched within prompt times by priority level</li> <li>• attendance times by priority level at force and division levels.</li> </ul>
Tayside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percentage of non-999 calls answered/abandoned across the virtual contact centre</li> <li>• percentage of 999 calls answered in ten and 15 seconds.</li> </ul>



# Appendix 3.

## Study advisory group members

Malcolm Dickson	Assistant Inspector of Constabulary, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (Scotland)
Martyn Evans	Director, Scottish Consumer Council
Anne Marie Forsyth	Chief Executive, Customer Contact Association
Dave Higgins	Secretary, Scottish Police Authorities Conveners' Forum
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David McKenna	Chief Executive, Victim Support Scotland
Colin McKerracher	Chief Constable, Grampian Police and ACPOS
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Pauline Smith	Call Handling Manager, Staffordshire Police
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