



# REVIEW OF THE 101 SERVICE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

A Scrutiny Review on the non-emergency 101 service

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The purpose of establishing a task and finish group was to review the 101 non-emergency service, which occurred due to concerns that councillors themselves were experiencing when trying to contact the service and also hearing from their constituents that they too were expressing concerns. The main concern was that people were waiting a long time to get through to the service and some were even abandoning their calls and ringing 999 instead, blocking urgent calls getting through for emergencies.

1.2 Some of the comments received were:

“I've just had to phone 101 about an incident in Stacksteads that I didn't think needed 999 and I gave up and phoned 999. I have to say the response from then on was excellent but I'm really concerned that the 101 service isn't staffed sufficiently and despite the cuts I think Rossendale Council should be asking questions”

“Shop window put through tonight around 1am with a crowbar, there was a distinct lack of police action considering that there is someone in Bacup wandering around with a crowbar at 1am - call made about 10 mins after alarm trigger, provision of a crime number for insurance purposes was the only positive outcome! “

## **2. About the 101 Service**

The 101 service is the police non-emergency number to call when you want to contact your local Police – when its less urgent than a 999 call.

You should call 101 to report crime and other concerns that do not require an emergency response, for example, if

- If your car is stolen
- Your property has been damaged
- You suspect drug use or dealing in your neighbourhood
- To give the police information about crime in your area
- To speak to the police about a general enquiry

When you call 101 the system will determine your location and connect you to the police force covering that area. You will hear a recorded message

announcing the police force you are being connected to and it will give you a choice of which force to be connected to.

Calls are answered by police officers and staff in the control room of the local police force. This ensures that staff with local knowledge can answer and deal with the calls and respond appropriately.

### **3. The Aims of the Group**

At the first meeting in October 2016 the group agreed the following aims.

- a) To look at what factual information was available that would demonstrate whether the length of time the public need to wait is acceptable when calling 101.
- b) To establish what quality of response is provided to the public through the 101 service.
- c) To find out how efficient and effective the current service being operated is to the public.
- d) What, if any, barriers exist to providing a good service to the public.
- e) To what extent the 101 service is being used to handle calls that should be dealt with by other bodies, particularly other statutory agencies, such as local authorities.

### **4. What we found out**

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group invited the Operations Support Manager, Force Control Room at Lancashire Constabulary to the first meeting to provide information on the 101 service.
- 4.2 **How the service was** – In December 2013 there were 6 divisional control rooms and following a long running project, it was agreed to centralise these into one single force control room, based at Hutton. The amalgamation of the service was not straight forward as they lost experienced staff due to them having to travel long distances to the headquarters at Hutton.
- 4.3 A review took place in 2013 and due to budget constraints the force was unable to recruit, which made 2014 a difficult year for them. Following a rise in demand of the service they are now able to recruit.

- 4.4 **How the service is now** – they receive between 2,000 and 3,000 calls to the 101 service, with an additional 500-800 emergency 999 calls, which take priority over all other functions.

There are 400 staff working on a shift basis, with the 'tidal shift' being peak times from 4pm.

Whilst demand has increase all calls would be answered, although there are significant delays.

The one thing the service does is protect 999 calls, because if these calls take over 10 seconds to be answered the police force is called to account by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

- 4.5. **Recruitment** – with the existing recruitment on temporary contract there was a fear that they would recruit mainly from Central Lancashire. As they are now recruiting on permanent contracts they are hoping to receive a good spread of applicants from all over Lancashire. This is a big win for the service, with a better age group coming in with life experiences. The age group at the moment is quite low.

The recent recruitment campaign received over 300 applicants for 60 jobs over the next 12 months, which will take them above establishment. The force over recruit because some control room staff apply to join the Police, with most being successful as they have already worked in the control room. There is at the moment a Police recruitment campaign.

- 4.6 **Calls to the control room** – on average 20% of calls are crime related, with the other 80% for a range of reasons, the main being public safety (50%), with others for mental health issues, ASB and drug and alcohol. The police do take the overspill of health services, particularly for mental health.

They undertake a full risk assessment in accordance with the National Decision Model of all calls and it is the Call Handlers decision on the grading of the call and the Dispatchers decision on how many will go to an incident.

There is a quality assurance process and staff do make good decisions on what comes through to them.

When asked if there was a measurement of 101 calls, the Operation Support Officer indicated that he looks at performance of all 101 and 999 calls on a daily basis. There has been a drastic rise in calls not being answered within targets – 10 seconds for 999 calls and whilst there is no Home Office target set for 101 calls, the force aim to answer calls within 40 seconds.

The following figures for the last 6 months show increase to both 999 and 101 calls above the targets.

- April 2016 = 4.4 seconds for 999 and 29.1 seconds for 101
- May 2016 = 6.4 seconds for 999 and 48.3 seconds for 101
- June 2016 = 9.9 seconds for 999 and 73 seconds for 101
- July 2016 = 8.9 seconds for 999 and 63 seconds for 101
- Aug 2016 = 11.8 seconds for 999 and 100 seconds for 101
- Sept 2016 = 13.9 seconds for 999 and 129 seconds for 101

A significant amount of 999 calls should have come through via 101.

10% of 999 calls are general emergencies. The force is plagued with hoax callers and these cannot be located as some mobile phones that are bought over the counter do not need to be registered.

The control room does have a whole range of diverse people who can speak a number of languages.

- 4.7 **Health** - The Police have an agreement with the North West Ambulance Service who will convey a person for such things as mental health problems to a 'place of safety'. If an ambulance is not available then the police would have to take a person to a place of safety or as a last resort the Police Station.

An operator can be tied up for long lengths of time with a suicidal person on the other end of the phone. They do co-ordinate with the Samaritans where possible.

There are soon to be mental health nurses within the force control rooms and the East Division will see both Police Officers and mental health nurses on patrol.

- 4.8 **Police visiting** – In relation to the police visiting a person following a crime, these are graded and risk assessed, as set by the Home Office as follows:

- Grade 1 – Emergency within 15 minutes from the call being connected
- Grade 2 – Within the hour (must hit this category)
- Grade 3 – Within 72 hours (these cause more problems than anything else and need to be seen quicker)
- Grade 4 – don't need to deploy at all

The force have to push to ensure that Wildlife and Rural Crime issues are dealt with as a matter of priority and can often trigger a grade 1 emergency deployment.

The model is different to the original one set for the Control Room.

## 5. Visit to the Control Room at Hutton

The task and finish group were offered the opportunity of visiting the force control room at Hutton. This took place on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016.



Picture courtesy of Lancashire Constabulary, showing the 101/999 Control Room at Hutton

Members were shown into a major incident control room and were provided with a display of how the system works when someone rings the call centre. This room was primarily used for major, high impact incidents and enables everyone to take control of what was occurring. On the day of our visit it was due to be used for training purposes for some of the newly recruited staff.

Members were informed that whilst there had been improvements to 999 call response times, the 101 response times were not better than when we met with the Control Room Manager in early October.

Apparently people do ring the 999 number instead of 101 and whilst the staff would help them as much as possible they do remind them to contact 101 in the future.

Grading for calls are set by the staff taking the call, grade 1 is an emergency (as fast as possible within 15 minutes), grade 2 is priority (as soon as possible within the hour) and grade 3 is a routine (as appropriate within 72 hours). A number of grade 3 incidents are suitable for the Planned Response option which allows staff to book an appointment, either at the Police Station in Burnley or Waterfoot, or for a visit at a pre-booked time, instead of keeping people waiting for an officer to attend. Some grade 3 calls may be suitable to be dealt with over the phone.

The call centre aims to achieve 400 staffing hours per day in order to meet their demand, but at the present time it stood at around 350 staffing hours per day. They lose on average 3.5 staff per month, mostly into Police recruitment.

The Operations Control Room Manager each day received a breakdown of statistics to keep a track of their call times averages, which were at the time of our visit at the 9 minute mark. They have seen an increase in the average call handling times over the past 18 months, which is due to the complex nature of demand. This also impacts on their ability to achieve their call handling performance targets.

During the visit the members noticed that the electronic display Boards were showing that from midnight on 14<sup>th</sup> November until 3.40pm (our visit time), they had received 288 – 999 calls and 1453 -101 calls.

TVs were also around the call centre highlighting were CCTVs were located around the East Division, which enabled them to watch areas where incidents were occurring until a police presence was visible.

All staff were busy on the phones. Staff on a 10 hour shift get an hour rest period. If a caller had to contend with a stressful person on the other end of the phone, then no one is adverse to them taking a 5 minutes 'time out'.

The call centre also deals with lots of calls that aren't police related but they have a duty of care and when they take a call, they take ownership of that call.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 Lancashire Police recognise that the 101 service has been struggling recently and there are steps in place to improve this, but members accept that there is no 'quick fix'. This is also reflected in the national picture with a number of other Forces experiencing similar delays and increase in demand.
- 6.2 The nature of the demands on the Police service have also changed and tend to focus more on public safety than crime and disorder, which takes longer to deal with from the initial calls made into the Force Control Room. This ultimately has an impact on their call answering times.
- 6.3 Although the task and finish group were impressed at how the overall 101 service was managed, it was apparent that the main reasons for the delays in answering calls, particularly those to the 101 service was due to past resources and would hope that the new recruitment of approximately 60 new members of staff would eventually improve response times.

- 6.4 Due to the number of calls the 101 service received that are for other organisations such as electric/gas companies and health, it was agreed that there needs to be some form of publicity campaign to highlight the difference between the 101/999/111 services, to educate the public to call the appropriate service. This would alleviate the need for staff in the control rooms to deal with inappropriate calls and improve target levels.
- 6.5 Whilst CCTV cameras were not within the remit of the task and finish group, it was agreed that the location of these throughout Rossendale was important to assist the Police in highlighting crime and accidents throughout the Borough. The Council has an outdated CCTV infrastructure, which are located in Bacup, Haslingden, Stacksteads & Rawtenstall. The infrastructure and technology is ineffective and on number of occasions the images provided are not satisfactory for the police to use.
- 6.6 It was noted that within the resident survey which was recently undertaken as part of a public consultation exercise, the results indicate that low crime levels are most important to respondents, but this is also something which is high on the list of issues that they think need improving in their area.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### Police and Crime Commissioner

- 7.1 That the Police and Crime Commissioner continues to monitor the targets for the 101 service to ensure that improvements continue to be made to the service and targets, particularly 999 response times, are being met and if not then further additional funding needs to be given to this much needed service.
- 7.2 In relation to 4.7 of the report, could a system be explored that would enable an operator who received a call from someone suicidal or required additional support, to be transferred direct to an organisation such as the 'Samaritans'. This would relieve the operator to continue taking 101/999 calls and at the same time alleviate any stress for the operator taking the call.

### Joint Police and Crime Commissioner and Cabinet/Council

- 7.3 That Cabinet/Council support the need for an appropriate investment to upgrade to a more modern system which links into mobile technology. Joint funding should be explored in conjunction with the Police and Crime Commissioner and Lancashire Safety Partnership to provide safer CCTV infrastructure for the Borough.

NB: The Council has been quoted £79,040 to overhaul the infrastructure with suitable cameras and technology for remote viewing.



## **THANKS**

Special thanks be given to Fergus Johnston and Anisa Shaikh for the information provided to the task and finish group to enable them to understand the 101/999 service and the procedures the staff undertake.