

# Recruiting, looking after and leading control room teams

Attracting, supporting and leading force control room teams with the right skills, values and behaviours.

7 mins read

First published 24 July 2024

The [National Contact Management Strategic Plan \(2023-2028\) PDF, 1.8KB](#) identifies the ability to recruit, retain, and support contact management staff as an enabler of successful service delivery.

*Recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced staff in the current financial climate and providing for their health and wellbeing in this time of increased demand and increased complexity is and will continue to be a key determinant of our success...*

*We will also need to have greater emphasis on looking after our staff, supported by stronger leadership*

*National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028)*

This information supports you, as a contact centre leader, to address the challenges of [recruiting](#), [retaining](#), and [supporting](#) staff by:

- highlighting positive practices from a range of force control rooms
- signposting to relevant guidance, standards, and resources to support in this area

## Recruitment

Raising awareness of the career opportunities that exist within contact management, and the responsibilities of those different roles, is an important part of the initial recruitment process.

## Help potential candidates to understand the role

Several forces have produced videos to help potential candidates understand contact centre roles in greater detail, for example:

- [North Yorkshire police](#)
- [South Wales police](#)
- [Cheshire police](#)
- [West Midlands police](#)

## Meet potential candidates face to face (practice example)

As well as providing information online, it can be beneficial to engage with potential candidates in person. Norfolk Constabulary explain the range of tactics they've used to reach potential candidates, and how these have helped to engage with underrepresented communities.

### Video Transcript

Chief Inspector Zoe Hardman, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Recruitment Lead, Norfolk Constabulary: One of our big challenges is people thinking of us as a role to begin with. I think when people think of emergency services, they think boots on the ground and they forget that actually, there's somebody behind a computer with a headset on making some of that happen.

One of the things that we have found difficult before is a wide reach for particularly underrepresented communities. So we now go to various jobs fairs, both at our city centre library, and then we've reached out to colleges as well so that we can try and speak to people as their career progression opportunities are presented to them.

So we've done some webinars for colleges and been to their open days and we're hoping to go to their careers fairs as well. And then we have also been part of our local county show, just to try and get word of mouth, so the more we can do to publicise ourselves to those people who just don't get to see us, the better.

We see an uptick in applications when we advertise on Facebook and LinkedIn and Indeed as well we've gone out to. But more often than not when we've asked for feedback forms at the end of a recruitment day, people have ordinarily heard through us through our police website, so I think people still go to Norfolk Police's starting point to find out what's available and work backwards

from there.

So the jobs fairs, the local shows where we're able to speak to people about what we actually do, it's not like you can bring them to work with you to have a look around or to hear the content of what you're dealing with, so we run a webinar now online pre our recruitment assessment centres and while the advert is open, and I think that enables us to show that it's not just picking up the phone and connecting somebody somewhere else.

It's a really multi-functional, multi-skilled, high-pressure role, and so the webinar enables us to open the window into that for whoever might be thinking of applying or has already booked on to our assessment centre to tell them properly what the different roles in the control room are, the weight of responsibility that will be on their shoulders.

Yes, there's lots of support around you. Yes, you've got tutors and supervisors. But ultimately, how quickly we're going to somebody or whether we're going at all is on your shoulders, and so what we find we can't train is the resilience.

We need people to be really eyes-open before they come to those assessment centres, before they're in the classroom and before they're taking calls to know what it is that they've got to be comfortable with when they go home at the end of a shift.

We've had our SkillGate training days recently, and we bring role players in for that and some of them are college students. We do a careers talk with them too, and even though they had just run through an exercise specifically for the control room, for communications officers and controllers, when I said to them afterwards, 'When you think of policing, what do you think of?', not one of them thought of the person sitting at a computer with a headset on.

## Outline the full pay, benefits, and ongoing support

Outlining the full pay and benefits package, as well as the training and support you'll offer, can help encourage potential candidates to find out more about the opportunities available.

Video Transcript

Chief Inspector Zoe Hardman, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Recruitment Lead, Norfolk Constabulary: We're one of the best paid control rooms in the country, to my knowledge, but we found that if we advertised with the basic pay, it didn't necessarily capture as wide an audience as it could. I think most people who go to recruitment websites and filter by salary for what they can afford to take, it potentially cuts some of those people out without adding in the shift enhancement and weekend pay.

With our webinars, we're really upfront about, 'This is your basic pay but actually this is what gets added on top,' so that they know the full salary rather than just the basic pay as well.

When somebody starts with us brand new, they get six weeks of communications officer training or it's two weeks for one of our switchboard customer contact agents, and that's in a classroom completely away from the control room, so that they are just immersed in their teaching.

And then they have three sets of shifts with a one-to-one tutor. Sometimes they don't need as much as that, sometimes they need a little bit more. And then within their probationary year, they come back to us for another week and a half of training to become a controller because the role is dual skilled and that's part of their probationary period to achieve sign-off in both areas.

Once people are through their probation period, they can apply to become a tutor, which is an additional skill within the room, and we do a two-day tutor course, which covers things like difficult conversations and feedback and coaching methods, so we advertise it just within the control room because of the skill set that it needs to be able to bring on those brand-new staff members.

And they do some of the one-to-one tuition, but they also help us on our team days sometimes, and if there's new systems process changes for existing staff, they help roll that out through the teams as well, and they are compensated financially. They get £10 a day for the day's tuition that they do. It has to be signed off by their supervisor to say that they've done that duty, and then it goes off and then they get the additional pay to go in hand with it.

And in terms of career pathway, there are supervisor opportunities as well, and we have another training package that goes hand in hand with that too, which also links in to Leading with Care, which is a learning pathway for the whole force, which people can key into at different levels depending on which pathway they are starting with, whether they're aspiring to be a supervisor or they're going from supervisor to management level, there's a pathway to fit that with various

workshops through the year. And it comes with 24 hours of protected learning time, so that people complete the modules according to the pathway that they're on.

## Recruiting to meet the needs of your community

Strategic assessments, such as your [force management statement](#) can help your recruitment team to understand the particular challenges your control room faces, and the needs of the community you serve.

When evaluating the skills needed within your workforce, you should consider any responsibilities you need to meet, such as those set out in the [Welsh Language Act 1993](#), as well as your commitment to the [Police Race Action Plan](#).

*Have a diverse workforce that is representative of the broader organisation and, most importantly, the communities it serves. This will bring added value through the experiences and life skills a diverse workforce can offer*

*National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028)*

## Assessing candidates' suitability for contact centre roles

Our curriculum details the essential knowledge, understanding and skills needed to fulfil contact management roles. You can map the roles you're recruiting for against this. Force learning and development leads can access the curriculum by contacting:

[NationalPolicingCurriculumEnquiries@college.pnn.police.uk](mailto:NationalPolicingCurriculumEnquiries@college.pnn.police.uk)

Our [national sift candidate guidance](#) outlines effective ways to identify talent. Whilst this has a focus on police officer recruitment, you can apply the principles to all police staff.

## Identifying candidates with the right values and behaviours (practice example)

Identifying candidates with the right values and behaviours for contact management roles is essential. Our [competency and values framework](#) outlines the consistent set of behaviours expected from all those in policing and can be used during recruitment, assessment and development.

Norfolk Constabulary, explain how their assessment centre focuses on candidates values and behaviours, as well as their physical and practical skills.

#### Video Transcript

Chief Inspector Zoe Hardman, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Recruitment Lead, Norfolk Constabulary: We as a training team do the paper sifting of the applications that we get, and then we run our recruitment assessment centre as well. And some of what we look for through that day is not just the physical or practical skills that they have of the call taking and the controlling exercises and things, but also their values and behaviours.

Some of the exercises that we run give us some insight into what that person's values and behaviours are, which is a real core function for us. We need to know that we're recruiting the right people with the right values and attitudes and behaviours. So we have our trainers run the assessment centre because they are all experienced comms officers themselves, and know what's good for the role and what's not, and where people might struggle.

So it's good for them to see the people that might ultimately end up in their classroom, so they can see where they may need the extra time and attention or anything that we might need to give additional resources to.

## Efficient onboarding and training processes

Knowing when new recruits will be available to start in role will help you effectively plan in the resources needed to deliver their training. However, this time can vary depending on factors such as vetting processes, reference checks, and input from medical panels.

## Recruitment and training processes (practice example)

Norfolk constabulary told us about the improvements they've made to their processes to make recruitment and onboarding more efficient.

#### Video Transcript

<https://production.copweb.aws.college.police.uk/support-forces/improving-control-room-services/recruitment>

Chief Inspector Zoe Hardman, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Recruitment Lead, Norfolk Constabulary: One of the things we have done is keyed in with our vetting leads, our recruitment leads and our people customer service teams, to try and make sure all of the processes after our assessment centre have smoothed out.

We were finding that we'd have really good numbers of applications and good numbers of people through the assessment centre, but because our vetting and pre-employment checks were taking so long, we lost lots of people in that window between clearing the assessment centre and having a start date.

So it used to be about eight months from recruitment assessment centre to start date, and now we've got that down to about three months, sometimes a little bit shorter. So we still run our recruitment assessment centres to allow for the lag so that we're not thinking at the last minute, 'Oh my goodness, we're not going to have those people cleared for the course'. And suddenly you're running a course for two or three people, as opposed to a cohort of eight or ten.

So we schedule our courses at a similar time each year so that we know what we're teaching for 2025 and 2026. And then I track back from there to see where the assessment centre needs to be to allow for that start date to happen. And we do January, March and May, and then again in September. And that tends to mean that the September intake are ready for the Christmas period of everyone on Christmas nights out and it making a busier time then.

So, we recruit January, March and May intakes so that we are good numbers for the summer when it gets really busy and so that those, even the May intake, have had time to be with their one-to-one tutor and a bit of time flying solo before that summer uptake really hits us. So right from the point of our webinars and again at our assessment centres and again at interview, we talk about the fact that you're at an assessment centre today for a role that will probably be available at this date, so they know how long that wait could be.

So we now have priority vetting so that as our candidates clear their interview, they can go through on priority vetting, and that's made a huge difference, so we just keep in touch them along that process. I have another partner in our internal recruitment team who sends me the pre-employment tracker each week to show me where people are progressing.

Sometimes they clear vetting very quickly, but they need to go to medical panel or there's reference checks yet to be done. So we keep an active eye on that weekly and then we can speak to the

candidates who are particularly delayed, so that they know that they're not just forgotten off a list somewhere. It's just making sure that they know that we're still there and that we're here to answer their questions if they have them.

## Retention

High turnover leads to inadequate resources for forces to deal with calls effectively.

Higher workloads also create pressure on remaining control room team members.

The costs of recruiting and training staff are significant. Retaining and developing existing team members can be an efficient and effective way to improve control room service delivery.

Providing opportunities for career development can help to retain talent.

*Have a strong set of career pathways and professional development opportunities for our workforce, including promotion and specialisation within Contact but also opportunities into other policing and external sectors*

*National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028)*

## Developing existing team members (practice example)

We spoke to Norfolk Constabulary about how they're:

- providing a range of development opportunities for team members, from progression to supervisor roles, to offering apprenticeships
- using personal development reviews to capture career ambitions, and support continuous professional development
- making training as accessible as possible; something that's particularly important for shift-workers

### Video Transcript

Superintendent Jason Broome, Head of Contact and Control Room (CCR), Norfolk Constabulary: We've got a low sickness rate, we've got a low churn rate and high-quality training underpins all that. To recruit, to train, to CPD [continuing professional development], it's probably two years minimum before you've actually got an unconsciously competent call handler. And if you're



recruiting 10, 20, 30 people a month, a year, that's massively expensive, not just in terms of pounds and pence but in terms of experience and efficiency and, most importantly, giving a great service because experience is worth its weight in gold.

Call handling has become an increasingly challenging role over the years. It's a highly technical role that requires ever more training in a very complex world. So firstly, it's about empowering the staff to feel confident in what they do, and that starts on day one of training. And everything we do in here is underpinned by training and that's the CPD offer throughout their careers.

We have both an operational and occupational training arm, all under the same training inspector. So we have the occupational training, which happens at a different site to here, where we train all of our new call handlers and provide the CPD.

Now we have a senior supervisor in the room who is part of the training team. They will identify any relevant themes or learning. That then goes back into their collective training knowledge to make sure that that learning, wherever it comes from, is appropriately shared across the teams.

Ysobel Meikle, HR Advisor, Norfolk Constabulary: We have the personal development record, so it's a PDR. It's an electronic version we've got. And they're utilised for staff so they can have actions against them to support and help with their development.

And it is about setting those SMART [specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound] objectives for somebody, for their current job, but also, you know, it's for the line manager to be like, 'What are you looking to do?' Or I might even get individuals themselves saying, 'I'm looking to move into this department, what would you recommend?'

And again, we would look at the different things that we know that we could do to support internally to document in their PDR, because we do have an application process for recruitment in the force, but we also do use the development records because it's really good evidence to say, actually this person really wants to look to do this and, you know, move forward.

We do have other opportunities within the forces, other roles and things that people can move into. We're very open to supporting short-term secondments out, as well, for people. We could put people through CIPD [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development], so there is a process for that.

We've got our own learning and development team as well, so people can reach out to them to say, 'Is there any further support or anything else you can recommend I can do to help with my development?' We also have Leading with Care scheme in-force that we run at the moment and that is banded for different levels of staff depending on where you are.

So if they're looking to move on for promotion for, say, a supervisory role or, you know, line management role, that kind of thing, there'll be relevant information in there. And that's something we also use and recommend for people, which they can document in their PDR.

Supt Jason Broome, Head of CCR, Norfolk Constabulary: Most CCRs are very police staff dependent and I know it's a constant concern for them, that they sometimes are left out of development opportunities. The force has worked hard to develop career pathways for police staff and leadership development.

And here in the CCR, we've recently adopted the modern apprenticeship. We now have our second cohort of five supervisors going through the National Apprenticeship Scheme. Some of them are picking up Maths and English, which they didn't leave school with. And others, they're now developing skills which are transferable both within the organisation and to other employers should they choose to leave us in future.

Ysobel Meikle, HR Advisor, Norfolk Constabulary: Within the control room, the difference is, sometimes the development opportunities are not at a time when they are working, so we do try and be flexible with them. So we run some courses, they're called Best I Can Be, and we run them on three topics.

So there's absence management, there's performance and attendance support. And they're an hour long and they're kind of snapshots, as in to talk around the process, you know, the supportive nature of them.

But I know within here, it's very difficult for supervisors to get the time out. So I try to do them separately, to say 'Actually, I'll come away to your supervisor training away days and I'll put an hour's input in around performance or attendance support,' which is really important for the supervisor, especially if they want to continue on for development, because the people work is more and more and they have more responsibility as they progress on.

## Resources for line managers and teams leaders

We've developed a range of resources that can be used to support those in your contact centre that manage people or lead teams. These include information on:

- effectively carrying out [personal development reviews](#)
- supporting [continuous professional development](#)
- [mentoring](#) opportunities

## Promoting a positive workplace through effective leadership

Your contact management centre will include leaders at each stage of progression. Every individual should be aware of the leadership standards expected on them.

We set the [leadership standards](#) for all police, staff, and volunteers. They set out what good leadership looks like when officers, staff and volunteers are carrying out the accountabilities of their role.

Staff in contact management roles encounter volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments and need to feel confident and supported as they manage demand and deal with members of the public.

Embedding the appropriate leadership qualities that all staff should exhibit will help ensure contact management environments operate in a psychologically safe manner. This will support staff at all levels to make confident, autonomous decisions.

[Leaders at all stages of their career](#) have a role in managing a positive culture within their control room. This includes:

- challenging unacceptable behaviours (in line with the [Code of Ethics](#))
- being prepared to have difficult and challenging conversations about behaviour, if necessary
- developing good supervision skills to be able to support any direct reports

Contact management teams may be made up of a diverse and multi-generational workforce. Leaders need to understand the experience and skills mix of individuals so that they can modify

their approach to suit each person. This is called situational leadership, and is discussed in [stage four](#) and [stage five](#) of our leadership programme.

## Providing effective supervision

We've developed [effective supervision guidelines](#). These set out the role that good supervision plays in supporting individual performance, learning and wellbeing and covers areas including:

- culture and capacity
- capability
- organisational support and processes
- acting as a role model
- building effective relationships
- communicating effectively
- demonstrating fairness and respect
- supporting wellbeing
- supporting the delivery of good service
- supporting professional discretion in decision making

## Support for wellbeing

*As Chief Officers we need to support our staff with appropriate and meaningful well-being and resilience structures to enable them to deal with the impact of their work, and include embedding a supportive environment where staff can learn from mistakes.*

*National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028)*

## National police wellbeing service

All contact centre teams have access to our national police wellbeing service, [Oscar Kilo](#).

We offer a range of wellbeing and self care resources through Oscar Kilo, covering a broad range of topics such as:

- sleep

- nutrition
- resilience
- emotional wellbeing
- mindfulness

## Wellbeing initiatives (practice example)

Norfolk Constabulary have put initiatives in place to support team members with health issues, or issues that contact centre teams can face as a result of responding to traumatic incidents. These include:

- providing wellbeing break out areas, and peer to peer support
- appointing wellbeing co-ordinators and mental health first-aiders
- welfare support for those returning to work following a long-term absence
- building a culture of psychological safety
- listening to suggestions for continuous improvement, and establishing a culture board to take ideas forward

### Video Transcript

Superintendent Jason Broome, Head of Contact and Control Room (CCR), Norfolk Constabulary: I think for me, the underpinning success that we've had here is around our people. You need people that want to be here who feel proud of what they do, and on a busy day will rip up trees for you, and in the summer it gets really busy and they want to be here because we look after them and we sincerely care for their wellbeing, their welfare, all the hygiene factors. We listen to them, we take on board their ideas and we make the environment a great place to work.

Ysobel Meikle, HR Advisor, Norfolk Constabulary: I know wellbeing is a real high priority for them in here because of the stress that can come in throughout the day. So, you know, the teams are very aware that if they need to have five minutes, step away from the call, go for a walk around the block, they can do that.

They have a wellbeing breakout area that staff can go and utilise if they need. They do these monthly little competitions between themselves, and they do have some wellbeing SPOCs [single points of contact] in the room as well, which they're all aware of, who they can go to if need be.

We have also got peer-to-peer support groups set up for various wellbeing, so I know there's a cancer group, there's a bereavement, there's menopause, there are many more. We also have internally our own workplace health, who we can go to but we also, in the last few months, have recruited into a wellbeing coordinator position.

And it has made a huge positive impact, not just from the senior management teams that have fed that into me, but also the individuals themselves. And I think by having that additional support, that it's also retained a lot of people at work that actually necessarily may have in the past would have just gone off.

If we do have people that are generally out of the business for long-term reasons, then part of my role is to make sure that they have a suitable welfare SPOC set up and we've got a process engaged for that so that they can contact that person regularly and we can make sure that, you know, they're remaining engaged for while that person is out of the business for whatever reason.

Rachael Tillett, CCR Supervisor, Norfolk Constabulary: We're quite good with dealing with traumatic jobs. It's not often that they will upset people, but it's maybe the stress, the shifts and the amount of demand that can do that, and we can help that by making sure people aren't doing the same role every day, mixing that up a little bit and getting to that problem before it becomes a bigger problem.

We've got a lot of wellbeing services on each desk. We have some folders and they all have the wellbeing services on them, so people don't need to let me know, they can access them themselves. We win as a team, we lose as a team. There's no individual blame in here.

Supt Jason Broome, Head of CCR, Norfolk Constabulary: It's that coaching and mentoring environment, and that takes a lot of trust. And for those people that need a little bit more, it's about, 'How can we help you? Are there issues at home? Is it about more training? Is it a health issue?' And we've worked really hard around issues such as menopause and the menopause passport. Some very simple things, but effective.

We do a lot around mental health, mental health first aiders. We've had a number of people in the room who have been very open to share their personal stories around mental health and spoken really positively about the support that they had, and as soon as we knew we could help them, we did, and they are real stalwarts of the CCR and our longest member of staff retired two nights ago.

They've been here for 35 years.

Ysobel Meikle, HR Advisor, Norfolk Constabulary: We want to promote psychological safety as our culture. That is where we would like to be. We want people to come forward with the good and the bad and the ugly or improvements that they may think of. We want to have that openness.

So we did a people survey towards the end of last year, and then from that, the control room here in Norfolk set up a culture board. So it's not judging, it's not pointing fingers, so people come there all levels across the room staff-wise, to put their suggestions forward. Our senior management teams, especially the chief as well, does an 'Ask the chief' session which questions and suggestions can come forward to him as well for those to be reviewed there.

Obviously these things are a longer burn and we know that the culture is not going to change overnight, but we have already some smaller things that have been raised, they're seeing improvements around those already as well.

We'll continue to update our practice examples. You can find more content related to force control rooms through our [search](#).

Back to [Improving force control room services](#)

## Tags

Operational policing   Force control rooms