

Demand management in force control rooms

Managing current demand and planning for future demand in police contact centres.

8 mins read

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The [National Contact Management Strategic Plan \(2023-2028\) PDF, 1.8KB](#) outlines the importance of forces being “operationally prepared” for the complex demands they face:

There are some good examples of demand analysis and understanding, this good practice needs to be developed across policing to ensure problems are accurately defined, solutions appropriately designed and benefits fully delivered

National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028)

[His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(HMICFRS\)](#) have also identified the role that effectively capturing and analysing data plays in understanding demand:

A poor understanding of data leaves the police less able to... answer and attend calls for service or investigate crime

Police performance: Getting a Grip, July 2023

This information supports you as a contact centre leader by:

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

Your force plans for managing demand

Your [force management statement](#) (HMICFRS) sets out your plans for meeting the demands you expect to face, now and in the foreseeable future.

This includes a section on how you'll deal with requests for a service from the police, including emergency or urgent responses.

It also sets out how you will change your practices to meet future demand, and the effect you expect those changes to have.

Managing current demand

Understanding and managing current demand means having access to information about requests coming into your contact centre, and what resources you have available to meet that demand as efficiently as possible.

All forces need to have accessible information on current demand, assets (especially asset condition and capability) and resources. They use that information in their decision-making, including decisions about improving efficiency and effectiveness

Force management statements, HMICFRS, 2022

Prioritising calls (practice example)

Norfolk Constabulary outline some of the practices they use to manage daily demand including:

- their approach to prioritising and grading calls
- close working with inspectors and superintendents
- taking a county wide approach to deploying resources

Video Transcript

Inspector Matthew Howes, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Inspector, Norfolk Constabulary: We're often seen as the gatekeepers of risk because information that's coming in often the first point of contact that comes through to the constabulary.

We have to identify the risk surrounding that using THRIVE [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement] to manage that and identify, 'Is this a police matter? How are we going to respond to it? What grade are we going to respond to it on? What area of policing does it sit in?' But it often will come to the constabulary through the control room first.

Rachael Tillett, CCR Supervisor, Norfolk Constabulary: So 999 calls come via BT, they get pushed into the room and we take them automatically. We can't redirect them anywhere else. A 101 call comes in via our switchboard, switchboard finds out a little bit about the call and decides where it's

best to go.

We also have a callback system which the switchboard can offer callers if they don't want to wait if there's a queue, or we can ask them to use live chat or emails if they like. The live chat originally goes to switchboard, but if there's risk identified there, then it'll come into the control room and a call taker will take it on.

We try not to move people away from digital, but if the THRIVE and the risk assessment says that the demand in the call queues is higher, then we might have to wiggle things around.

We can also see calls come in on the call systems, mostly ambulance and fire. There's sometimes social services, children's services, adult services and the calls from them don't trump calls from members of the public. And then we might use THRIVE to say, 'Are we the best people to go to that job?' And if not, we'll have a discussion.

Each call we take, we have call scripting and that just involves going through some question sets to figure out the THRIVE. We will decide the grading based on the THRIVE, and that's how quickly we need to get to the calls.

The grades we have are: grade A, that's blue lights and siren, quick as you can, 20 minutes to get there. Grade B1, dispatch immediately, but it doesn't need to be blue lights. B2 is within 24 hours, C, D, we're not going at all and then a diary, which is appointment-based.

Martin Potter, CCR Supervisor, Norfolk Constabulary: Every day, we receive an email from the resource management unit that will give us the numbers of officers on shift. It will split it down by area. If another area was under, we can talk about moving resources around the county.

The inspectors have a daily management meeting and they will discuss with the inspectors from other areas and the superintendent about what's going on, on the areas where demand is as well.

Insp Matthew Howes, CCR Inspector, Norfolk Constabulary: It is a meeting that will be chaired by someone like a superintendent or a chief superintendent. They're looking at where we sit with regards to things organisationally. We class it within the control room as the gold meeting.

From my point of view, they're looking at: 'What does demand look like for the day?' If there are any incidents of note that are going to have a major impact, and also if there's any incidents that require

me to consider around staff moves to meet the demands of the calls that are coming in, that's something I raise at the gold meeting, say, 'I'm looking to move some people from this area of the county to this area of the county.'

So the idea of the silver briefing is to actually get all the key players together to identify where we sit with regards to the deployments of the day, where the room is and understand those demands that are coming in and manage expectations.

It's more for me to ask as the control room inspector to the other departments, 'Is there anything I need to be aware of?' And it's done as a simple checklist, and it follows on from bronze briefings.

So the bronze briefing, where the supervisors will come in, they will brief their teams around the expectations of the day. The first one of the day will be the 6:30am meeting, which will be the early turn coming in. But we also have further teams that then come at our key demand time.

So we then come to the silver briefing. It will then be for those representatives to say to me, 'This is where we sit with regards to the room. This is what we've asked to be done.' Silver briefing wise, there are three.

So there's the early turn silver briefing, which plans for the gold meeting at nine o'clock. You then have a late turn silver briefing that again goes into a gold meeting. The night turn silver briefing allows the control room inspector to have an understanding of where demand is with regards to the room.

One of the key things that's been introduced is Calabrio. Calabrio took over from seating plans. It identifies the core positions that are required and it identifies the number of call takers that, based around demand, it predicts that we will need.

When they walk through the room, they'll see there's the board up there, which will have their seating plan in place. The different colours will represent where different people are, and hovering over the pink bit here, it's saying the digital contact between 3:15pm and 7:15pm with a meal break at this point, so it gives them their job for the day.

The other thing Calabrio allows us to do is to look at predicted demand versus the staffing that we have. There are times it may show an understaffing based around demand. If I was looking at that as a risk and somebody presented that to me, I'd be looking to move some people from dispatch side across to call-taking side in order to meet that demand, so it actually gives me live-time

information to manage live-time risk.

Supporting repeat callers (practice example)

A small number of vulnerable people who repeatedly call the police can lead to increased demand on contact handling. These calls also have the potential to delay other members of the public accessing your services.

Kent Police are using call-handling systems to identify and support vulnerable repeat callers to 999 or 101. This has allowed them to engage with vulnerable callers to help them receive the correct assistance and signposting.

Recording crime types accurately (practice example)

South Yorkshire Police have improved their crime recording standards with the aims of improving the experience of victims contacting their control room and maintaining consistency in recording crime types.

The force have set up an Incident Management Team (IMT) that are based within their Force Control Room, and have oversight of crime, anti-social behaviour, public safety, domestic and hate incidents.

The incident management system can generate a daily record of incidents in these categories which were opened in the Force Control Room under the type 'crime' due to the initial information provided, but subsequently closed by attending officers under the type 'non-crime'.

Managing future demand

Planning for how you will manage demand in the foreseeable future will help you to resource plan more effectively.

Forces should have good methods of assessing a range of possible and likely future needs and how they will meet them. Force management statements will help forces explain how these are influencing forces' planning processes and decision making

Force management statements, HMICFRS, 2022

Forecasting demand (practice example)

Norfolk constabulary outline some of the practices they use to manage future demand including:

- the use of previous years data to inform resource planning
- planning for the busiest days of the week and times of the day
- forecasting in relation to planned events such as football fixtures
- understanding any changes in channel demand

Video Transcript

Inspector David Jerman, Op Solve Inspector, Norfolk Constabulary: Demand is increasing month on month and we are now starting to see a transition towards digital demand and we're having to put things in place to make sure that we've got the resources for that.

So we're getting ready for the future, but also we're getting the increase on 999s as well, which is the traditional route as well. So we're trying to be a match-fit, forward-thinking control room, but we've still got the traditional 999, which is increasing month on month.

Our demand management unit use Calabrio, which is our duty system. We have a weekly meeting where we scan the next month ahead and also significant events, so local big football games, New Year's Eve, those sort of events, and then we plan at least a month to six weeks in advance to make sure we've got the right resources.

I think if we look at where we were before, which is almost the finger up in the air in terms of where demand would be or where we expect it to be, we've now got actually some data that we can use, to forward plan where we expect demand to be based on previous years.

For example, we've been able to look at where our high call volumes are, the times of day, live-time as well as historic. And we've been able to plan in and around when we expect switchboards' call volumes to be high.

But now what we're able to do through Calabrio is use data to accurately measure what times are our busiest, what days are our busiest, and when we need to ensure that we've got the right staff in

the right place. We then use that data to accurately plan and accurately use overtime to cover any shortfalls.

It's also been able to highlight when we are short because of training in other areas, so it gives us the ability to plan ahead with a degree of accuracy. Digital is overtaking up one of our biggest demand areas and trying to make sure we've got the resources in place for that.

So we've found that through using Calabrio, we're able to evidence that a lot of our work is now Single Online Home, previously it was emails. We're now starting to see the shift and Calabrio is able to accurately record where that change in demand is, and it's going from emails towards Single Online.

Scenario planning (practice example)

South Yorkshire Police identified how software was successfully being used by local NHS trusts to help manage demand on their future services. They identified the opportunity to use this software to deliver their own demand strategy.

They're using it to model the effect of various 'what if' scenarios such as changes to demand, backlogs, resources or process flow. Learn more about their use of [simulation software to plan for demand](#).

Managing demand through the use of software (practice example)

Humberside Police have implemented [workforce management software](#) that uses historical data and trends to predict future demand in the force control room. This has allowed them to match staff working arrangement with predicted periods of higher demand.

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

Tags

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