Using technology to improve contact management

Using technology to deliver efficient and effective contact services to the public.

8 mins read

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The **National Contact Management Strategic Plan 2023-2028 (PDF, 1.8KB)** highlights the importance of making the "best use of technology to deliver a service to our communities that is reassuring, efficient and effective at the earliest point of contact."

Technology can be utilised in a number of ways, including:

- assessing the resource needed to meet current or future demand
- reducing the effort required from the public to achieve the outcome they need
- helping make decisions based on available data
- resolving contact at the earliest possible point
- helping citizens to self-serve, where appropriate

This information supports you as a contact centre leader by:

- highlighting positive practices in the use of technology, from a range of force contact centres
- signposting you to relevant guidance, standards, and resources

Preparing for the switch to digital telephone networks

The National Contact Management Strategic Plan (2023-2028) makes the working assumption that "telephone and voice will continue to be the public and policing's channel of choice for emergency contact."

By 2027, **all telephony systems will be switched over to digital networks** nationally. Your force should ensure that your contact centre network is configured to:

- accept incoming voice calls via digital telephone networks
- process enhanced Information System for Emergency Calls (EISEC) and Advanced Mobile Location (AML) data from BT (in the case of 999 calls)

Your force may opt for an on-premise or cloud based telephony platform. In either case, you should ensure that reliability and availability tolerances are set at a level that matches the **critical national infrastructure** requirements for 999 and 101 networks.

The switch to digital telephony networks will provide better support for people to communicate via a range of channels such as internet calls, video conferencing, and online collaborative tools.

Where possible, forces should consider ensuring that voice and digital channels are integrated to allow a citizen to use more than one option, where appropriate.

> *But forces must make sure that the level of response to online reports is no less than it would have been had the victim called. Our inspections found that many forces had no way of assessing and monitoring the performance of response to online crime reporting. This must improve.*
>
> ***Police performance: Getting a grip**, HMRCFRS, 2023*

Use of technology to support dispatch management (practice example)

Norfolk Constabulary share how they use technology to support with:

- allocating jobs
- estimating and monitoring response times

Video Transcript

Martin Potter, Contact and Control Room (CCR) Supervisor, Norfolk Constabulary: My role today is I'm a dispatch supervisor, so I am overall responsible for getting the officers out to their jobs in time, making sure they're on scene within our target times. Responsible for kind of moving the officers about to backfill as well should areas get busy, liaising with the dispatchers, should they have any issues or concerns.

When the 999 call comes in, we have to dispatch a unit within three minutes. As soon as the count is created, it flashes up on what we call Orcon, which gives you like a countdown timer so we can see how long we have left to dispatch on that job.

Once a unit has been dispatched on that, it drops down to the next level and we can see how long we have until we need to be on scene. It will show the job, the area, a bit like an egg timer, it just counts down to when they need to be dispatched by.

We do also have a system which, if there are any units that aren't available, we can press and it will load and work out from a vehicle tracking the next appropriate unit to send and will give you the approximate arrival time of that unit and list them as well.

Times are all logged, they get reviewed. I know the senior management team, they will run reports. They can split it down into areas to say that the Norwich may be getting out to jobs a bit slower than Broadland, and they can see like if there is a job that should have been dispatched in three minutes or 20 minutes, they can ask why this wasn't dispatched.

So, for example, one of our B1 jobs, which is a priority response, we're supposed to dispatch with those within 20 minutes. But that has gone outside of that 20 minutes because it involves children and to seek specialist advice. So there are occasions it does go out but for good reasons.

Intelligent call routing (practice example)

Norfolk Constabulary told us how they use technology to help manage and assess contact requests across a range of channels (including phone, live chat, and email).

Video Transcript

Superintendent Jason Broome, Head of Contact and Control Room (CCR), Norfolk Constabulary: The public, perhaps through COVID, but increasingly, are happy to be serviced in a different way. People are happy to take a mortgage or a loan out online. They'll see their doctor on a video interview. So why wouldn't they want to access police services in a very similar way?

There are a range of opportunities that we offer, whether it's a telephone interview and statement taking, or whether it's a face-to-face video call, or whether it's just advice and guidance over the phone. All that happens within the CCR.

Rachael Tillett, CCR Supervisor, Norfolk Constabulary: Calls come in on a system called Mitel, they come in through switchboard. Then they sit in queues so I can see that it'll say public safety or a domestic. And it just gives you a little idea about what the kind of call is.

Then they get distributed to call-takers. We can do that automatically or, as a supervisor, I can push each call through where it needs to go.

Then we also have a system called Calabrio, and that's where you can see all our staffing from the day on it. You can see who's doing what and who's where.

And there's an option called Adherence and you can check that staff are where they're supposed to be, how long they've been doing what they're doing, and you can use that just to check up on them, make sure they're okay, make sure they're where they need to be and move people around if you notice that demand's higher than the number of call-takers available.

We also have a callback system which the switchboard can offer callers if they don't want to wait if there's a queue, and then we'll call them back later 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 [threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement] and the risk assessment says that the demand in the call queues is higher, then we might have to wiggle things around.

Name required, Title required, Norfolk Constabulary: We have the digital contact allocated to us as well and we have the live-chat system that's on 24/7 and we get people, sometimes are up at 3am in the morning, wanting to report crime or sometimes they just wanted to inquire.

It doesn't necessarily need to be a phone call. Sometimes they might just have a question and a lot of the time we can probably resolve that through the digital channels so it doesn't take up people from taking up calls if we deem it is not high risk.

And, you know, there has been times where my colleagues had to direct the person reporting incident online, said, 'You need to call 999, this is emergency or this might be better to speak to an officer or to a colleague via the 101.'

There's also the email option as well that people can contact us and report crime. They can fill out the online reporting form and it comes through directly to us in the inbox and we have colleagues monitoring that 24/7 as well.

Supporting THRIVE assessments (practice example)

Processing contact requests as efficiently as possible, must be balanced against providing the right level of support to the public. This is especially true in contact that involves vulnerable people.

Surfacing the right data, from the right IT system, at the right time, can support teams to make evidence-based decisions in relation to THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement) assessments.

Cleveland Police have implemented **Initial Contact Enquiry (ICE) for call handling**. This is an IT solution that draws together information from different sources. It helps contact centre teams to identify, more efficiently, whether an individual is known to be vulnerable or a repeat caller. The system has also been effective in helping them to reduce call handling times.

Automating quality assurance processes (practice example)

Lancashire Constabulary have introduced a **contact management quality assurance process**. This has involved employing a service improvement supervisor who has identified areas of focus for quality assurance (QA).

Using a range of existing software, the force have been able to automate their QA assessment and reporting processes.

Their aim is to assess the quality of work being produced within the force control room while providing a fair and consistent approach across all areas of the department, such as switchboard, call handling and online reporting.

They're using the QA system to address areas of improvement identified through **PEEL** inspections; monitor whether training needs to be adapted for new recruits; and capture the quality of THRIVE assessments.

Supporting operators to process requests (practice example)

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) have introduced **robotics process automation** (RPA).

This has:

- expediated the process of transferring details from online crime reports
- led to improved triage outcomes
- improved data accuracy with reduction in human error

The force found the RPA to have a success rate of 98.3%, based on around 280,000 online crime reports submitted annually. This amounts to a saving of more than 7,000 hours per year. This makes a significant contribution to ensuring all online crime reports are processed within one hour of submission and the crime is classified within 24 hours of receipt.

Supporting citizens to self-serve (practice example)

Demand on 101 services can be increased by members of the public asking for updates on a crime they've already reported.

Thames Valley Police and Hampshire Constabulary have implemented a **citizens portal and automated messaging** to help address this. It's helped them to reduce calls to their 101 services by 14% and 21% respectively.

The portal can send up to 120 different automatically generated messages which include information such as:

- confirmation that reports have been received
- updates that an officer has been deployed
- when the crime has been allocated for investigation
- details of appointments that have been made
- information to the victim that their case has been closed and the reason why

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