Content Guru services

Introducing a new telephone platform to improve performance around managing and meeting 999 and 101 demand.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Digital Operational policing
Organisation	Sussex Police
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Private sector
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2023
Completion date	April 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	General public Victims Workforce

Aim

The aim of the intervention was to upgrade Sussex Police's telephone platform to a modern offering as seen in private industry and improve performance in being able to meet and manage demand from the public.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Content Guru services are to:

- improve 999 performance of meeting 90% of calls within 10 seconds or less
- be able to fairly distribute workload to reduce demand on our staff
- improve 101 wait times

Description

The previous system

The control room previously used a system called Avaya to manage 101 and 999 calls. This system was a premise-based solution, meaning the force owned all the kit and servers internally. The force identified that this was an issue, as it was difficult to update the system and keep up with the ever-changing tech landscape. The maintenance of this kit was also lengthy, and the force identified that they were not able to keep up appropriate maintenance.

Sussex highlighted that 999 and 101 calls are not consistent, and can come in waves, therefore it is important that staff within the control room can switch between 999 and 101 calls throughout their shift to assist colleagues. Their previous system split 101 and 999 calls on separate platforms

meaning staff were having to physically move to work on 101 and 999 calls. The lack of flexibility also meant that staff workloads could be disproportionate, as the system could not distribute calls effectively.

Furthermore, non-verbal contact through police websites and emails could not be addressed within the old system, creating further complications for control room staff.

Making a change

As a result of the above limitations, Sussex set out to update their telephone platform to a cloud-based platform. A cloud-based platform refers to software that is stored, managed and available through an online server. This would allow for 101 and 999 calls to be managed and distributed evenly across the control room, eliminating the limitations of the previous system.

To begin this process, the force scouted the market looking for various available platforms. From this the team conducted an IT impact assessment to review the benefits of changing platforms against the costs. A business case was put forward to senior leaders, highlighting the benefits of a newer cloud-based system. Finally, the intervention went through procurement where the winning software supplier was granted the funding. In Sussex's case, Vodafone was the winning supplier and became the primary contractor and provider of the new telephone system.

The implementation of the new system took around six months and involved various resources from IT including:

- solutions architects
- programme managers
- project managers

These team members were already within the force and their involvement was added to their current role.

The new system

The new system is supplied by Vodafone, who provide the internet network the system is run on, and the internal telephone system. As the service is cloud based, there is less kit to maintain, creating less demand on the force. Within the new system, control room agents can work on 101

and 999 calls, as well as non-verbal communications such as from the website.

The system distributes calls to staff automatically, reducing supervisor workloads and ensuring calls are being shared effectively throughout the team. This is possible as the system monitors every agent's capacity and skillset, to match calls to the best agent available. To ensure 999 calls receive priority, three members of staff are always ring-fenced to 999 calls and do not work on other communications regardless of workload. The new system also distributes calls in priority order, ensuring the most important communications are distributed to an appropriate agent first. Furthermore, the system included an interactive voice response (IVR) automated phone system that used pre-recorded messages to direct callers to appropriate agents. For example, callers wanting to contact the custody suite were able to be directed automatically to the appropriate agent, without having to speak to the control room.

In Sussex Police, the software is also linked to their workforce management system and is being used to create control room rotas. The software can look at the call flow demand during specific time periods and provide the amount of resource required to meet this demand. This is a new practice within the force, and they are planning on conducting a formal evaluation to assess the impact of this.

Due to the flexible nature of this platform, it has been rolled out further across the force to streamline IT communications.

Training

Control room agents were trained on how to use the new system. The force reported that the software was very user-friendly, and the principals were the same as the old system, in terms of how to answer calls. As a result, the agents required minimal training.

Supervisors were provided with more in-depth training, to support them in understanding how to read and use reports created within the system.

Overall impact

Since implementation, Sussex have improved from 22nd in national 999 performance tables to being a regular front runner, meaning they are responding faster and more efficiently. Service delivery has improved under the new system, with 99.4% of 999 calls being answered in under 10

seconds – 9.4% higher than the national average of 90%.

Control room team leaders are reporting that they now have more time to support their staff, as they are not having to manually move people around to manage the demand of 999 and 101 calls. Control room agents are also reporting that they are happy with the new system and feel it is more fairly distributing calls across the team.

Learning

Sussex highlights the importance of ensuring the force network is prepared for the cloud-based platform as it takes stronger networking resource. This can be reviewed by conducting a network readiness assessment to ensure the force network can function with a larger amount of internal traffic.

Some parts of the new system are complex, such as designing how specific reports will be delivered. The force had a knowledgeable analyst with a good understanding of work management systems and how to link this to the new system to deliver reports on performance features such as agent performance.

The team, who had been resourced from other areas within the force, had to remain on the project for longer than initially planned. Sussex highlights that they underestimated the resource and time required to deliver a new telephone platform and that it is important to allow for extra time in ironing out details after the software has been implemented.

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Tags

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