

The Highland Council
Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities
Committee 30.9.15

Agenda Item	4
Report No	CPE/ 12/15

Consultations Regarding Police Services

Report by the Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

The report outlines the background to 2 consultations on police services and the Council's response to these. The first consultation sought views on the impact of changes to police front counter opening hours and the second, from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, on police call handling. The report outlines the background, the process for collating the responses and asks Members to note the responses to these separate consultations.

1. Background

1.1 Over the summer months, views have been sought on 2 aspects of police services; front counter opening hours and police call handling. The first consultation was undertaken by Police Scotland and looked for feedback on the impact of the changes to police office front counter opening hours. The second was a review by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland who was undertaking an independent review of police call handling.

1.2 The report outlines the background to each consultation and the process for collating views. Both consultations were undertaken during the summer recess and so the responses submitted can be found at appendices 1 and 2.

2. Police Front Counter Services

2.1 Police Scotland is undertaking a review of the impact around the change to Police Front Counter Opening Hours provision following the changes implemented last year.

2.2 As part of the review a public questionnaire was produced and this was circulated to Members by the Corporate Communications Team.

2.3 In addition to Members feeding back individually, a Council response was prepared, gathering views from Members via the Ward Management team. With feedback sought by the 4 August 2015, a response was collated and can be found at Appendix 1.

3. Police Call Handling

3.1 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland has been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to undertake an independent review of police call handling. The objectives of the review are to consider:

- the capacity of the systems and the human resource available within the control centres to manage, receive, answer and prioritise calls;
- the capability of the systems and the suitability of the training provided to those who manage, receive, answer and prioritise calls; and
- the process within the control room to ensure that all calls are handled and dispatched appropriately.

3.2 As part of the review, HMICS are undertaking a public consultation; seeking views on individual experience of call handling. This was distributed to Members by the Corporate Communications team and was also made available on the staff intranet.

3.3 The Council also received a request directly from HM Inspector of Constabulary, Derek Penman, to feedback on views and experience of police contact, command and control functions in our area. Feedback was sought on 4 key areas:

1. Have elected representatives raised any issues with police call handling from the public in your Council Area?
2. What are the main issues which have been raised?
3. Has police call handling (of 999 and 101 calls) been raised within your local scrutiny and Engagement Committee?
4. What issues were raised with Police Scotland and how were these addressed?

3.4 With feedback required by 23 August 2015, a response was drawn up based upon views sought from Members via Ward Managers and upon the discussion within this committee last October on call handling. In addition the Council Leader met with Mr Penman on 14th August and this matter was discussed. The response submitted can be found at Appendix 2.

4. Police Call Handling – Review Update

4.1 On 3 September, HMCIS published an Interim Report on call handling based upon evidence gathered so far. The report provides an update on the progress of the review, a summary of activities, emerging findings and key areas of interest where further work is ongoing. Members can access the interim report at: <http://www.hmics.org/publications/independent-assurance-review-police-scotland-%E2%80%93-call-handling-interim-report#sthash.d49WRpVa.dpuf>

4.2 The report contains one interim recommendation to Police Scotland regarding call handling. This recommendation is that Police Scotland should:

“..consolidate and stabilise their staffing, systems, procedures and processes in both the East and West service centres and area control rooms.....detailed planning for the previously agreed end-state model should continue, with consideration given to accelerating the recruitment of staff and early commissioning of the North Area Control Room.”

Supporting this recommendation, HMICS notes that there should be contingency planning around the retention of service centre staff in Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee to ensure these centres are staffed appropriately until

the other key elements of the 'end of state' model are fully in place. Following publication of the interim report, the Scottish Government have advised that the closure of control rooms will be delayed in line with the HMCIS recommendation. The final report on Police call handling is due at the end of October.

5. Implications

- 5.1 Resource implications: there are no new resource implications from responding to the request for information.
- 5.2 Legal implications: there are no legal implications.
- 5.3 Equalities implications: no equality implications were highlighted.
- 5.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications: none are identified.
- 5.5 Risk implications: Members noted concerns about the ability of police to respond effectively to calls if there is a lack of geographical knowledge from call handlers.
- 5.6 Gaelic implications: concerns about the lack of geographical knowledge highlighted in the response can be compounded when call handlers are not familiar with Gaelic place names.
- 5.7 Rural implications: particular concerns were noted about identifying locations in rural areas.

6. Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the background to the reviews into police front counter opening hours and call handling and the responses submitted as part of these reviews.

Author: Alison Clark, Principal Policy Officer, Tel (01463) 702512

Date 4-9-15

**Police Scotland
Front Counter Service Review - August 2015**

Response from The Highland Council

1. Which Police Scotland division do you reside within?

N – Highlands and Islands

2. Would you classify where you reside as rural or urban?

Both – The Highland Council area covers both urban and rural communities

3. Are you aware of the review Police Scotland undertook in 2014 resulting in the change of opening hours to front counters at local police offices?

Yes – the Council responded to this review in 2014

4. To your knowledge, have the hours of opening/closing for the front counter at your local office changed as part of this review?

Yes – this varies across Highland with some offices directly impacted but others not.

One Member noted that in rural north Sutherland, there are no services to change as officers are not based in these locations any longer. As a result, the offices there offer no immediate or emergency response to the community in need.

5. If so, has this change affected you personally in any way? If yes, please provide comment

No - Members note that they have the appropriate direct number and so can make contact with officers as required.

6. Have you received any feedback from other members of your local community about the change?

Mixed – some Members have received comments back from their communities whilst others have not.

7. If so, have the comments made been positive or negative? Please provide comment.

On the whole, where comments have been received from communities, these have been negative. Included within these are:

- 101 is not seen by the community as an adequate replacement for reduced face to face contact. People generally prefer face to face contact and may pass on more information in that way.
- Current hours mean it is hard for those at work in the day to visit a police station for face to face contact.

8. Since the review, many additional officers have returned to operational duties allowing them to patrol and respond to your needs in local communities. Do you believe this is a more appropriate use of policing resources?

Members responding all agreed with this as a use of resources. However, it was queried whether there was evidence of more police on operational duties as this was not the perception locally.

A further point noted was that although Police are attending Community Council meetings more often, it is not always the same officer so it does not build local relationships. It was queried whether this is the best use of resources.

9. Do you feel there are any significant issues with the changes that were implemented, taking into account the local community and yourself? Please provide comment.

Members were divided on this question.

Some members noted that there were no significant issues with the changes that were implemented. It was suggested by one group of Members that rural police stations in Caithness have already been closed for some time with police based in urban centres.

Some Members highlighted however that the changes have resulted in problems. These included:

- there is not sufficient public confidence in the 101 system;
- the lack of a local visible police presence and local base is a significant issue. It has resulted in less community policing, there is a perception of less police in an area and that there is less local knowledge; and

- As highlighted in Q4, one Member noted that in rural north Sutherland, there are no services to change as officers are not based in these locations any longer and therefore offices offer no immediate or emergency response to the community in need. It is suggested there should be a change for the better.

10. Any other issues you wish to comment on regarding the front counter review? If yes please provide comment.

There was a view expressed that where Council Service Points and Police stations have co-located this has worked well.

HMICS INDEPENDENT ASSURANCE REVIEW OF POLICE CALL HANDLING

Response from The Highland Council August 2015

Please find below responses to each of the questions outlined:

1. Have elected representatives raised any issues with police call handling from the public in your Council Area?

Yes, a number of elected members from wards across Highland have either direct experience, or have had issues raised with them, regarding police call handling.

2. What are the main issues which have been raised?

101 Call Handling

The most common issue raised relates to the delays in answering 101 calls.

Related to this are issues with the way calls have been answered. Members report frustration at a lack of local knowledge from operators, particularly when calls have been routed away from Inverness. A Member noted that in one case reported, a call had been rerouted to Humberside. There is a sense that the lack of local knowledge impacts upon the ability to respond to the call and that delays in response are related to this.

Frustration has been reported with the level of questioning from operators on the 101 number; that it appears unnecessarily detailed. Concerns have also been noted that call centres try and log all incident locations by postcode, which often proves difficult for individuals if they are reporting something out with a building setting or from somewhere that they are unfamiliar with.

Members have received concerns about the delays in responding to issues raised via 101, with a perception that this may be related to the lack of geographical knowledge from operators. It was reported that in a small number of cases, issues were not followed up at all.

A concern was noted that when an incident had been reported in relation to local roads in Caithness, this information was then not passed on to local contractors.

A further example provided was in relation to this year's Belladrum festival when there was a high build-up of traffic on roads surrounding the festival site. Locals unsuccessfully attempted to report this, with one local Member being told that there was no one available to deal with the situation.

999 Call Handling

The majority of concerns raised relate to 101 call handling however it has been reported that incidents have occurred where police/ambulance respondents to 999 calls have been unable to find houses as the information relayed has been wrong. This is particularly the case in rural areas where houses are named.

3. Has police call handling (of 999 and 101 calls) been raised within your local Scrutiny and Engagement Committee?

Police Call Handling was discussed at a meeting of the Council's Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee on 1 October 2014 when a paper was brought by Contact, Command and Control North Superintendent, Philip Macrae. This paper was brought following a request at the previous scrutiny meeting for performance information regarding call handling.

There has also been some discussion at Area Committees as part of the regular Police performance reporting.

4. What issues were raised with Police Scotland and how were these addressed?

The paper highlighted performance for 101 and 999 calls against the standards of service. No issues were raised by Members in relation to 999 call handling and this was reflected in the high level of performance noted in the paper.

Members however did raise concerns about the response times to 101 calls, with some noting constituents had raised issues about having long waits for calls to be answered. Further issues detailed included not all crimes reported being inputted into the system, the challenge of individuals providing postcode information when reporting an incident and the importance of operators having geographical knowledge.

Superintendent Macrae noted that they were in the process of recruiting additional posts in an effort to address the lower performance standards in responding to 101 calls.

The paper and minute of discussion can be found at the following link, item 5ii:
http://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3318/community_safety_public_engagement_and_equalities_committee/attachment/66820
