

National Contact Management

Strategic Plan
2023-2028



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Foreword

Demand and public expectations on policing continually evolve, and quite rightly policing must respond. It is important that the service reflect upon and refresh our approach to Contact Management to ensure we have a service which is more agile, and focused on public needs and supports our colleagues delivering upon them.

This means we have a greater focus on making the service public-centric, be that through effective channel management or being more transparent about our contact performance. We will also need to have greater emphasis on looking after our staff, supported by stronger leadership, and making sure we are operationally prepared for what the future holds.



ACC Catherine Akehurst

NPCC
National Contact Management Lead

That future is a closer collaboration between the National Contact Management portfolio and the NPCC Digital Public Contact Programme, with a convergence of voice and digital contact channels to support public expectations, making sure they have a seamless journey and outcome, while exploiting the benefits of new and emerging technologies.

Supported by Chief Constables, this strategy will put a stronger emphasis on having a publicly focused service to make it as easy as possible for the citizen to contact us when and how they choose; ensure we effectively manage our channels with emergency supported by more routine methods of reporting; and prioritising contact through improved partnerships with non-policing agencies.



DCC Simon Megicks

Digital Public Contact Programme
Senior Responsible Officer

Executive Summary

The content of the revised National Contact Management Strategy was endorsed following extensive consultation with key stakeholders and through the appropriate governance processes of the National Contact Management Steering Group, the Local Policing Coordination Committee and Chief Constables' Council.

The strategy has three key principles, these are:

1. Ensuring service is public focussed

Service delivery should focus on reducing citizen effort required to achieve the outcome needed for each contact. Decisions on call grading and attendance will consider the needs of both the individual and the public as a whole.

2. Effective channel management

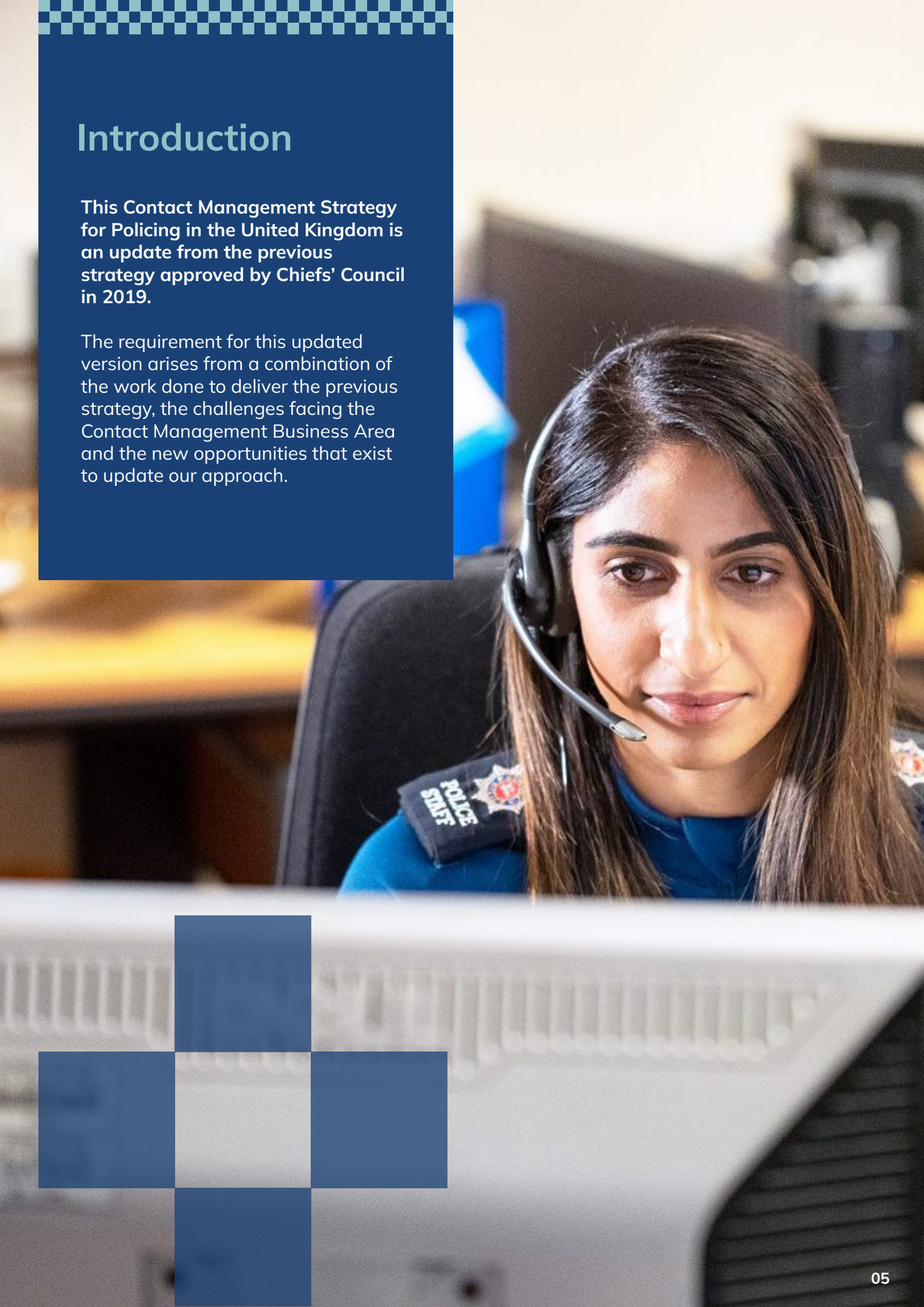
This is essential in a context where a range of contact channels will be required to meet demand in a way that is nationally consistent. While the '999' emergency system will remain the single preferred means to contact police in an emergency, there will be a range of routine channels. However, contact with higher risk or vulnerability remains a higher priority for the police service, and will be serviced contact, while transactional or lower-risk contact should primarily be self-service.

3. Prioritisation of contact

This takes into consideration a number of important factors, where real and immediate risk to life will be prioritised in all cases. Strategic decisions on attendance and investigation policies will be informed by the resources available to meet demand. Relationships with partners should support the most suitable agency response to contact, in alignment with other national policing portfolios and strategic direction of partners.

Enablers

In support of these three key principles are enablers, categorised as stronger leadership, addressing retention, recruitment and support for staff and officers, and ensuring we are operationally prepared in contact management for the range of complex and dynamic demands.



Introduction

This Contact Management Strategy for Policing in the United Kingdom is an update from the previous strategy approved by Chiefs' Council in 2019.

The requirement for this updated version arises from a combination of the work done to deliver the previous strategy, the challenges facing the Contact Management Business Area and the new opportunities that exist to update our approach.

Working Assumptions

The strategy is based on a number of ‘working assumptions’ supported by contact management leads and business and technology practitioners, and is approved by Chief Constables’ Council.

This strategy seeks to take these ‘working assumptions’ and combine them with a ‘National Vision’ for the Contact Management Business Area, also approved by Chiefs’ Council.

Telephone and voice will continue to be the public and policing’s channel of choice for emergency contact.

Emergency contact volumes, complexity and handling time will continue to rise.

Resource budgets will continue to be under pressure.

Less than 20% of the total 999 calls result in an emergency response.

Education on contact usage does not significantly change public behaviour in an emergency.

Increasing contact channels increases contact choice which increases contact volume.

Contact centre and control room staff will continue to default to resolving public contact at initial point of call where possible.

Challenges will continue to be felt in health, well-being and staff retention.

Current granular demand (including ‘failure demand’) is not always well understood.

‘Failure demand’ will continue to increase if access to service is not addressed.

The contact management business model can be significantly codified.

“Right care, right person” process needs to divert non-police demand to the appropriately commissioned health and social care services.

National Vision

Contact Management will enable the police service to prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, respond to requests for service and conduct effective investigations by ensuring our people are skilled, equipped and enabled, making best use of technology to deliver a service to our communities that is reassuring, efficient and effective at the earliest point of contact.

This vision will apply to all contact channels and will deliver contact management services which:



are designed to deliver appropriate assistance to members of the public;



prioritise those at greatest risk of harm;



effectively utilise people and technology across an appropriate range of communication channels;



achieve early resolution of calls for service, deploying policing resources where necessary;



in collaboration with others, ensures that we protect the public and increase confidence in policing.

To achieve this we must ensure that, when our communities need to contact the police, our services must be reliable, user-friendly, and accessible, while at the same time being efficient and effective to provide value for public money.

Operational Context

The context for achieving this is challenging. Policing demand for service is high and complex. Police receive approximately 12 million 999 calls annually and this has been growing at over 5% per annum since 2014.

Annual non-emergency contacts via '101' and digital channels is approximately 20 million with nearly 200,000 online reports having a risk indicator. Demand is going up across multiple channels, with more channels providing more choice.

Public expectation is also changing. Post the pandemic, our communities have become more dependent on technology and therefore expect the police service to be as easily accessible as any other online or place based service.

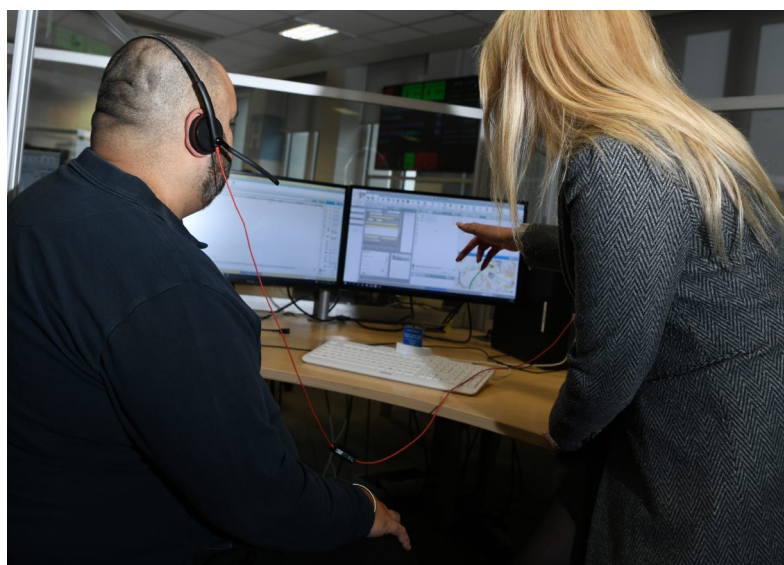
A broad suite of digital services allows our communities more choice in how and when they contact us. 98% (67m) of the UK's population today are active internet users, each spending on average 6¼ hours per day online.

Over half of us use the internet 'to fill up spare time' i.e. without a specific purpose. We know that users of our digital services are generally highly satisfied with their ease of use, and we know we need to position ourselves for a changing future and invest in new, improved services to make contacting the police simpler

and better for our communities, be those individual members of the public, businesses, or partners.

These expectations also make our public less accepting of channels where service levels are not met. In policing, this means slow answering times for non-emergency telephony on 101 will become even less acceptable and in the absence of effective self-service alternatives may continue to transfer pressure to the 999 system.

Our workforce challenges are significant. 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.



Contact management has transformed over the years from a largely analogue and paper based operation to one very much in the digital age. During this time, importantly, there has been a shift from simply clearing calls to adding value by resolving demand at the first point of contact and assessing vulnerability and risk as an integral part of the overall service. However, some aspects have changed little. The 999 telephone system was designed and launched in 1937 and remains essentially unchanged. There are strong reasons to review this going forward with our emergency service and governmental partners.

Technology is changing at pace. Capabilities such as automation, 'AI' and the use of shared data provide additional digital capacity that augments and compliments the capacity provided by our staff. We need to continue to harness these digital opportunities in a way that is lawful, ethical and scalable and continues to improve our communities' experiences of contacting the police while simultaneously improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the policing contact operation.

This strategy sets out what we want to achieve by 2028 and why

Once adopted, the accompanying Principles & Practice documents will be refreshed and will set out advice, guidance and best practice for local forces to consider in how and when they will deliver the outcomes this strategy outlines.

In drafting this strategy, we have developed the 'working assumptions', cognisant of the recently refreshed National Police Digital Strategy – specifically the desire to create a seamless citizen experience, and the recently launched Vision 2030 for Policing that sets out in Pillar 3 the need for policing to respond effective to all appropriate demand and taking a more dynamic approach to tackling demand.

Principles of Contact Management

Public Focused

We will be public focused in the way we deliver our services, focussing on reducing the citizen effort required to achieve the outcome needed for each contact. This includes resolving as much appropriate contact at the first point as is possible.

All contact channels will provide clear information and sign-posting to self-service wherever possible.

Decisions on call grading and attendance will consider the needs of both the individual and the public as a whole.

Contact with individual members of the public may provide wider opportunities for engagement and communication with the public as a whole, in a digitally connected era.

Effective Channel Management

A range of contact channels will be required to meet demand in a way that is nationally consistent.

The '999' emergency system will remain the preferred means to contact police in an emergency and misuse of that system should be robustly challenged.

There will be a range of non-emergency channels to contact the police but not all contact will be serviced on all channels.

Contact with higher risk remains a higher priority for the police service and will be serviced contact.

Prioritisation of Contact

Contact where there is a real and immediate risk to life will be prioritised in all cases.

Contact will, where appropriate, be resolved at the earliest point of contact, without deploying officers or staff.

Some contact will not be attended and investigations will be carried out only where there are reasonable lines of enquiry.

Strategic decisions on attendance and investigation policies will be informed by the resources available to meet demand.

Vulnerability will be considered when prioritising demand.

Relationships with partners should support the most suitable agency response to contact, Right care, right person – first time.

Enablers for Contact Management

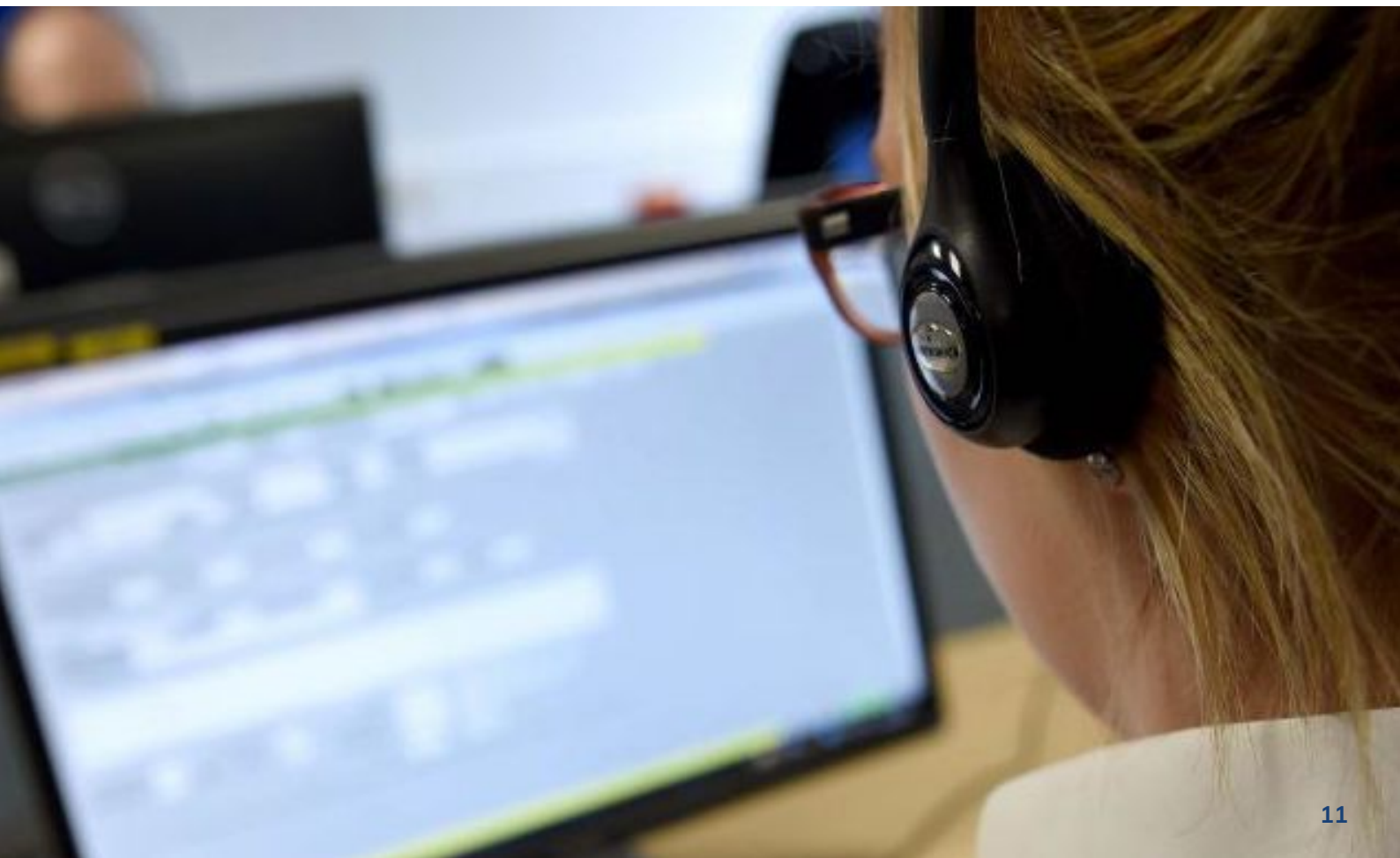
1. Our Leadership

Contact management is the first point of contact into policing and the criminal justice system. Both are areas unfamiliar to the majority of the public. It is the initial actions of contact management staff that determine the response and the level of risk to the public, whether for criminal damage, murder or extreme weather events.

In that sense contact management cuts across departmental functions and other areas of policing responsibilities. It is also a cornerstone of national capabilities in

responding to national threats. It is right, therefore, that contact management has strategic leadership within each police service.

Leaders should be appropriately skilled to understand the criticality of contact management to policing, able to manage consequences and promote standards. Leaders in contact management should seek to embed a culture of ethical behaviour which promotes an ethos of contact management staff and officers being first responders.





2. Our People

Working in the contact management environment can be difficult. Staff and officers are faced with harrowing circumstances on a daily basis which can have an impact personally and professionally.

Chief Officers need to recognise the difficult decisions contact management staff and officers are faced with on a daily basis, often without all the information, our staff make time-critical decisions.

Whilst they will do so with the best of intentions, on occasion they will make a decision which is either incorrect or ultimately proves to be so.

It is important these decisions are seen in the context of the thousands of calls and incidents taken on a daily basis that are dealt with well.

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.

All of this becomes only more important in the current employment and economic situation where recruitment and retention of staff is more critical than ever and likely to remain so.

Chief Officers need to see Contact Management staff as a value rather than a cost and invest accordingly.

3. Preparedness

The nature, scale and pace of incidents that police services respond to on a daily basis is unrivalled.

Among those incidents are some of the most operationally challenging and dangerous. In dangerous times the public seek protection from their police.

It is important that we are prepared to respond to whatever we may face. In order to be able to function effectively in a crisis we must prepare, rehearse and test out plans for a variety of contingencies.

The nature of contingencies to be prepared for will vary between police services but the level of preparedness should not.

It is this preparedness that enables us to operate in such difficult circumstances, either alone, or as part of a national mobilised response.

4. Collaboration

The challenges faced by policing are not unique and the demands on policing are, in some cases, symptomatic of similar challenges in partner organisations.

Sustainable solutions require a collaborative approach. This has been particularly evident in the interface between Policing and Health and Social Care. The emerging work on 'Right Care – Right Person' is an important development.

If it is to be successful and sustainable clear parameters will need to be set and maintained, detailed training and guidance given to Contact Management staff and most important good support given to staff making key, fast time decisions, some of which will doubtless come under significant scrutiny.



5. Understanding Demand

Despite consistent efforts through various fora within policing and the acceptance by many that this is a key area, detailed and granular analysis and understanding of Contact Management Demand is not at the level required to transform the business.

This potentially risks lack of system thinking in business design which in turn risks small scale business changes, often with associated technology spend, where, because the initial problems are potentially ill-defined, solution design also risks being flawed and benefits poorly delivered.

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 design and benefits fully delivered.

6. Operating Model

What we do fundamentally in contact management is the same throughout the UK, we all receive and respond to contact from the public on standard policing issues and yet Contact Management business practice varies widely across forces.

This has been demonstrated in peer reviews and in attempts at compiling an understanding of systems and processes across the UK. This is an area which will need significant attention.

The work within the National Productivity Review, currently being piloted in six police forces/services should provide a much deeper insight into and if successful

should provide the basis for codifying significant elements of a preferred 'Target Operating Model'.

The work currently being progressed by the College of Policing needs to amalgamate the outcomes from the Productivity Review with their own work and make this central to the Contact Management Principles and Practice framework, including optimal operating models going forward.



7. Performance Management

In 2022, in partnership with the Contact Management Steering Group and The Digital Public Contact Programme, the Home Office under Ministerial direction, began to publish regular Police Emergency Contact Performance Data (999 Call Handling Data).

This is based on consistent, national, independent data. The Contact Management Steering Group acts as the Gatekeeper to this process to ensure it remains consistent and independent.

Whilst this has provided useful data and insights allowing many forces to address some performance issues, the emphasis within the data on answering calls within 10 seconds has allowed this, in many cases, to become the focus.

Performance data showing the number of calls each force/service fails to answer within 2 minutes (arguably a more critical

issue) remains stubbornly high across too many forces/services. In essence, the 2 minute measure constitutes a red flag warning that something is systemically wrong and needs more attention from Chief Officers.

There is significantly more organisational risk in calls waiting more than 2 minutes to be answered than calls waiting marginally more than 10 seconds. There remains the desire within the Home Office to extend the performance data in to the '101' handling data.

Following representation from the Contact Management Steering Group this has been deferred to allow for a more comprehensive Non- Emergency Contact Performance Data Set. This approach will need to be developed and delivered going forward by the Digital Public Contact business area.

8. Technology

Technology has never moved so quickly....and is unlikely to ever move so slowly again!

Clearly Contact Management lends itself to innovation and new technology. This can of course be a 'double-edged 'sword, the comments on understanding demand and lack of systems thinking previously refer.

We therefore need to reconsider fundamentally how we approach this.

In the changing landscape and taking the above enablers of 'Understanding Demand', 'Operating Model' and 'Performance Management' we should be leveraging the role of the Police Technology Council and Police Digital Services with a view to supporting codified business models with appropriate and cost effective technology in end-to-end solutions.

This is a long way from where we are now and is a significant leadership challenge for policing.



Strategic Outcomes

Evolving technology and data to fit both force and customer need

Propose that a new front end to 999 be explored in agreement with other emergency services and DSIT/HO/DoH.

The 999 system was introduced in 1937. It allows or probably more accurately relies on any member of the public deciding what amounts to an emergency for the relevant agency from which they seek assistance.

Set against this we know that routinely less than 20% of 999 call volumes result in an emergency graded call for policing, sometimes it can be as low as 10%.

Whilst an indicative rather than definitive measure, it does indicate that a significant amount of the current unsustainable demand should likely not be on the 999 system.

Collectively emergency services need to address this, exploring with each other and call handling partners how, with advances in technology, we might do this differently.

Creation of nationally consistent operating environment that binds together multiple contact channels, enabled by technology and consistently delivered.

The work of the Digital Public Contact Programme alongside the Productivity Review, Police Technology Council and Police Digital Services need to consider an optimised, codified model for service delivery and optimised technology platforms for delivery.

Transforming the citizen experience

Movement to Key Performance Indicators that consider first contact resolution and customer satisfaction and citizen focus as opposed to simply call answering times which run the risk of driving non-value add, or worse still perverse practices and outcomes.

Propose that a **Non-Emergency Contact Model** is created by joining operational thinking on 101 call handling and digital 101 developments through Digital Public Contact.

We will be public focused in the way we deliver our services, focusing on reducing the citizen effort required to achieve the outcome needed for each contact. This includes resolving as much appropriate contact at the first point as is possible.

We will be a listening and learning industry, adapting to change societal context and striving to forecast future citizen need when thinking about new services and capabilities. Similarly we will review other industries and how they are improving customer/citizen experience, adopting and adapting our current and future services, where appropriate.



Creating a step-change in culture

Development of a Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment for Contact Management to support Executive focus on Citizen Focused business outcomes.

Establishment of APP structures for training and professional development.

Provide an environment that is a great and inclusive place to work, that offers rewarding roles to people who want to work in this arena.

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.

Build on our learning from how we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in exploring ways of delivering our capabilities in a more diverse operating model that is not reliant on people working on premise, on shift.

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



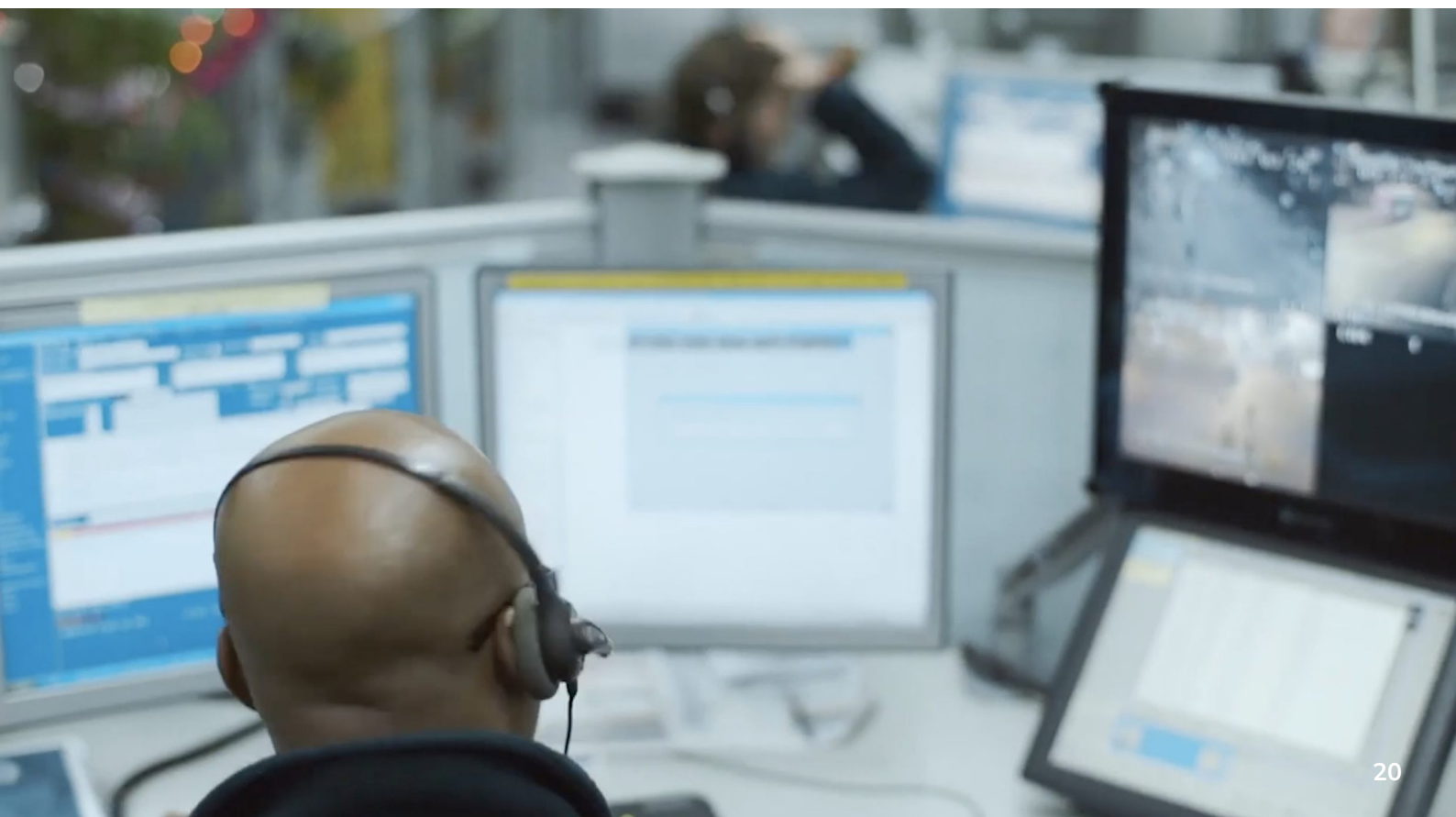
Performance management that is 'fit-for-purpose'

Approve a recommended 'Understanding Demand' business model in terms of both process and technological support.

Deploy a data model, supported by technology, that both automatically puts the right data in front of the right person at the right moment in time to aid evidence based decision making based on critical risks as well as volume metrics.

Deliver a national omni-channel operating environment for routine contact, capable of local configuration to meet local needs.

Develop and deliver a national, accurate and consistent non-emergency performance data set which reflects public demands and provides insight into how we deliver this business area.





Summary & Recommendations

The 2023-2028 National Contact Management Strategy provides an adaptive pathway to the current and future needs of the UK citizen by advocating a truly seamless experience.

The Strategy seeks to be adaptive to increased demand by creating a more technologically complete environment affording more efficiency and better operational effect, tested annually through a structured NPCC STRA process.

The Strategy purposefully seeks to redirect the non-policing demand to right agency for the right care with a whole system approach.

To support our staff and officers in contact centres and control rooms across the UK, the creation of an APP and structured career pathway will bring heightened opportunities to provide the best service in responding to and resolving public need at first contact.

