

**Police and Crime**

**Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys**

**Scrutiny Panel**

**Dip Sampling Exercise**

**Force Communication Centre (FCC) Digital Desk**

**Panel Members’ Findings & Feedback**

**January 2024**

## Contents

[Contents 1](#_Toc102479580)

[1.0 Overview Background, Purpose and Methodology 2](#_Toc102479581)

[2.0 Review of Digital Desk Incidents 4](#_Toc102479584)

[3.0 General Comments and Observations 7](#_Toc102479585)

# **1.0 Overview, Background, Purpose and Methodology**

The Quality Assurance handbook, available on the [PCC’s website](http://www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/media/6081/002qualityassurancepanelhandbookjune18.pdf), states the background and purpose of the Panel along with how the dip sampling is carried out and what the Panel is asked to consider.

On the 24th of January 2024, members from the Quality Assurance Panel met at Dyfed Powys Police Headquarters to review a selection of emails, website correspondence and social media correspondences, coupled with the call logs attributed towards police response between the Force Communication Centre (FCC) and members of the public. The Panel reviewed 7 incidents in total.

A supervisor of the Digital Desk, gave an input to the Panel and gave an overview of the call demand over the past year to aid understanding of the need for the Digital Desk.

The Digital Desk has three methods of contacting Dyfed-Powys Police which is alternative to the 101 telephone service. These are:

* Email
* The Force Website (known as Single Online Hub, [Home | Dyfed-Powys Police](https://www.dyfed-powys.police.uk/))
* Social Media (Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly known as Twitter))

The induction emphasised that the Digital Desk is not a replacement for the telephone service; whereas this is a form of communication that some people may prefer to correspond with directly with the police. The Digital Desk provides immediate contact with a large audience and allows Dyfed-Powys Police (DPP) the opportunity to:

* Provide swift assistance.
* Help with updating the public on ongoing incidents and build a receptive audience for times when the Force needs to distribute and seek vital information.
* Improve Dyfed-Powys Police’s visibility and aims to build trust and confidence in their work by becoming more approachable as a source for information and support.

The Force currently has 132,991 followers with Facebook, 129,715 followers with X (formerly known as Twitter), 12,402 with Instagram and 2,988 followers with Linked-in. These followers are expected to grow in the long-term; and therefore, consideration needs to focus on how the current level of service is being provided in its current form.

The data captured from Jan-Dec 2023 (Source: Knowledge Hub Website / Digital Public Contact platform) in relation of demand shows:

* 66,835 calls made via 999 emergency telephone service (BT data source).
* 176,534 calls made via 101 general telephone service (Vodafone data source).
* 15,829 Single Online Hub (SOH) reports were made via email and the Police’s website.
* 20,431 reports were made via social media (Facebook, Instagram and X).

The call demand throughout the year of 2023 tended to peak in the summertime, reaching the highest of 17,530 calls in one month, to decline but remain between 12,000-13,000 calls from the autumn to winter period. This call demand is causing significant strain within the FCC department, with circa 25.9% 101 calls being abandoned. Therefore, the Digital Desk could help reduce call demand; however, the question remains whether the Digital Desk is a comparable service to the 101 telephone service.

The Panel were informed of some of the challenges that the FCC face in facilitating this service. From a recent survey, the public preferred the 101 telephone service and due to Dyfed-Powys’ largely rural demographic area, accessing adequate internet connection is not always easy. Staff within the FCC are trained to handle calls and not digital communication; therefore, additional training is required and staff are not obligated to do this. In terms of managing risk, on a telephone line, call handlers are highly trained to monitor not just what someone says, but how they communicate this information; with the digital desk, this service is significantly harder to monitor those subtleties; and consequently, harder to manage risk. Finally, there are no quality assurance processes in place monitoring the service that call handlers provide to the members of the public in this forum unlike on the telephone service.

It is for the reasons outlined above, that the QAP have been asked to review incidents from the three methods of contact into the Digital Desk being email, the Force’s website (Single Online Hub, SOH) and social media. They will also examine the police response by accessing the log of the incident and assess whether the call handler has:

1. Understood the initial report.
2. Transferred that knowledge on the STORM log accurately.
3. Provided a service that is comparable to the telephone service by assessing the level of detail, response from police and timeliness of correspondence.

# **Review of Digital Desk Incidents**

Case 1

*Dyfed Powys Police were notified of another Force’s incident of a well-known individual who attempted to steal items in a retail store.*

**Method of contact:** Email

**Positives**

* Crime has been identified correctly and the call handler has responded to the informant to ascertain further details.
* The communication was done in a timely manner.
* Digital Desk provided a good outcome, as the service provided by the call handler and the Force was handled in a timely manner.
* The Call Handler had cross referenced this incident with a previous incident.
* Due to the links the offender has with affiliated local gangs, the call handler was advised to call the emergency services should they return.

**Feedback**

* As there was no information on the location initially, the Panel discussed whether over the telephone, this would have been clarified much sooner. However, as this was not time critical and due to this being reported close to midnight, the Panel concluded that the Digital Desk was the best forum for this report to have been made.

**Queries Raised**

* Why was an incident in another Force reported to Dyfed Powys Police?
* It was noted that the informant (an employee of the store) had been advised to call their local force, and they followed that instruction. Did DPP pass the information that the Force in question initially didn’t record?

Case 2

*Email received from another Force advising that an individual residing within Dyfed-Powys has suffered an offence of criminal damage.*

**Method of contact:** Email

**Positives**

* Information was recorded clearly, concisely, and risks identified from the outset.
* Grading, crime and location have been recorded accurately.
* Call handler has made attempts to contact the victim but was unable.

**Feedback**

* Crime was recorded 5 days after incident was transferred from another Force, which appeared to be untimely and not victim focussed to the Panel. Despite attempts by call handlers to telephone the victim, there was no direct correspondence between the digital service desk and the victim.

**Queries Raised**

* How do Forces contact each other, is there a way the Force that receives the call, can log it and send it over via the STORM logging system?
* What considerations does the Force have to contact the reporting victim? Should further interaction occur, with a reporting victim, occur either via the same medium used to report the crime/incident or would contact via the telephone service be prioritised?

Case 3

*Received correspondence from a member of the public expressing concerns for children at a specific address without the appearance of any parents at the location.*

**Method of contact:** Social Media

**Positives**

* The location, grading of the call and category were correctly recorded. From the point of contact, police responded within 30 minutes.
* The Call Handler, corresponding with the member of public, was polite and had a good manner. The Call Handler advised what was going to happen and offered reassurance that the correspondence would remain anonymous.
* The questions asked, within the social media forum, were reasonable and proportionate to obtain the necessary information to evaluate the seriousness of the incident. This also influenced appropriate background checks on the location and possible parents involved.
* The Panel considered that as the informant knew the postcode for the named address, the time when this was reported and also wanting to remain anonymous, that potentially they lived locally. The Panel therefore assessed that the ability the informant had to report this via social-media was beneficial and would have been more comfortable to report. This may encourage other calls of similar nature for welfare checks to be a possibility.

**Queries Raised**

* Does the Force follow up with any malicious contact they receive? If so, how is this done?

Case 4

*A social-media post was brought to the attention of Dyfed-Powys Police showing an individual behaving anti-socially.*

**Method of contact:** Social Media

**Positives**

* Attachment of the video was sent.
* Within 30 minutes of the recording the call, this was sent to a police sergeant who made an overall assessment of the crime and fears of escalation associated with this incident.
* Vulnerabilities and individuals were identified immediately.
* Reporting via Digital Desk was deemed appropriate in this instance as it contained an attachment of the video of the incident concerned.

**Feedback**

* Police sergeant made a remark which the Panel were not satisfied was entirely appropriate, expressing a pejorative opinion in place of stating facts. The comment was referencing their thoughts of the incident being “totally disgusting.”
* There did not appear to be much discussion in the log surrounding the victim or obtaining the informant’s details.

**Queries Raised**

* Can clarification be provided whether officer or call handler’s opinion should be logged on official transcribed documents such as STORM or Niche?

Case 5

*Report of a burglary at a disused property.*

**Method of contact:** Single Online Hub (Force’s website)

**Positives**

* The Panel unanimously felt that the use of SOH was appropriate and best use of resources for this report.
* The Crime was recorded accurately and dealt with very clinically. Niche recorded within 30 minutes of contact made from victim.

Case *6*

*Report of a suspected known drug trafficker.*

**Method of contact:** Single Online Hub (Force’s website)

**Positives**

* Report was logged 5 minutes from the point of contact.
* Considerable detail of the incident was recorded to the log from the subsequent anonymous report.
* History and record of alleged offender and vehicle recorded.
* Due to the informant’s concern about remaining anonymous, this information may not have been provided had the option of the SOH or other forms of digital communication had not been made available.
* The subsequent actions of the police were considered to be prompt, clinical and effective.

**Feedback**

* As the means of communication is one way and the informant remaining anonymous, there is an inability to ascertain further information via the Digital Desk.

Case *7*

*Informant reporting a road rage incident.*

**Method of contact:** Single Online Hub (Force’s website)

**Positives**

* The narrative of the incident, background checks and subsequent transfer to Niche occurred within 40 minutes of the report being received.

**Feedback**

* Difficult to determine the outcome in this report and there is no mention of victim being contacted or updated.

#  **General Comments and Observations**

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| **Observations** | **Force Response** |
| What considerations does the Force have to contact the reporting victim? Should further interaction occur, with a reporting victim, occur either via the same medium used to report the crime/incident or would contact via the telephone service be prioritised?  | *The Force Communications Centre (FCC) always contact the victim on their preferred method – be it social media, email, mobile etc. Other alternative contact options are sought, however, there is an agreement as to the caller’s preference which is used.*  |
| The Panel were largely unaware of developments in digital communications between the public and the Force. What steps are being taken to promote digital communication options to the public? | *The FCC has messages built into its telephony call routing, and have posters presented at police stations promoting digital contact. In addition to this, advertisements on social media platforms and email signatures similarly promote this contact methodology. Contact handlers verbally inform callers of the alternative options during their calls for service. Approximately 30% of the FCC’s incoming demand is digital in nature, this being non-telephony.* |
| The SOH seems well suited for low level crime that does not require urgent attention. However, in comparison to the other digital forms of contact that include social media and email correspondence, there is not always a means to ask further questions if the informant does not provide their contact details should the informant wish to remain anonymous. | *SOH is a national platform thus the FCC has little influence on the digital forms used as templates on the digital platform. The nature and amount of information communicated is therefore dependent upon the member of the public submitting the form as to the required fields. The FCC does re-contact informants via the email used if further clarification/additional questions are required.* |
| Whilst the timeliness of these cases were considered to be good, the Panel highlighted potentially a risk of a lack of empathy in the acknowledgment email and correspondences between the call handler and the informant. Information obtained felt very methodical and clinical but appeared to lack emotional understanding. | *Digital contact is often quite ‘mechanical’ and it can be difficult in a typed message to provide the appropriate emotional response. The FCC’s Digital Desk currently supports a number of new staff to the role, and the Senior Management Team is confident that once the requisite level of experience is gained, a more confident and befitting response will be delivered, this being less mechanical in nature.* |
| There were cases observed whereby the incorrect Force was notified of a crime. The Panel would like to know what the optimal form of communication ought to be between Forces transferring incidents between one and other? | *On those occasions when an incident reported to the FCC is occurring in another Force Area, with this being assessed ‘life at immediate risk’, the other Force is contacted via the Airwave radio option by the incident handlers working within the Force Control Room. All other incidents (not assessed as posing an immediate risk) are transferred to the other Force via a telephone call direct to the relevant Control Room. Command and Control (STORM) logs can be transferred to the other Welsh Forces but all other UK Police Forces will receive an email outlining the incident. Such emails forwarded directly to the other Force are followed up by a phone call (Force Control Room to Force Control Rom) if an electronic incident receipt is not received. This provides the necessary safeguard confirming receipt and transfer of the incident.* |
| Does the Force follow up with any malicious communication they receive? If so, when would this be deemed appropriate? | *The FCC has experienced very little malicious communication on Social Media. If this were to occur, the FCC would open a Command and Control (STORM) log to reflect the crime incident which would be investigated by officers (out on the police divisions or within the Crime Incident Hub at HQ).* |
| Can clarification be provided whether officer or call handler’s opinions should be logged on official transcribed documents such as STORM or Niche? | *Contact handlers are trained not to record personal opinions on the Command and Control (STORM) logs, or any other platform used, verbally or written. The incident mentioned in Case 4 (DP\_20231226-296) involves a police sergeant who is stationed outside of the FCC and beyond its scope of supervision and management.* |