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DYFED-POWYS  
POLICE AND CRIME  
COMMISSIONER

## **Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys**

### **Scrutiny Panel**

### **Dip Sampling Exercise**

**Review of 2016/17 Quarter 4 (Jan-Mar 2017)**

**Professional Standards Department Case Files**

**&**

**Force Communication Centre Calls**

**Panel Members' Findings & Feedback**

**April 2017**

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## **1.0 Overview**

At the first meeting of the Commissioner's Quality Assurance Panel held on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2017, members reviewed a random selection of closed Professional Standards complaint files and calls made to the Force Communication Centre from January to March 2017.

The Panel considered 6 complaint files and 9 calls in total.

During the first session of the day, members worked in pairs to review complaints cases and discuss their view of the files. Members' feedback was collected through template observation forms. Members of the OPCC staff were available throughout the exercise to answer any questions and provide clarification where needed.

In the afternoon, calls recorded in the Force Communication Centre were played to members via the meeting room's speaker system. Using the FCC NCHS marking sheet, members noted any observations during the playback. The group then collectively discussed each call, with notes being taken by OPCC officers. Members' NCHS marking sheets were also collated at the end of the day to inform this report.

Panel members' findings were discussed with department leads in detail. Departments were then provided with the opportunity to formally respond to the Panel's observations. These responses are included within this report.

## **2.0 Background, Purpose and Methodology**

The background and purpose of the Panel along with how the dip sampling is carried out and what the Panel is asked to consider is detailed in the Quality Assurance Panel handbook, which is available on the [PCC's website](#).

## **3.0 Approval by Panel**

All Panel members have been provided with a copy of this report for comment and have confirmed that it fully represents the views expressed by the Panel during the dip sampling exercise dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2017.

## 4.0 Closed Professional Standards Complaint Cases

The Panel reviewed 6 cases from the Professional Standards Department (PSD). The cases had been randomly selected, to include a variety of areas responsible. The following sections set out Panel members' observations, followed by feedback from PSD.

### 4.1 Best practice

Panel members highlighted a number of elements they considered to be best practice:

- Overall, the majority of investigations were conducted thoroughly and within reasonable time periods.
- It was felt that most complaints were appropriately dealt with, with one member noting "Satisfactory outcome which was never going to be acceptable to the complainant".
- There was good evidence of internal communications to ensure procedure was being followed.

### 4.2 Areas for learning

Panel members highlighted some of areas of learning:

- Where complainants were directed towards other agencies e.g. Ombudsman, it was felt insufficient detail was provided.
- The Local Resolution (LR) and appeal outcome letters state another agency may have been at fault for not updating the Motor Insurers Bureau but we do not specify who. The reason for this is that unfortunately it could not be established who was responsible for any error. As such, it was not possible to signpost the complainant with any certainty.
- The appointed investigator, as part of the local resolution process, suggested to complainant that if he had issues with the Labour Party he should contact the Ombudsman. The investigator may well have given the complainant more detail when speaking in person as to how to contact the Ombudsman, but this is not reflected in the local resolution outcome letter. Therefore, the Department accepts that more information should have been included within the letter in order to appropriately signpost the Complainant to the Ombudsman (i.e. full contact details).

- It appeared within one case that the DISSAT process did not address the complainants concerns which led to escalation to formal complaint which was locally resolved by an Inspector. The total time taken to resolve the situation was consequently 4½ months, with a subsequent compensation claim pending.
- The concerns raised by the panel appear to be in relation to how the DISSAT process did not address the complainants concerns. Having reviewed the case, it is clear that given the nature of the concerns, it should have been referred immediately to PSD. The severity of the allegations in terms of damage caused by police through gaining entry should have been considered by PSD rather than the Bureau as it would be reasonable to assume that a claim would be forthcoming subsequently. The team regularly discuss the types of cases that must be considered within the formal complaints framework and are aware of the need to refer to PSD any matters that appear of a more serious nature. The Manager of the Public Service Bureau is confident that experience and expertise has developed considerably within the team and that should such a case be received today, the right approach would be taken.
- In relation to the formal complaint, this was received at PSD on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 and unfortunately there was a delay in recording it due to an administrative error. An apology was given to the Complainant in respect of this failure in service. The complaint was formally recorded on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016 and finalised on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017 by way of a local resolution. It is accepted by the Department that there was an inadvertent delay in recording the complaint once it arrived at PSD, and that the local resolution process took longer than it should have. However, it is positive to note that a local resolution action plan was agreed with the complainant and no appeal was made in respect of the outcome which would indicate that the complainant was satisfied with the action taken.

### **4.3 Areas for further discussion**

Panel members raised a number of issues during the session which required further discussion or action to be taken:

- There was a strong opinion in some cases that the personal approach had been overridden by legalese and the correspondence with complainants lacked empathy. Some members speculated this may have been due to "standard" documents being cut and pasted over time so they no longer flowed appropriately. Members highlighted that letters of this quality may antagonise and exacerbate complainants feelings. Members suggested

documents be reviewed by another member of staff before being sent to the complainant.

- Due to the volume of work that the Department deals with, it has to rely on template letters.
- It should be noted that a working group set up under the Quality Assurance Panel's predecessor (i.e. the Resident's Panel) reviewed and redrafted the suite of template letters used by the Department in order to make them more customer friendly and jargon free. There have been some minor changes to the letters since the redraft due to changes in process and as part of the Department's continuous improvement, but these changes are in keeping with the changes made by the Resident's Panel.
- The Department is keen to ensure that letters meet the needs of complainants and do not exacerbate feelings, and all formal decision/outcome letters are reviewed by the Department's Senior Manager in his role as the delegated appropriate authority. Unfortunately, due to the volume of correspondence that is sent from the Department is not practicable for every letter that is sent during the life of a complaint case to be reviewed by the Senior Manager or a supervisor.
- It must be noted that the letters are formal and there are certain legislative requirements placed on the Department in respect of the information that should be provided to complainants during the complaints process. There is also specific terminology that has to be used which unfortunately can be viewed as legalese.
- If the Panel have any particular suggestions in respect of the template letters used, then the Department will be happy to consider them.
- It was suggested that complainants should receive, within the acknowledgement letter, an indication of the processes to be followed and time frame in which the complainant will be contacted. It was also suggested the procedures for local resolution be made clearer.
- Further to the above, the Department has tried to keep acknowledgement letters as simple as possible to avoid confusion to complainants.
- The letter is intended to simply acknowledge the formal recording of the complaint under the Police Reform Act and to let the person know that a suitable person will be appointed to deal with their complaint and will contact them in due course. It is this initial contact with the complainant that is the most suitable opportunity to explain the process that will be followed as in the majority of cases this will be either a face to face conversation with the complainant or a conversation over the phone, which is better than providing more detailed information in a written format.

- Again though, if the Panel have any particular suggestions in respect of the template letters used, then the Department will be happy to consider them.
- In terms of setting timescales, there is no specific timeframe within which a complaint should be dealt with, but it should be dealt with in a timely manner. This is something the Department is committed to and it is an area the Department is currently focussing on with the development of a performance framework. The reason that the Department does not stipulate a timeframe within the acknowledgement letter is that it is entirely possible that due to, for example, other operational priorities, a set time frame may not be complied with. This can then lead to further dissatisfaction and possibly an additional complaint that the set timeframe was not complied with. Additional complaints would have to be recorded under the Police Reform Act 2002 and this could cause further delay in dealing with the complaint, complication for the appointed investigator and the complainant, and additional and unnecessary bureaucracy in what is already a bureaucratic process. To that end, and in order to manage expectations, the Department does not stipulate a time frame within the acknowledgement letter.
- A query was raised in relation to the management advice provided within the case involving forced entry to a property. Members sought assurance that the resulting consequences of the complaint had been addressed.
  - It can be confirmed that all necessary action was undertaken by the Department.

#### **4.4 Any other issues**

A small number of other issues were raised by Panel members for noting:

- It was considered that a full explanation of outcomes was not clear in two cases, however another was identified as having clear reasons for rejection of allegations being provided to the complainant.
  - The Department has been unable to find a letter on the only case reference number given which does not give clear explanation of the processes being followed.
- Members felt that it was unclear in one case whether the alleged crime was appropriately recorded from the outset.
  - Although the issue of the recording of the crime was not relevant to the complaint, the information on the case confirms that a crime was appropriately recorded on the same day it was reported. The complainant

in this case was the person who was arrested for the crime and subsequently convicted at court and this information was contained within the investigation report.

- Whilst members noted that small delays exceeding response times may have exacerbated complainant feelings, it was acknowledged these delays may have been due to criminal proceedings requiring finalisation prior to complaints being progressed. Positively, the delay was identified by a member of staff within one case.
  - The above is noted.
- It was noted within one case there was repeated use of an incorrect email address.
  - The Department has been unable to find any instances of an incorrect email address being used on the case.
- Panel members noted in one case it was unfortunate that the force appeal form was not attached to a letter.
  - From reviewing the case it is apparent that the Complainant wrote to PSD to say that he had not received the appeal form with his Appropriate Authority (AA) letter. The complainant was subsequently sent an appeal form and a written apology.
  - It is difficult to see how this occurred as appeal forms are actually embedded within the template outcome letters (i.e. they are not separate documents that need to be attached or printed off). However, if the form was not included this would be an isolated and inadvertent administrative failing and, as per above, an apology was offered.



## 5.0 Force Communication Centre Calls

The panel collectively reviewed 9 randomised calls from the force communication centre. There were three 999 calls, five 101 and one via the main DPP telephone number of various types.

### 5.1 Best practice

Panel members highlighted a number of elements they considered to be best practice:

- Members felt the call opening and establishment of caller needs was good in all cases.
- Recaps occurred in all calls, however in two of the calls it was felt the re-checking of details was a little excessive or inappropriate to the situation.
- Call handlers all displayed a professional manner and in the main appeared to have a good rapport with the caller.
- Prompt transfer to dispatch and early identification of resources required was excellent in all cases, especially during the call reporting a missing vulnerable person.
- The level of service provided to a caller regarding a civil dispute was exceptional, with the handler providing advice, referral to other agencies, reassurance and empathy. However members were also concerned by the length of the call and questioned whether it could have been closed sooner.

### 5.2 Areas for learning

Panel members highlighted some of areas of learning:

- Members considered within one call that there was some inappropriate questioning considering the circumstances of the call and some potentially useful questions were not asked. The caller was frightened that there was an intruder in the house and whilst the call handler identified it was difficult for the caller to talk, they persevered trying to take all personal details. There was also some difficulty in the officers on scene getting to the caller, which members queried if the call handler could have assisted by asking questions about the caller's location in the building for example.
- In terms of vulnerability, one call handler failed to ask if the victim had been injured or if they were alone during a burglary. The incident had been

reported through Careline which members considered should have prompted the call handler to identify that the victim would be vulnerable. During the suspected intruder call, the handler did not ask if anyone was with the caller, although they could be heard speaking to someone else.

### 5.3 Areas for further discussion

Panel members raised a number of issues during the session which required further discussion or action to be taken:

- Members felt unable to appropriately score the calls or comment on the NSIR/NCRS compliance and THRIVE and felt it may be beneficial in future sessions to have a call handling supervisor available to provide guidance and answer any questions if necessary.

#### **Action 1**

Call handling supervisor to provide additional training input to QAP panel members

- Members felt it important to enquire about the policy for investigating instances of cars leaving petrol stations without paying for fuel. In the call listened to, the caller was unclear of the registration number of the car and stated the CCTV was of a poor quality. The call handler referred the caller to Action Fraud. Members queried why this would not have been passed to traffic officers for noting as perhaps the car had used false number plates.

#### **Action 2**

Provide clarification to Panel members on the process for reporting instances of Making Off Without Payment

- One call handler came across as unsure and repeated themselves and perhaps they were new to the role. Members sought assurance that call handlers are constructively made aware of any weaknesses in order to improve confidence and performance.

### 5.4 Any other issues

A small number of other issues were raised by Panel members for noting:

- Members made two observations regarding the recording of the time of incident. When recording a missing person, members considered it very important for the time of the last person to visit the missing person's address

to have been recorded accurately. On this occasion there was a 30 minute discrepancy. In the case of a theft, the time of incident was recorded as "10 mins ago". Members queried if this was appropriate, or if the actual time should have been noted.

#### **5.4.1 Force Communication Centre comments**

- The feedback from the scrutiny panel is welcomed and will be shared with the FCC training staff for continuous professional development.
- All supervisors have access to information which gives the length of time a call taker is engaged with a member of the public on the phone. In addition, supervisors have access to any calls for service waiting. It is accepted that at times calls can take a long time and callers are occasionally kept on the line for reassurance until Police resources arrive. Supervisors can monitor calls that are considered to be protracted but can also arrange for resources to be dispatched whilst callers are on the line.
- To effectively THRIVE a call for service, the callers' personal details are required and these details are required for thorough intelligence checks.
- The feedback regarding missing persons will be disseminated to all call takers.
- Where the panel consider that there is learning for call takers, we would ask that the specific call be highlighted in the feedback for action locally.