



Derbyshire Constabulary

Derbyshire Police gets go-ahead for centralised call handling centre following process simulation project with Lanner Group

Derbyshire Police serves a region of over 1000 square miles which includes the Peak District, Derbyshire Dales, old mining communities, modern towns and business centres. With a population fast approaching 1 million, Derbyshire faces a number of challenges, not least of which include delivering high service levels to the public and meeting national performance targets.

The Chief Constable had recognised for some time that the configuration of the force's control rooms and call centres was inefficient and needed to be addressed, but finance had been difficult to obtain due to competing priorities. Following a performance review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in 2005, HMIC's report supported the Chief Constable's view that a new facility was needed. This led to a detailed briefing to the Police Authority, and a decision to develop a full business case was made, with their support.

The Challenge

Call handling is split into two areas – emergency and non-emergency. Derbyshire currently has three emergency incident control rooms and two non-emergency call reception centres located across sites in Ripley (headquarters), Chesterfield and Derby. The incident control rooms receive 999 calls made by the public or other emergency services and calls made by officers over Airwave. Non-emergency calls include anything from an officer calling in to log an incident, to a member of the public calling in to report an incident, speak to an individual or for help and advice.

Derbyshire's emergency call handling was cited as the fastest in the country by HMIC and records show that 93.8% of 999 calls were being answered within 10 seconds. However, although HMIC's overall assessment of Derbyshire was good, its record for non-emergency calls showed room for improvement.

Non-emergency calls accounted for 80% of total inbound call volumes, and only 84.5% were answered within 30 seconds, against a target of 90%. Combined with this issue was the fact that 15% of calls were being abandoned entirely and many of the calls were being answered by officers, thus impacting valuable police time.

In addition, performance variation existed between emergency call handling facilities. For example, all calls from mobile phones were handled by the Central (Ripley) Incident Control Room (CICR). Given that the proportion of inbound calls from mobiles has increased substantially in the last 10 years, this disproportionate volume of calls presented a significant resourcing challenge for the CICR at Ripley.



Building a Case for Centralised Call Handling

It was clear that there was scope for improvement in call handling operations and Derbyshire set about creating a business case for improvements to be made.

Given that 33 of the UK's 43 police forces have centralised call handling, Derbyshire was keen to explore the option of a centralised call centre.

Chief Inspector Sunita Gamblin is responsible for call handling at Derbyshire Constabulary. She comments: "We felt that a single call handling facility would provide an opportunity to improve the process of call receipt and dispatch, which is bound by several limitations in its current form. But in order to take this idea to the next stage, we needed to build a business case.

"Having worked with business process simulation specialist Lanner for many years, we had no hesitation in selecting Lanner to help to scope a business case for improved call handling and specifically, a new centralised call handling centre."

Chosen Solution

Lanner was commissioned to undertake a three month project to analyse Derbyshire's existing call handling processes. From this, Lanner would simulate and map out a number of scenarios which could be implemented to overcome Derbyshire's challenges in its call handling.

Throughout October to December 2005, Lanner launched a process simulation project to review Derbyshire's existing call handling operations and to ascertain whether a business case existed for a centralised call handling facility.

After the three month period, Lanner presented two detailed scenarios to Derbyshire Constabulary. The first was to adopt a centralised call handling centre using Derbyshire's existing processes. The second was to adopt a centralised call handling centre with a set of new processes.

Recommendations

The key recommendation of the project was to deploy a centralised call handling centre with a set of new processes in order to derive the following benefits:

- Improvement of 999 call answering: 99% of calls answered within 10 seconds
- Reduction of other inbound call abandonment by 1000 per week
- Increased non-emergency inbound call answering performance: 72% of call answered within 10 seconds
- Reduction in wasted officer time
- Performance improvement within existing staff headcount
- More efficient use of existing resources
- Greater consistency in performance
- Opportunity to use resources more flexibly

Chief Inspector Sunita Gamblin comments:

"Having gained valuable information on the tangible benefits of a centralised call handling facility with redesigned processes, we completed our business



case in conjunction with Lanner and were keen to translate this case from paper to action.

“However in February 2006, the Government announced plans for regionalisation of several police forces across the country, including ourselves. At the time, with this degree of uncertainty about the future of Derbyshire Constabulary, it seemed inappropriate to pursue a new centralised call handling facility.”

However in November 2006, it became clear that plans for regionalisation were unlikely to happen. In January 2007, therefore, the Chief Constable received the green light to progress plans for a centralised call handling facility as outlined in Lanner’s report.

12 Months on

Work on the new centralised call handling facility commenced in February 2007. Construction is expected to begin early in 2008, and the facility is set to go live in 2009/10

Chief Inspector Sunita Gamblin comments:

“In a sector which is subject to stringent targets and shifting goal posts, it was imperative that we developed a watertight business case in order to progress our idea of a centralised call handling facility.

“Having worked with Lanner on a number of other projects over the years, we had absolute confidence that they would be able to drill down into the processes we were currently using and highlight bottlenecks which were inhibiting our ability to maximise our resources and provide an excellent service to both the public and our officers. Lanner’s ability to map out a number of potential processes in order to build a business case was invaluable and we look forward to working with them to help drive further improvement within Derbyshire in the future.”