Public Perspectives on Call Handling in GMP

Created as part of the themed public forum on the same topic
Introduction

This short report presents key themes to emerge from analysis of public perspectives on call handling in GMP. The themes have been derived from three sources of information.

- Information from satisfaction surveys conducted on behalf of Greater Manchester Police with victims of burglary, vehicle crime and violent crime.
- Correspondence received by the Commissioner.
- A short online survey carried out by the Commissioner’s office.

Key Themes

Victim Satisfaction Surveys

The vast majority of victims surveyed (94.4%) were completely, very or fairly satisfied with how easy it was to contact someone who could assist them (figures for rolling 12 months ending November 2013).

- A slightly higher percentage of burglary victims (95.7%) were satisfied. The lowest percentage of satisfied respondents were those who had been a victim of vehicle crime (93.6%).
- Satisfaction levels are not significantly different for respondents who had used the 999 service (94.9%) or non-emergency numbers (101 or 0161 872 5050) (95.8%). A lower percentage of respondents who had used other telephone numbers were satisfied (91.4%).

Examining relevant free text comments made by survey respondents showed the following.

Satisfied respondents made positive comments about:

- The call taker’s manner

  “...they were polite and listened to me.”
  “...the person I spoke to on the phone was really lovely and helpful.”
  “When I contacted the police I was feeling very upset, by the time the call was finished I was feeling much better.”
  “I used the new 101 service and was listened to. I reported it and it was all business-like and professional. They dealt with me with courtesy and did what they could.”

- The call was dealt with efficiently/promptly/explained what would happen
“They answered the phone very quickly.”
“It was a very good service and the lady on the phone explained certain things to me...”
“...before I spoke to them I was very concerned. They took me through everything...”
“They explained everything that would happen.”

Dissatisfied respondents highlighted issues relating to:

- The call taker’s manner

“Initial staff member who took the call was very rude.”
“...the service received from the person answering 999 call was unacceptable as they showed no care towards someone who was in a position of being burgled.”
“The 999 call handler was not very professional and failed to understand the gravity and it was treated like a small minor incident, and to me it wasn’t.”

- Time taken to get call answered/kept on hold

“...I couldn’t contact the police for hours initially, as they didn’t pick up the phone.”
“I waited 40 minutes to speak to someone but still I could not speak to them. I had to ring them again.”
“It became a stressful report when I couldn’t get through and when I did I was told to call the number I was waiting on.”
“...the 101 call took forever to get through.”

- Time taken to log details over the phone

“The only thing was the time they spent taking my details on the initial call, if they had spent that time sending someone out they could have caught the criminal and stopped this happening again.”

- Promises were not kept

“...the promises they gave me with the initial call were not kept; I feel they were just following a process to give me a crime reference number.”
“They didn’t turn up for an hour and there was no communication to say they weren’t turning up...when they did arrive they said they didn’t think it was an urgent request, even though 999 told me they would be here in 10 to 15 minutes.”

Correspondence
It is perhaps unsurprising that people who correspond with the Commissioner on the subject of contacting GMP by telephone do so because they are either unhappy with, or are seeking clarification about, some aspect of the service they have received. Examination of the correspondence highlights the following issues:

- Took too long for call to be answered / was kept on hold for too long / wasn’t sure if was on hold or had been cut off

  999 call - “...all I heard was an automated response saying there was a high call volume followed by silence. After 2½ minutes of holding, I hung up as I had no idea whether the call was dead or alive.”

  101 call – “Having rung 101 they said we are very busy but would put me through to a call taker, after waiting five minutes with the phone ringing we gave up.”

  101 call – “...after waiting 15 minutes, after being asked the nature of my call, I had to put the phone down.”

- Caller highlights issues with what they were told by the call handler / how the call was dealt with by the call handler

  Caller told that if he tried to deal with the situation himself, he would be arrested when he has a legal right to use reasonable force to prevent damage to his property and to protect himself and his family from danger.

  “I rang 999 to be answered by a total moron that even hung up before we had finished the conversation...we detained the drunk driver for over two hours until the police finally arrived.”

- Call handler did not have the required geographical knowledge to assist the caller quickly

  “They could not locate McDonalds at XXXXX on their system and required a postcode to log the information; to which I replied I did not have the postcode...The McDonalds is on XXXX (main road) and whilst I appreciate not everyone is local to the specific areas in question I feel that rather than annoying the informer, the advisor should have taken the details, they could have tried to look up the postcode themselves whilst I was on the phone.”

- Dissatisfaction with the length of time quoted by the call handler that it would take for the police to attend / lack of police response
“Why when I dial 999 am I told that it will take an hour for the police to respond?”
(someone is trying to break into the caller’s home)

999 call – “...I was asked if I felt threatened (which I responded yes) – the
operator could hear the youths around me...I made another call approximately 30
minutes after the initial one, the operator told me there were no available units as
they were busy attending another call – I asked if neighbouring forces (divisions)
could not help and was told no.”

“After a repeated series of phone calls to 999 and 101 all we got told was that
due to the cut backs there were no police to respond to this incident.”

• Complaints about the cost of calls to the 101 non-emergency number

“...I was not told how much the call would cost me when I telephoned the number
and neither was I aware of this before I was charged...Please campaign for free
calls to the 101 number of else get the 101 operators to inform the caller of the
charges when they ring the line.”

• Concerns about the lack of response to other GMP non-emergency numbers

“One of the few complaints we get about contacting the police is the non-
response from a variety of non-urgent numbers. Emails seem to work better, but
are obviously slower and require computing links.”

Results from the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner’s
Survey

• Analysis is based on 113 responses received.

• 19% had called 999; 53% had called 101 and 29% had called 0161 872 5050.

• 38% said they had been put on hold for a period of time after their call was
answered. 21% - less than 1 minute; 37% - between 1 and 5 minutes; 30% -
more than 5 minutes; 16% did not provide a specific time.

• 16% hung up, all of whom had waited more than 10 minutes or not stated a time.

• 43% of respondents described something positive about their conversation with
the GMP call handler. Nearly a third of the comments related to the manner of
the person taking the call, most describing them as “polite”, “professional” or “friendly”.

"Officer was polite."
"Friendly, keen to help."
"…dealt with the call in a professional manner."

13% related to the promptness and efficiency of the call handler.

- 14% of respondents stated that there was nothing good about their conversation with the GMP call handler and 29% specifically commented on what could have been improved.

Most stated that calls needed to be answered more promptly (19%) and many commented on the need for better manners (15%) and for the call handler to listen more carefully/appear interested (15%).

“The call could have been answered a lot quicker.”
“A bit of care and patience.”
“Didn't seem interested in what I said.”

Lack of local knowledge was also mentioned as an issue by a number of respondents.

- 8% of respondents said that the call handler had asked them something which was unclear or that they couldn’t understand/answer. The subjects described were varied and no specific themes stood out.

“Why I wanted to report being assaulted.”
“I was asked if this was the first incident and how was it resolved previously...”

- When asked to describe the way the call handler dealt with their call, most respondents said the individual they spoke to had:
  - Been polite (69%)
  - Asked questions clearly (60%)
  - Told the caller what would happen next (51%)

Fewer respondents said the caller handler had:
- Been sympathetic (35%)
- Provided reassurance (33%)
When asked if there was any other comments to make about their call, the most common themes to emerge were:
- Dissatisfaction with the time spent waiting on the phone (non-emergency calls)
- Positive experience – dealt with appropriately/easy to call
- Dissatisfaction with the length of time it took for details to be taken
- Being charged for 101 calls
- Negative feedback on response/lack of response following the initial call

Feedback was generally more negative about the follow-up than about the call or initial actions taken.

“As an informer of a potential crime situation, I gave my full personal contact details and after two weeks I have had no feedback on the outcome. This makes me question the value of the information I gave.”