



**‘MAKING IT EASIER TO CONTACT
THE METROPOLITAN POLICE IN
NON-URGENT CIRCUMSTANCES’.**

BRIEFING PAPER

**Author: Chief Inspector Steve Benn.
Directorate of Information DCC 10(4).
Service Communications Officer.**

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Executive Summary.

- E.1 Because the Emergency Service contact numbers are so well known it puts that facility under pressure through inappropriate use.
- E.2 Historically, because of the large number of non-urgent contact numbers it was traditionally difficult for the public to contact the MPS in these circumstances.
- E.3 However because of the introduction of Single Non-Urgent Numbers for every Borough Operational Command Unit there now exists the opportunity to greatly enhance that ability through better and innovative methods of publicising those numbers.
- E.4 The Public Carriage Office initiative 'Safe Travel Home' intending to enhance a large number of Bus Routes is not due to be even trialed until mid 2003. As a result there exists the opportunity to conduct more detailed research into the most appropriate technology to facilitate the goal of 'Making it easier to communicate' with some form of partnering agreement.
- E.5 In addition, following the initial success of the Metropolitan Police 'Watchbox' Project at Earls Court further research should also be conducted into the implementation of this type of facility at other appropriate locations.
- E.6 When considering any new initiative in terms of being able to contact the MPS, careful consideration must be given to potential impact on the C3i Project, as this initiative was never part of their business case or requirements.
- E.7 Careful consideration must also be given to the full term costs (and impact on other areas)of any such initiative and not just the start up costs.

Introduction.

- 1.1 The brief of this paper is to discuss options for making it easier for the citizens and visitors of London to contact the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in non-urgent circumstances. Specific reference will be made to the Greater London Authority (GLA) sponsored Public Carriage Office initiative 'Safe Travel Home' which seeks to increase public safety for their journeys by upgrading certain bus routes and the opportunity for the MPS to enter into some form of partnership onto this scheme.
- 1.2 In view of the timescales involved the content of this document is deliberately at a high level. Should a decision be taken to pursue any of the options discussed then a much more detailed feasibility study including start up and full term costing will be required.

2. Current Position.

2.1 Emergency Communication.

When referring to non-urgent communication it is worth giving a brief outline of the current system for Emergency Calls as it does have impact on the former. Since 1937 the '999' system (now augmented by the European standard number '112') exists for the Emergency Blue light Services to be contacted in emergencies. Clearly the fact that both numbers are three digit sequences makes it both easy to memorise and use.

- 2.2 All '999/112' calls made within the GLA are first directed to either BT or Cable and Wireless where they are handled by an operator who determines the nature of the emergency and directs the call to the appropriate emergency authority.
- 2.3 '999/112' calls for the Metropolitan Police Service are connected to the Communications Branch, DCC 10(4-3) at New Scotland Yard (NSY) where an operator answers the call and makes the initial assessment.
- 2.4 The current organisational structure of the Metropolitan Police in terms of resource deployment requires those calls that do need a deployment are passed via the Command and Control System to the local Borough Deployment Support Control Room for resource allocation. Non-local resources, e.g. Marine Support, Air Support etc are known as 'Pan London Resources' and are deployed from NSY.

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- 2.5 Current statistics indicate that approximately 70% of calls made to the MPS on the emergency service are not classified as emergencies. Indeed, what is and what is not an emergency is a very emotive subject and we as an organisation should never be seen to be discouraging anyone from contacting us; the challenge is to provide a viable alternative means of communication.
- 2.6 The current Grade of Service for Emergency Calls is 80% of calls will be answered within 15 seconds.
- 2.7 The Police Service is the default agency for receipt of emergency calls, in that if the Emergency Operator cannot determine the nature of the emergency and they consider that the call should be connected, they will route it to the appropriate Police Force.
- 2.8 BT consistently tell us that they filter out over 50% of emergency calls and do not connect them to the emergency services; that represented a figure of over 12 million calls last year.

3. Non-Urgent Communication.

- 3.1 Traditionally, all police stations within the MPS had their own unique telephone numbers, which were published locally and in London telephone directories. However, these numbers when dialled were routed to one of four Operator Call Centres staffed by Metropolitan Police employed operators who are part of the Communications Branch, DCC 10(4-3).
- 3.2 The operator's equipment indicates what number has been dialled and will answer the call with the appropriate salutation for the Police Station that the caller is attempting to contact. Once the operator has ascertained the nature of the call they will either deal with it themselves, if they are in a position to do so, or transfer it to the appropriate extension.
- 3.3 The current Grade of Service for Operator Centres is that 60% of calls will be answered in 30 seconds.
- 3.4 In 1999 in collaboration with the London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service the Metropolitan Police launched the '999' Education Project whose goal was to promote more appropriate use of the '999' service.

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- 3.5 One of the products of the '999' Education Project has been the introduction of a Single Non-Emergency number for every Borough, including the five Divisions within Westminster Borough. There has already been one campaign to publicise these numbers and we are in the process of repeating that campaign. Part of the new campaign will be to have the Local Borough numbers depicted on the appropriate response fleet as a high visibility reminder of the relevant phone numbers.
- 3.6 As with the previous police station numbers, if dialled these Borough numbers will be routed to one of the four Operator Call Centres and the call handled by a Metropolitan Police operator.
- 3.7 Thirty-four of the thirty-seven such numbers end in 1212 (there was a technical difficulty with three of the Borough's) so the numbers are very similar and relatively easy to memorise.
- 3.8 Another significant advantage of this reduced amount of numbers is that it matters not that you are in your home Borough, if you dial the number you know you will be connected to a Police Operator. The challenge is getting the public to learn their local non-emergency number and of course somehow imparting that knowledge to the visitors of London.
- 3.9 It is my understanding that a decision was taken at a strategic level not to implement a London wide Single Non-Urgent number in order to emphasise and promote the idea of local policing.
- 3.10 This is a convenient point to mention a government sponsored initiative, supported by the Police Minister John Denham to introduce a National Single Non-Emergency Number (SNEN). The Deputy Chief Constable of North Yorkshire, Mr Peter Walker, is chairing the project with the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) along with some consultants from Mason Communication who are also assisting him.
- 3.11 It is my understanding that at the moment the initiative has stalled slightly whilst an appropriate number and variety of forces are found in order to trial the concept.
- 3.12 I believe that the MPS have been given an undertaking that no National initiative will be mandated during the start up of C3i project. Nevertheless, it is very important that any decisions in the interim period taken for the MPS take the SNEN initiative into account as this may have significant impact on call receipt in the future.

4. Internet.

- 4.1 The MPS Internet Site is widely recognised as an effective source of information about the MPS and its activities, with a Frequently Asked Questions section, which addresses many of the inquiries that the public wish to make.
- 4.2 Following a National initiative in 2001 the public are now also able to report instances of minor crime through a portal on the MPS website.
- 4.3 This corporate website is now backed up by over 69% of the Borough Operational Command Units having their own websites specifically targeting their local population.
- 4.4 In para 3.5 I referred to a renewed campaign to publicise the Borough Single Non-Emergency numbers. Part of that initiative is to improve the layout of the MPS website in order to more readily identify those numbers.
- 4.5 Clearly, at the moment Internet access is limited to a minority of the capitals population, but that minority is rapidly increasing and will continue to do so under the governments 'E-Government' initiative. This obviously is an audience that we cannot ignore and the recently published e-Policing Strategy for the Metropolitan Police Service seeks to augment and enhance electronic services by 2005.
- 4.6 The strategic aim of the MPS is to deliver all services to our customers electronically, where it is reasonable to do so. That aim will be achieved by: -
- identifying and defining those services which can reasonably be delivered electronically;
 - investigating and developing the infrastructure to provide a range of service delivery options;
 - implementing the e-services, providing clearly defined, compelling, citizen-focussed services.

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5. Metropolitan Police Watchbox Project.

- 5.1 In 1996 on Kensington and Chelsea Division as it was then, a permanent beat officer had the idea of re-introducing a Blue 'Dr Who' Police Box to the Earls Court Road.
- 5.2 As a result the Metropolitan Police Watchbox Project was initiated and solely funded from the private sector with donations to the tune of just over £37K.
- 5.3 Facilities included a vandal proof external telephone for use of the public, which if used connected the caller to the appropriate Metropolitan Police Operator Call Centre. This telephone was also fitted with a covert digital camera in order to deter hoax callers and the fact there was a camera was clearly indicated. There was also a roof mounted CCTV camera with recording facilities in the box.
- 5.4 Internal facilities for patrolling officers included an internal telephone, heating, water supply and first aid box.
- 5.5 The external telephone ceased to function when the STD Codes changed in April 2001 and the momentum was lost; the computer associated with the telephone became defective and no funds were available to replace it along with the pre-programmed Operator Centre number unable to be changed.
- 5.6 Currently the box has been surrounded by scaffolding associated with some local building work for over six months and is likely to remain out of commission for at least another six months. However, I understand that some funds have been found in order to restore the box to operational status once the building work has been completed.
- 5.7 No statistical information exists in respect of the public's use of the external telephone but the perception from the local control room staff was that the number of calls received from that location was about the same as they would receive from a public telephone kiosk.
- 5.8 In the words of the permanent beat officer, the greatest impact appears to be the fact that the box was large enough to contain two officers and there was no indication from the outside that the box was occupied. This acted as a deterrent, significantly reducing local crime and greatly increasing the confidence of local residents and shopkeepers.
- 5.9 A fundamental flaw in this particular project was the fact that all necessary funds were found in order to set the project up but there was no consideration given to ongoing costs such as maintenance and upgrade etc.

- 5.10 It is also my understanding that Haringey Borough Operational Command Unit are in the process of installing similar boxes at two locations on their area.
6. Public Carriage Office Initiative 'Safe Travel Home'.
- 6.1 The fundamental aim of the 'Safe Travel Home' initiative is to make it easier and safer for the travelling public of London, in particular on the Bus Network to complete their journeys.
- 6.2 The Mayor of London has announced a huge programme of work sponsored by the GLA to develop up to 4,000 bus shelters with 'Digital Information Displays'; 'CCTV' and 'Toilets'.
- 6.3 It is suggested that the MPS may be able to look at some form of technology, linked to these shelters that would provide the public with non-urgent contact points.
- 6.4 It is very much in the embryo stage of this initiative and having consulted a colleague on the technical issues I am assured that the actual technical implementation of such an idea would be relatively straightforward. A digital information display would require a minimum of an ISDN telephone line and connections from this network could very easily be routed into the MPS Network.
- 6.5 The warning given by the technician was in terms of the potential number of additional contact points coming into the MPS Network. Obviously all these lines are not going to be used at the same time, but he did state that even a quarter of the 4,000 quoted would put the network under significant threat.
- 6.6 In addition, the need to screen calls and direct them appropriately is a fundamental ingredient, so a large increase in contact points could significantly affect the Operators ability to handle calls and therefore impact on service delivery. It is also a very pertinent point that this form of contact into the MPS was never scoped for the C3i Project and could have considerable impact on the project delivery.
- 6.7 There is also the obvious opportunity at these sites for individuals to damage the facilities and make hoax calls. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the 50% of emergency calls screened by BT that I referred to in para 2.8 are just such calls. If the opportunity was there to simply 'press a button' and be connected direct to a police operator then that would be a very attractive option to certain elements and of course we would not have the benefit of the 'filter' provided by BT and Cable & Wireless.

- 6.8 All that said I believe that there is an opportunity to collaborate here, but there needs to be a strategic approach.
- 6.9 Help Points, Information Points, whatever you want to call them, with Contact Buttons should only be sited at carefully selected busy public locations that are effectively covered by CCTV cameras. That way, calls for assistance can be quickly verified and supported through use of those CCTV cameras. Indeed there are a number of companies in the market that provide vandal proof interactive help points that include cameras in their system.
- 6.10 Other Information Points containing a database of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) could also be sited at a number of other locations that are not suitable for actual contact points.
- 6.11 None of the above can be implemented without careful consideration of the full life costs, not only of the physical infrastructure, but all the human elements, including impact on service delivery. I believe that there is an ideal opportunity here to partner with both Local Authorities and/or commercial organisations.
- 6.12 It is my understanding that no work is planned on the 'Safe Travel Home' project until the next financial year when it is proposed that a six-month trial will be carried out on the N109 Brixton Bus Route. This would be an ideal opportunity for the MPS to trial some of the concepts suggested.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations.

- 7.1 The '999/112' Emergency Service is really a victim of its own success, it has been around for almost 70 years and it is widely recognised throughout the UK as the number to contact the Emergency Services. Unfortunately, because it is so well known it does suffer from a large proportion of inappropriate calls, as stated above, in the region of 70% of the total received.
- 7.2 That said we have an opportunity here to enhance the non-emergency service, which if successfully implemented will naturally impact upon the Emergency Service and improve our ability to deliver an immediate response in appropriate circumstances.

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- 7.3 With the proliferation of mobile phones I believe that the most effective way forward both in terms of timescales and value for money is to promote the Borough Single Non-Emergency Numbers. There is an obvious quick win here; the numbers already exist and educating the public to insert these numbers into both their mobile and home phone memories will immediately enhance their ability to contact us.
- 7.4 In parallel with this initiative I recommend that we should investigate more thoroughly the implementation of both Help Points with Contact Points and those that just have information facilities such as FAQ databases.
- 7.5 As stated above, because of the timescales involved with the Public Carriage Office project 'Safe Travel Home' there is a window in terms of time to do some detailed research in terms of the technology, cost and partnering opportunities. Once that has been done the opportunity exists to trial potential solutions alongside the N109 Bus Route trial.
- 7.6 Because of the time delay there is also an opportunity for the C3i Project Team to assess and evaluate the impact of any initiatives undertaken.
- 7.7 In addition to all of above, following the initial success of the Earls Court initiative further research should continue into the use of the Police Blue Box type facility.