

Swyddfa Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddau, Gwent
Office of Police and Crime Commissioner, Gwent

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Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throseddau Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent:

Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD



The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

2nd September 2020

Dear Home Secretary

PEEL Spotlight Report – A call for help: Police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) PEEL spotlight report, 'A call for help: Police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19'.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the work undertaken by Gwent Police's control room staff. Their work is carried out under immense pressure and they are the first point of contact for people who may be going through one of the most difficult times in their life. Frequently, the people who contact the police are extremely vulnerable and the police service is not always the most appropriate service to provide the support that they require. As stated in your report, having mental health practitioners in the control room makes a difference to understanding and dealing with vulnerability and is effective at managing the demand placed on our frontline officers. I am pleased that my investment in this area has resulted in positive outcomes for the service and those in need of assistance. This is reiterated in the comment from the Chief Constable below, who also references a new initiative currently being piloted by Gwent Police. This initiative relates to a social worker (Senior Safeguarding Practitioner), also based in the control room, providing immediate advice to frontline officers dealing with the most vulnerable in our society, ensuring they get the correct support quickly; this initiative also shows the excellent partnership arrangements we have here in Gwent with local public and third sector organisations.

We welcome the findings of the PEEL Spotlight Report – A Call for Help. The work undertaken daily by our force communication suite teams to identify threat, risk, harm and vulnerability and respond to calls for service is significant. We are pleased to see the continuing increase and complexity of demand acknowledged in this report. We continue to work successfully with our

partners in health and social care to protect people vulnerable from harm. Our established team of mental health professionals work in our control room providing ready access to services to safeguard people vulnerable from mental ill health. In 2019 we also introduced the services of a Senior Safeguarding Practitioner into the control room to further enhance our assessment of and response to vulnerable people from first point of contact.

Our commitment to the wellbeing of our workforce remains a top priority. Responding remotely to trauma, shock, distress and often overwhelming demand is not without impact on our staff. Our awareness to these issues and commitment to supporting our staff saw the introduction of our first point of contact wellbeing working group. Led by control room staff, the group formed in May 2020 and meet regularly to develop wellbeing services that meet the unique needs of emergency control room working. A key enabler to workforce wellbeing is ensuring that our staff have the right tools, equipment and professional development to support them in their role. We welcome the launch of the National Contact Management Learning and Development Programme and we are reviewing our current training provision against this programme.

We continue to work closely with Welsh forces in preparation for the launch of Single Online Home later this year and welcome the opportunities this will bring for public contact with the force. Our established social media service continues to provide an alternative option for public contact and we will continue to explore more digital contact options. The next two years will see Gwent Police move to a new headquarters. The learning from this report and the new national contact management strategy are being used to inform our continuous improvement plans to ensure that we are providing responsive and effective force communication suite services both now and in the future.

As mentioned in the comment from the Chief Constable, the welfare of our employees is of the utmost importance. I am extremely proud of the way Gwent Police has improved the services we offer to our staff over the last few years. The introduction of a dedicated trainer for the control room, along with the improved wellbeing arrangements that have been put in place have improved attendance and resilience.

As well as the adoption by Gwent of Single Online Home to assist in improving contact with the public, there is also the option to correspond via social media. The social media desk was introduced in Gwent in December 2018 and provides an additional method of communication for those members of the public who may not have been confident enough to contact us via telephone. During 2019, 190,000 messages were received by the social media desk, a significant figure in its first year which makes the police service more accessible and reduces the burden on the 101 service. In addition to the social media desk, further improvements in updating systems and the technology used in the control room have also helped to improve the service and reduce abandoned calls by almost 50% (42,169 in 2018, to 21,178 in 2019).

Gwent Police has also recently been encouraging the use of the 'what3words' app in conjunction with public sector organisations across the UK. As the app works offline and provides 3 words which pinpoint your location, its use could help to reduce the time control room operators spend trying to identify the location of someone in need and ensuring the help they need gets to them as quickly as possible. I very much look forward to understanding if the app is being used and how successful it has been in the future.

I am also pleased that the focus Gwent Police has placed on the recruitment of Welsh speaking operatives for the control room has been successful and we now have the ability to offer a Welsh speaking service to those members of the public in Gwent who would prefer to communicate with us in this way.

My office has also been working closely with the force to understand the performance of the control room, with Gwent Police also keeping us apprised of on-going developments. The Police and Crime Panel has also received presentations on the performance of the control room, and they have supported and challenged me, in my role as PCC, to hold the Chief Constable to account for this.

I am extremely proud of the way in which Gwent Police has responded to the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Gwent Police acted quickly to split the control room across 3 sites to ensure resilience, minimise the risk of transmission and ensure that the public would receive the best service possible during these uncertain times.

Despite the work undertaken by Gwent Police to improve the service provided to those contacting our control room, there is still significant work to be undertaken in ensuring the public know which organisations they should be contacting to best meet their needs and also how to contact them. The police will always be available to support those in need, but it is imperative that increased partnership working takes place to ensure that the police service is not continuing to absorb inappropriate demand that impacts on our ability to assist those who really need help from the policing service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Cuthbert', written in a cursive style.

Jeff Cuthbert B.Sc., MCIPD
Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent