



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

Thursday 3 December 2015

Thursday 3 December 2015

CONTENTS

	Col.
DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE	1
CALL HANDLING	2

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

11th Meeting 2015, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)

*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

John Bainbridge (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland)

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)

Laura Paton (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland)

Derek Penman (Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Joanne Clinton

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Thursday 3 December 2015

[The Convener opened the meeting at 13:18]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christine Grahame): I welcome everyone to the 11th meeting in 2015 of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing. I ask everyone to switch off mobile phones and other electronic devices completely. No apologies have been received. I welcome Roderick Campbell as a visitor to the committee.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Do members agree to take agenda item 3, on our work programme, in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Call Handling

13:18

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is our main item of business today. It is an evidence session with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland on the final report on its independent assurance review on call handling, which was published last month.

I welcome Derek Penman, HM inspector of constabulary in Scotland, John Bainbridge, associate inspector, and Laura Paton, lead inspector. We have a row of inspectors: that is scary.

I remind members that the focus of the session is the report. The circumstances surrounding the tragic deaths of John Yuill and Lamara Bell on the M9 in July are subject to a live investigation by the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner. I understand that the commissioner submitted an interim report to the Lord Advocate on her investigation earlier this week. We therefore cannot discuss or allude to the specifics of that case today. I know that you all know that.

We move on to questions from members.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Good afternoon, panel. Mr Penman, you said:

"There was an initial focus on meeting deadlines and increased productivity rather than a well-managed project with a focus on customer service, good staff relations and thorough process design."

I hope that that quote is accurate. Will you expand on that, please?

Derek Penman (Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland): That was a general observation on how Police Scotland was managing its change programme.

We would have expected to see a well-managed programme with clear workstreams and dependencies between them, so that there was clarity about what was to be delivered and when. We found that the impetus, rather than being about managing the change, was about bringing in the change within a timeframe, with a particular focus on call answering times in driving productivity through. The comment that you quoted alludes to that point.

John Finnie: It is important that we learn from mistakes and understand things going forward. Is that focus on productivity still an issue?

Derek Penman: The focus now is to make sure that there is a service to the public. Police Scotland has performance indicators that focus on the grade of service, which effectively includes productivity.

One of our recommendations in the report is for a much broader performance framework that focuses on the quality of the service that is provided to the caller. I have been asked by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to work with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to develop measures to ensure that the focus is not simply on productivity, but on quality.

John Finnie: With regard to the C3 project, the report says:

“The Project Board agenda is inconsistent and often ignores key areas of governance such as risk management.”

The presumption would be that the project was all about risk management, given the nature of the employment area and the work involved. Can you comment on that?

Derek Penman: Again, that comment was made in the context of what good would have looked like in a significant change programme to bring in something new for a critical function of Police Scotland, such as call handling.

We would have expected a very robust and professionally managed programme of change. Within that would have been the identification of risk, and the management of that risk should have been part of the process. We found that the management of risk was weaker than we would have expected.

John Finnie: I have some knowledge of police culture. Can I ask about the presumption that rank brings with it not only responsibilities but knowledge? Is that in any way tied up with the fact that increasing seniority of police rank meant a presumption of increased knowledge? In relation to call handling, we are talking about very technical matters.

Derek Penman: Probably. As a generalisation, our view would be that there are senior officers who conduct projects and have duties that are not necessarily police duties. One of our recommendations was based very firmly on the need to have professionally qualified and experienced—those are different things—project and programme managers to assist those who are leading the change to deliver it.

Our view is very clear that it should not be about police officers' rank, but about the capability and capacity of the individuals who are doing the work. Clearly, there is a role for people who understand the business to be involved in and oversee a change programme. However, our recommendation was that those senior officers who are leading projects as senior responsible officers should also be properly trained in and understand project and programme management.

John Finnie: Finally, can I ask about the rationale behind your interim report's suggestion—which I fully support, for a wide range of reasons—of the retention of the existing Northern Constabulary control rooms?

Derek Penman: The end-state model is to build what Police Scotland refers to as a virtual service centre, which is in effect the Motherwell, Govan and Bilston Glen sites joined together by technology to act as one. That centre would have the ability to support area control rooms in the east, west and north. Calls from anywhere in the country would come into the virtual service centre, which would have the ability to direct the incident to an area control room so that it could be managed by the officers who would attend.

That technology is not in place at the moment. If there is not the link between the service centre and the area control rooms, the system has to rely on the manual transfer of information. Our view in the interim report is that that introduces a degree of risk.

Police Scotland needs to consolidate the virtual service centre and ensure that it is properly staffed and equipped, that the technology is working with robust processes and that the control room in the north, which will be in Dundee, is up, resourced and properly working, with the technology tested, before any call centres in the north start to close.

John Finnie: I realise that you should not ask a question that you do not know the answer to, but finally—

The Convener: That is another “finally”. Is this a finally finally?

John Finnie: It certainly is, convener.

Public perception is important; we talk about productivity, but the issue is the speed with which someone who is in enough distress to phone the police gets a response. The public perception would be that there is a very clear rationale for retaining Aberdeen and Inverness to complement whatever arrangements are put in place. Would you care to comment on that?

Derek Penman: I have made it clear that it is not for us to comment on the model for the control rooms. That said, the issue with regard to what needs to be in place is less about where the service is located and more about the service that is provided to the communities in the north-east, the Highlands and Islands and Tayside, and that will be a test for how the new system is working.

The design of the system is such that calls from those areas can be taken in the central belt if the technology, the training processes and the mapping and other things that support local knowledge are there. If that is the case, I see no reason why that service cannot be provided. As

long as that information can be passed to an area control room, where the officers who work in those communities can be properly tasked, everything should work together.

John Finnie: What is an area control room?

The Convener: Wait a wee minute—that is a finally finally finally. I will let you back in in a wee while, John, but I have a long list that includes Elaine Murray, Kevin Stewart, Margaret Mitchell and Alison McInnes. Let them all have their shot, and you can come back in if you still have a finally finally finally.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): On the issue raised by John Finnie about the northern call centres, the closure of which you recommended should be suspended, does it surprise you to learn that staff are apparently being called in for one-to-one redundancy interviews?

Derek Penman: It does not surprise me, because it relates to the statutory consultation on redundancy. Police Scotland's position on that has been that it will not close those locations until such time as it can demonstrate to the Scottish Police Authority with some independent assurance that they are ready to be closed and that Police Scotland itself has everything in place to take over the service. The organisation is continuing with its planning assumptions, including the consultation around that and, assuming that all of these things can be put in place and assurances given, the staff in those areas will be allowed to leave under early retirement and voluntary redundancy arrangements.

My understanding is that the consultation is taking place, but I have received an assurance from Police Scotland that the individuals in question will not be allowed to leave and the control rooms and call centres will not close until this assurance has been provided. What you are talking about is, effectively, part of the voluntary redundancy arrangements, but Police Scotland has given an assurance that the staff will not be allowed to leave until such time as the assurances for the new system can be given.

Elaine Murray: Surely, though, that cannot be very good for staff morale. I am sure that you have been very much aware of staff morale problems throughout the closure process.

Derek Penman: Absolutely, and what we found consistently was a tremendously dedicated call-handling workforce across the country, which is testament to some of the findings in the audit with regard to the service being delivered to communities.

We have made it clear to Police Scotland that, while that consultation is taking place, it should make staff aware that they will not be able to leave

until such times as the system is stable and can be moved across. I also made it clear in my interim report that the staff must be given the same assurances with regard to any voluntary redundancy or early retirement packages that they might receive to ensure that they are not being prejudiced by their having to stay on later.

Elaine Murray: You say in your report that there are disparate views—I think that was the phrase—on the best national model for call handling. Do you feel that there was adequate consultation across the country on what the final model might look like and on whether there were other alternatives to the proposals?

Derek Penman: Our review did not look specifically at the extent of the consultation, but we tracked the idea of rationalising control rooms. It first appeared in the very high-level outline business case for police reform, which recognised that the system at that time of 10 control rooms or service centres was not sustainable and suggested that it be rationalised, which would lead to savings. That moved on to further design work prior to Police Scotland that made other assumptions and then moved into a document that Police Scotland called the strategic direction. It was not a business case, but it listed a number of options, which went to the Scottish Police Authority for endorsement.

With regard to your question, we did not look at the extent of the consultation locally, and it would be unfair of me to say whether it was sufficient or otherwise.

Elaine Murray: You mention in the report the need to develop

“a bespoke emergency services address gazetteer for Scotland”

between the different emergency services. Was an opportunity lost to look at whether you could have had co-located call centres for the emergency services? That might have retained some of the local knowledge and flexibility that existed in the previous model.

13:30

Derek Penman: We did not specifically look at that. My personal view is that, when such significant change is happening across Scotland with the emergency services, clearly there are opportunities that could be taken, which might assist with making savings and also with the quality of the service that is being provided to the public.

On whether opportunities were missed, and whether they can be recovered as things move through, that is a matter for Police Scotland and the SPA. My personal view is that there were

potentially opportunities for those things to have taken place.

Elaine Murray: That is my personal view as well. Do you think that the SPA and Police Scotland have learned the lessons of that exercise? What would you expect to see from similar large-scale changes in the future? Obviously, the same thing will not happen again but what sort of improvements would you expect to see in such processes in the future?

Derek Penman: Police Scotland and the SPA have both co-operated thoroughly with us throughout the review. Police Scotland in particular was extremely open and helpful in everything that we needed to do. Staff at all levels were very honest and open with us.

We have identified—not just in call handling, but in Police Scotland and the SPA's approach to wider change and the large process of moving from eight units into one and building something new and sustainable—that such change has to be managed as a significant programme. Professional skills and good governance are required to provide transparency so that everyone understands what the transition plan will be.

Police Scotland and the authority have given their absolute commitment to following through on our recommendations—there are 30 recommendations in our report. I have engaged with Police Scotland and the authority and hope to meet them before Christmas to start working through the detail around governance structures and how they will manage that project.

A key feature in our report is the recommendation that there should be independent assurance of projects at key stages. The committee will wish to know that, before any move to close further control rooms in the north, we would expect the planning assumptions and the resourcing of people, technology and processes to be independently checked, and assurances to be given to the authority to say that Police Scotland has got those right, so that there is a degree of confidence in moving forward.

To answer your question about lessons being learned and assurances being provided, I hope that we can develop from that. I also hope that it will not just be about call handling, but that other major projects will be brought together into a more cohesive programme, with more discipline being provided in how they are managed.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Mr Penman and I have some shared history with Grampian Police. I wonder whether, in what you have done, and in what the SPA and Police Scotland have done, you have looked at past history. In Grampian there were some difficulties as a result of moving to the Aberdeen service

centre, which caused a bit of grief in communities throughout the north-east. There were major teething problems with that centre—lost calls and so on—but those problems were eventually ironed out. Have you, or have Police Scotland and the SPA, looked at such past experience to see whether any of the current troubles are similar to what happened in Grampian, and whether any lessons can be learned from that in trying to iron out the present difficulties?

Derek Penman: Does the service learn from its experience? That is a fair question. The experiences in Grampian would have been replicated across the country, not least in the east several years ago when new technologies were rolled out. I am of a vintage such that I can remember managing call demand simply by taking one phone off the hook—local calls were put through to local police stations. A lot of that has been rationalised over the years and a lot of experience has been gathered as that has moved forward.

On whether lessons were learned specifically from that experience, I suspect not. Call handling in the Highlands and Islands has recently moved from a lot of local offices answering phones to all calls being brought into Inverness. A lot of experience had been gained in terms of local knowledge about similar place names and so on, and we suggested that a lot of that knowledge should be captured so that people could learn from it as they moved forward.

Kevin Stewart: Although similar experiences have happened in the past, we often have new investigations into why there is a difficulty. However, the solution might be in the heads of folk in the service who were involved previously in that situation in Aberdeen and, from what you described—although I am not sure about it—the situation in the Highlands and Islands.

Sometimes we reinvent the wheel when we are trying to get to grips with difficulties. I am quite sure that the problems with the Highlands and Islands move will not be dissimilar to those that were experienced in Aberdeen. It would be worth while for the folks who are in charge of the projects to speak to folks in Aberdeen, and possibly those in Inverness, to hear about their experience and to garner knowledge from them.

I am being parochial, but I think that the folks in Aberdeen made a very good fist of those changes. The knowledge is probably there, and I do not think that it should be lost. I am probably getting overly parochial.

The Convener: Let me stop you a wee minute. You have given lovely evidence, but I think you should tack on a question and ask whether the witnesses agree.

Derek Penman: Perhaps it is more about what lessons were learned from shortcomings in the Grampian area or any other part of the force. My question would be whether they were learned or experienced.

There are service centres and control rooms that are working well in those areas, and there is good practice across the country. You can look at it slightly differently and instead of asking what went wrong, you can ask what now works very well in those areas. Police Scotland can definitely look around the country to see what works particularly well.

For example, in the Grampian legacy force area, there is a strong focus on quality of service to the public. In the east, there is a strong focus on managing demand and dealing with calls at the first point of contact, which avoids demand being passed on to police officers on the street and gives them more capacity to deal with other calls. Police Scotland recognises that, in designing its new model and new technologies, it should garner in information about what works well across the country. I have spoken to Police Scotland and it seems to be keen to capture that information.

Kevin Stewart: I imagine that the quality of service that was provided by Grampian led to far fewer complaints about call handling there. Am I correct?

Derek Penman: On quality of service, it would be difficult to comment on complaints. Grampian had a different approach, which was to try to manage the call when it came in and resolve it for the complainer.

The force there also did—and still does—some interesting work on road safety, for example, which is a priority for the force. If someone identified a person and phoned in saying, “I have just passed a car with registration number ABC 123, and the driver is on a mobile phone”, the call centre in Grampian was able to pass that on to someone in the service centre who would then phone that person about their mobile phone use.

The Convener: On their mobile phone?

Derek Penman: No, not on their mobile phone.

The Convener: Sorry, I thought that they phoned the mobile phone of the person who was driving—

Derek Penman: It would be done afterwards.

The Convener: That would catch them out, though.

Derek Penman: My point was that, rather than leaving that report as something that there was no evidence for, so there was nothing to deal with, the force introduced a system that supports road safety by contacting the driver, making them

aware of the complaint and providing advice on road safety. That is just an example of the service centre doing something other than sending out a police officer.

Kevin Stewart: The best value and quality that came from Aberdeen shows, perhaps, that the closure decision there was the wrong one. I hope that it will be rethought.

I will move on from my parochialism, convener—

The Convener: It was evidence giving that was the issue—parochialism I am used to.

Kevin Stewart: I am really concerned about certain aspects of the matter. Mr Penman, you talked about the aspiration to create a virtual service centre, which I think is a fairly good aspiration. However, at the other end of the scale, your report talks about scribble pads, with folk having to rely on writing things down because the system is far too slow. How can you achieve the aspiration of a virtual service centre when you have those very obvious flaws that mean that folk have to write notes?

Derek Penman: A virtual service centre is technology that links three sites to the same telephony systems. Any calls that come in are managed within that. That technology currently exists and will move on—

Kevin Stewart: I will stop you there. The problem is that it is very difficult to share between the three centres information that is written on a notepad.

Derek Penman: I ask you to put the notepad to one side for now. I will come back to that, if I may.

The design of our systems means that a call is automatically directed to an available call taker, who records the information on the contact relationship management system. The systems show whether the caller has made any previous calls. The call is recorded not on a scribble pad but electronically. If police attendance is required, a message is automatically generated and sent to the nearest control room, which is the front-facing side of things for police officers. The process and technology allow all that to be linked up. The systems are virtual, so it does not matter where the call comes from. The call can be passed around the country.

Scribble pads have always been an element of control rooms and effective policing. They have a legitimate use. When someone makes a call, they might be under duress, drunk or incapacitated. Often the information does not come out in a particularly structured way, so sometimes call takers need to write down quickly a telephone number, an address or a name. That is the value of scribble pads. They should not be used to

record calls in their entirety, because that is what the information and communication technology systems allow people to do. In our review, we picked up that the use of scribble pads is legitimate, provided that it is controlled and that there is guidance on it. We have asked Police Scotland to provide that.

Bypassing the system is another issue. People might not put details on the system but write them down and put them on afterwards. The system should prevent that from happening.

Kevin Stewart: I have some concern about the issue. It is difficult for us, because we are not on the front line. Common sense obviously has to come into play. If information must be recorded and an ICT system does not operate quickly enough, I can well understand why folks have to rely on pen and paper to make sure that they have the most detail that they can have.

My difficulty is that getting the information that is on the scribble pad to wherever the call goes to will be very difficult indeed.

Derek Penman: It would be impossible to send on information from a scribble pad. My point is that the use of scribble pads allows operators to take down information, such as a caller's name and address. Sometimes other information comes out, and the operators need to record that. Everything should be recorded on the computer systems, which are designed to divert messages and generate tasks so that calls are actioned. Nothing that goes into the systems can be lost. We are quite clear that the systems have that capability—

Kevin Stewart: But they are slow.

Derek Penman: There are issues with slowness, which we have asked Police Scotland to address. The systems are separate, so they can be bypassed.

I do not want to get too technical, but if one of our three systems does not work, which means that the other two systems do not work, we have nothing working. Under business continuity arrangements, if one system does not work but the other two do, it will still be possible to make things work. To my mind, that would be okay, provided that proper safeguards were in place. We have asked for those safeguards. It is possible to bypass the systems, so we have asked Police Scotland to ensure that it is able to check whether and when they are bypassed, so that we can make sure that that is not being done inappropriately.

The Convener: Explain again, in simple language, what bypassing is.

Derek Penman: I am conscious that the report is inherently complex.

The Convener: I am sure that you are used to explaining things to simple people like me. Please explain to me the important business of how the information does not get lost.

Derek Penman: It might be helpful to explain what happens. When somebody phones Police Scotland, the call is captured by a telephone system that automatically directs it to the next available call taker. The call takers do not have to accept a call; if they are free, it will automatically come to them and they will answer it. Once they take the call—ignoring the scribble pad—

13:45

The Convener: If they are not free, what happens?

Derek Penman: If they are not free, the call will go to the next available call taker—the telephone system will identify that. On the virtual site, if everyone in Edinburgh was busy, the call could be diverted to Glasgow or Motherwell. The telephony system works out who is free to take a call and direct it to them.

Police Scotland records every call through the telephony system speaking to what is called the CRM system—I will not go into its details—which passes on information from the telephone system, such as the number of the person who has phoned. That means that a check can be done to see whether any previous calls have come from that number, which is helpful in knowing whether someone has phoned for a second or third time: it provides a caller history.

That information and the call are recorded in the CRM system. The call taker then has a choice of whether to send the call off for a police officer to attend or just to deal with it. If a police officer is required to attend, the call taker just presses a button and the system sends the call to a third system—the command and control system—which is used by the area control rooms. In effect, the area control rooms look after the police officers on the street. A call will pop up electronically in the command and control system to say that the call has been received in the service centre and an officer is required to attend; the call will then be managed in the command and control system.

I realise that that is quite complicated.

The Convener: No. Just explain to me, though, the business of the call going to one person where there has been a previous call from the same number. Is one person aware of all that or is it only the system that is aware?

Derek Penman: When someone answers a call, the system will show whether it is from a number from which previous calls have been made. That is very important because it tells the call taker that,

for example, the call is now the third one from the same person about domestic violence and that there is a vulnerability issue, that someone is phoning in again about the lost property that they reported earlier in the day, or simply that someone has phoned for the sixth time. The system provides a call history so that the call taker can help the caller—the member of the public. If a police officer is required to attend, the system automatically generates an incident entry, which is then managed and attended to separately.

All the systems that I have described are designed to work together and they should not be bypassed, because they pass data to each other and help to manage calls. However, if the telephone system was working but the CRM system was not working or was slow, the risk would be that the call taker would not use the CRM system and would instead write down the information about the call. If the call was about an incident that a police officer was required to attend, the call taker would put it directly into the third system but not put it into the second system.

The difficulty is that if the CRM system does not work, the ICT system fails. If the first two systems are tied in too closely, potentially nothing will work, so there must be the ability to work round that. My view is that instances of the system failing should be few and far between. We said to Police Scotland that if the systems fall over or fail, it needs to find a way of knowing when people are there.

Again, without being overly technical—I hope—the main links are the instant recording system and the CRM system. We have asked Police Scotland to check all its incidents to see how many incident entries have been created outwith the CRM system and whether that is happening regularly. Such a management report would establish quickly whether people have been bypassing the second system.

The Convener: Are you saying that they are bypassing the CRM system because it does not work?

Derek Penman: To be fair, there are two scenarios, one of which is that the CRM system might be slow and not working well. It could be bypassed, and then people could go back into it and retrospectively fit it with the other systems. However, we would not encourage that—there have to be checks and balances.

It would be legitimate to bypass the CRM system if it was not working—if it had broken down and was therefore temporarily unavailable. In that case, we would expect the incident to be recorded in writing, then put on to the other system and, potentially, put on the CRM system afterwards, if that makes sense.

The Convener: On that last point, have you asked Police Scotland to report back to you on the number of times that that has happened?

Derek Penman: No. We have asked Police Scotland to introduce processes that will allow it to monitor the number of occasions when incident entries have been created outwith the CRM system. Basically, we have asked it to monitor the number of times that incident entries have been manually created, which would indicate that people might have bypassed the system.

We have said to Police Scotland that it needs to check its systems regularly and, where they show that people have entered things manually, to go back and check the reasons for that. Such cases would be, I hope, few and far between, but that action would identify people who may be bypassing the system.

The Convener: I understand now. I apologise to Kevin Stewart for interrupting.

Kevin Stewart: Are the systems that are being used new ones or older systems that have been adapted to take cognisance of what is going on?

Derek Penman: The latter. Again, we support Police Scotland's approach to that. It is going to procure a new suite of technologies with £15 million-worth of investment—it is known as stage 7 of its project. It is looking to develop a tender document for that, and we have made recommendations on ensuring that the new suite of technologies is properly specified and professionally assured and that the checks and balances that I spoke about are built into the system.

Police Scotland selected an interim suite of technology that was based on the systems that it already had, which systems could be scaled up, which licences existed and cost effectiveness. It chose—

Kevin Stewart: I understand all of that and the reasoning for it. You say that a tender document is being prepared. How long will it be before a new, bespoke system is in place?

Derek Penman: The next stage is planned. My recollection is that it will be a couple of years before it comes in, is prepared and then moves on. I ask John Bainbridge whether he can find the initial timeline for stage 7 of the project.

Kevin Stewart: It is really important that we get the answer to that, convener.

The Convener: Yes.

Derek Penman: The time that has been put forward is the end of June 2016. That is next year, but my thoughts—

Kevin Stewart: Is that when the tender will be put forward?

John Bainbridge (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland): That is the date for the

"Programme of procurement and roll-out of new supporting ICT systems".

Kevin Stewart: Okay. How long will it take to get to the procurement stage and then to the operational stage? The folk round the table are well aware of how long it takes to deal with the procurement, installation and—finally—operation of ICT equipment. Do you have any idea how long it will take?

Derek Penman: I do not. The time that I gave you—the end of June 2016—is Police Scotland's estimate of when it will be done and delivered. My professional view is that I suspect that it will take longer, as it is still looking at the invitation-to-tender document and we have asked it to have that gateway reviewed and checked and to ensure that there are other requirements on it.

I do not think that Police Scotland will be in a position to come back with information until such time as it has engaged with contractors and worked out what the timeframe will look like.

Kevin Stewart: Convener, it is extremely important that we find out from Police Scotland the exact timescale. Beyond that—I have finished my questions—it is important, as Mr Finnie said, for us to get the current definitions of control rooms, control centres, service centres and all the rest of it.

Derek Penman: Those definitions are contained in our report; I just have not explained them very well.

The Convener: We need a realistic timescale for when the system will be operational. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but I think that you are telling us that the timescale that has been given—the end of June next year—is not realistic.

Derek Penman: I do not think that Police Scotland will be able to give you that information. It has not yet gone out to tender, so it does not have a supplier who can tell it what can be delivered and when. I do not think that it will have an idea of when it will happen until it awards the contract.

The Convener: Does John Finnie want to come in?

John Finnie: Yes, thank you, convener. Mr Penman, is there a direct link with the i6 project?

Derek Penman: No—not that I am aware of, although I will defer to John Bainbridge if he has any information. There will be a degree of

integration. The reason why I mentioned the timescales is that I do not imagine that Police Scotland will be in a position to be confident about the timescales until such time as it has got the tender document done, it has engaged with suppliers, and they have come back with firm proposals around delivery. At that time, it will have a better idea of the time that is needed to do the work.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): One of the key findings under "People" is:

"Initial assumptions on C3 staffing levels were limited by a lack of legacy data and comparators."

When were those assumptions made? How were the staffing levels decided? Where were the faults shown to have emerged? What lessons have been learned for the future?

Derek Penman: Police Scotland made some initial estimates that were based on legacy force data, but it had difficulty in using the legacy data from eight forces because they were captured differently. I think that it based its data on what was known in Strathclyde. John Bainbridge will be able to provide details of the estimates around that time.

John Bainbridge: Yes. We asked for detailed information regarding the staffing of establishments and the actual full-time equivalent numbers at each stage in the change programme. However, we have had difficulty in getting clarity on that, so it is considerably unclear exactly how many staff there should have been and actually were at each stage in the programme, but I can say what we know. This information has been provided by Police Scotland. The actual staff numbers in total in the C3 division—the contact, command and control division—were 1,450 full-time equivalents on 1 January 2015; 1,460 on 1 April 2015; 1,494 on 1 July 2015; and 1,563 on 1 October 2015. Therefore, there is a rising trend in staff numbers.

There are essentially three reference points for the planning assumptions for the change programme, the first of which comes from a product that was commissioned by Police Scotland. In March 2014, an external consultant called Sabio estimated that the number of staff required in the national virtual service centre—that is not all of C3, just those who take the calls—would be between 379 and 447. On 4 May, Police Scotland conducted a review of the strategic direction, and that figure was honed down to 400 in the national virtual service centre function. More recently, at a project board for C3 on 23 June, the figure was revised to 416. Those are planning assumptions about the numbers of staff who were expected to undertake call handling in the national virtual service centre.

Derek Penman: That was based on assumptions about the number of calls that would come in and the average time to take a call. Assumptions were made on what was known and then the correct numbers of staff were estimated. One issue that we picked up on was that it depends on the type of model for call handling that is wanted. If we want a very effective call-handling service in which people take calls, take details and pass them out to an area control room to be dispatched, that will involve much shorter times on the phone compared with the times if we want a service centre that will spend longer with people on the phone and will seek to resolve their issues and not send a police officer. Therefore, there are issues in the planning assumptions to do with how the service is designed.

What we have said—this will probably be important to the committee—is that, before people move to bring in the control rooms from the north, they will have to work out those planning assumptions again and demonstrate what they are doing. They will have to demonstrate how they have calculated the number of people who are needed against the call volumes to satisfy independently whether the right number of people are available to take the calls.

Margaret Mitchell: I am really trying to establish when those initial assumptions were made. How far back was that?

John Bainbridge: The Sabio report was released in March 2014, and the estimate that it made was 379 to 447 staff. That was used as a planning assumption in January. On 4 May this year, there was the 400 figure.

Margaret Mitchell: Yes, I have the figures, but was the very first time that there was any assumption about staff levels in 2014?

John Bainbridge: That was the information that we got from Police Scotland. Yes.

Margaret Mitchell: We know already that the SPA expected that reducing the number of call-handling sites would create challenges in retaining experienced staff and would involve a significant amount of organisational change, but closures went ahead regardless because they realised the most business benefits.

A theme seems to be emerging. The report states:

“Governance of the change process has been weak with key risks and project issues not being highlighted through existing structures.”

However, there has been a focus on “productivity and achieving savings”. I am trying to get at what is dominating. Is it savings or delivering an effective service? If it is the latter, why do we still

have backfilling—it is limited, certainly—and what sort of backfilling is it?

14:00

Derek Penman: Police Scotland’s position is that it is saving and delivering an effective service. It identified a number of benefits to its programme, which included providing a better quality of service for the public and introducing standardised systems and processes across the country. Savings were an element of that. Police Scotland’s position is that there will be a mixed range of benefits from the programme.

As the report outlines, we identified a focus on allowing people to leave the organisation, which means allowing savings to take place, in effect. The journey of savings in people is difficult for us to track. To go back to the outline business case, savings of £18 million were identified before the decision was taken to create the single force. When Police Scotland started to design the programme, it said that there could be around £8.6 million of savings. Currently, the estimate is around £6.8 million of savings, which is 212 staff and £900,000.

Our difficulty is trying to track the number of staff who were in the organisation and have left it and how the financial savings are accounted for.

Margaret Mitchell: You mentioned that Police Scotland’s position is that it is both. What is your position? Was there too much of an emphasis on trying to make savings rather than on ensuring that adequate staff were available to handle the calls?

Derek Penman: It is difficult to say what the motivation behind the project was. We can only say what we saw. We found that, at critical stages of the project—for example, when the Stirling centre and then the Glenrothes centre closed and moved to Bilston Glen—insufficient numbers of staff were available. That was precipitated by allowing staff in those areas to leave, which allowed Police Scotland to make some savings, at the same time as those closures went ahead. Police Scotland attempted to recruit new staff into those areas, but there was a lag in that recruitment. The model is still to have staff in those areas and recruit staff in them.

We have found it difficult to track down the numbers of staff who were in position at the key points in time against the projections. What good would have looked like is numbers for how many staff Police Scotland needed at a given stage, how many it actually had and the shortfall, as well as a plan for how it intended to address that shortfall. We had difficulty in finding that information.

Margaret Mitchell: Will you confirm how much backfilling is still going on? It seems to me that we are still plugging the gaps. Perhaps one way to assess where we do not have the manpower is to examine the unanticipated overtime payments that have been paid to fill the gaps. Those payments are going down slightly, but we want some reassurance on that matter, because it is not good for morale and it is not a way to run the service.

Derek Penman: One of the assurances that we gave is that the staffing levels in C3 have now stabilised. We went out the week before our report was published to check on that. Additional staff have been recruited into the virtual service centres in Edinburgh and Govan, so staffing levels are now up to what Police Scotland considers necessary for the programme. That has manifested itself in the performance figures now being achieved.

When we went to visit the service centres, we looked to see whether many calls were waiting to be answered, which would have been an indication that the centres did not have enough staff for the calls that were coming in. In fact, there were staff free waiting for calls to come in. We spoke to staff in those areas, who feel they now have additional staff round about them, so our view is that the staffing is stable for the current level of volume. However, we need assurance that, when the calls come in from the north, the centres have sufficient capacity to manage that.

Margaret Mitchell: What about backfilling? We know that it is still going on. Deputy Chief Constable Richardson confirmed that only on Tuesday.

Derek Penman: My view is that very limited backfilling is taking place in the C3 environment. Staffing is up to required levels, and a number of new staff have been recruited into those areas. There was an element of backfilling early on when there was a struggle to meet demand, and it drew mainly on officers who were already working in the area control room. People who were already working in the call-handling environment were brought in to deal with that, while other officers were brought in from outwith that environment. However, significant backfilling is not going on in the service centre, and we did not see much evidence of it when we were out.

John Bainbridge: The number of gaps has reduced as staff numbers have increased, thanks to the injection of finance. Essentially, there are three options: pay overtime to increase capacity; backfill temporarily with officers from divisions that have previously worked in the room; and arrange shift swaps with other people in the division to backfill places. As I have said, the number of occasions on which that has occurred has diminished significantly since establishment and,

more important, since the strength of staff has increased.

Margaret Mitchell: Finally, what measures are being taken to monitor this closely? After all, it seems to be the Achilles' heel in the system.

John Bainbridge: It all ties in with the need for a performance management framework that goes broader than the issue of productivity and which should include the quality of call handling as perceived by the customer—the public—with some sampling of the way in which handlers or operators deal with calls; timeliness, obviously, in order to meet service standards; staff utilisation to ensure that staff are productive and that the anticipated after-call activity is within expectation; and attrition, which is about service failure and relates to, for example, calls in which people hang up in the midst of a conversation, or re-presented or inappropriate calls. We estimate that about 30 per cent of the calls that come through are not appropriate for the 999 system; as that presents an opportunity to reduce demand, you have to monitor the system to ensure that it is being used appropriately and for its purpose and that the whole procedure is operating efficiently.

The Convener: With regard to the historical figures on call centres, difficulties and so on that you cannot get your hands on, where is the SPA in the middle of all this?

Derek Penman: The SPA clearly has a role to oversee that—

The Convener: Right, but excuse me a wee minute. It appears to have a role, but it also appears to be invisible. I appreciate that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary cannot inspect the SPA—or can you?

Derek Penman: I can.

The Convener: Well, that is good news, because the question that I am asking myself is this: how come the SPA cannot give any answers, given its role in overseeing all these stats, data and figures?

Derek Penman: In effect, our recommendations on tightening up and improving governance are also directed at the SPA. When the issues became apparent at Bilston Glen and it emerged that call performance was not going well, the Scottish Police Authority intervened, asked for performance figures and numbers and monitored the situation at that point. What we are saying is that at certain critical points going back it was hard to assess at what times and whether sufficient staff were in place.

Picking up on Ms Mitchell's point, I point out that the Cabinet Secretary of Justice has written to me asking, first, that I work with Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority on developing a

range of performance indicators to ensure not only that calls are being answered quickly—after all, answering calls is only one very small part of performance management; there is a range of other things going through—but that we look at staffing levels, numbers, recruitment and vacancies and ICT issues to give us a much more balanced picture of performance.

The Convener: The SPA should have been doing this before you had to come in with your big boots.

Derek Penman: It was doing it, to a degree, but given the experience that we have seen and the experiences of John Bainbridge and others around the country, we are looking to assist with the situation and bring something together that will assist us.

The cabinet secretary has also asked us to carry out unannounced visits to service centres across Scotland for the duration of the programme's roll-out, and my intention is to use the performance management information that we get to carry out risk assessments as part of the things that we look at on those visits. For example, I will be very keen to see whether there are any staffing and recruitment issues, what the numbers are, whether the numbers are being met and what the abstractions are. We are in a much better place now in that respect, and there is greater clarity about what is required.

The Convener: It is taking a bit longer than the committee would have expected. We have had a few years of it now. Forgive me; that comment is not directed at you.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I return to the earlier questions about the north control room. You said in response to Elaine Murray that you were not surprised that the local redundancy interviews and processes are still going on. Do you agree that putting people on notice leads to staff attrition?

Derek Penman: I do agree. Again, it is about how Police Scotland manages that through use of temporary staff. My other observation in the report is that staff consultations are now being done one to one, so there are opportunities for staff to engage and to speak to Police Scotland about the situation and about potential timescales. We have made it clear that the service centres in the north should not close until such time as that process has run its course, which means that closure could take a while. One of the criticisms from staff was that there had been very little engagement with them until the point at which the announcement was made that centres were going to close. I accept that it could be unsettling for staff to go through the current process, and that it may to an extent lead to staff attrition, but my view is that that

allows staff to get a more informed picture of where they are. The important thing that is missing for them is the timeframe in which it will happen.

Alison McInnes: That is my point. The situation is very open ended and it makes the system more unstable because people will leave if they find another job before the process is complete. Have you any indication of what the timescale will be?

Derek Penman: We do not have a definitive timescale, but we have asked in our recommendations for Police Scotland to plan in detail what it refers to as stages 5 and 6, which is to bring up the new control room in Dundee and then to transfer calls from Inverness, Dundee and Aberdeen down into the central belt. We have asked for that to be planned out with a high degree of information and to have it independently assured. That planning should contain the timelines. The forecast just now is for it to happen in March 2016, which was the original forecast, but Police Scotland has not yet demonstrated what that timeline looks like. It is still working towards that but it has not evidenced it or had it assured, so the timeline may slide out further.

Alison McInnes: I still maintain that we should do what we can to keep the control rooms. You said in your report that

"Performance in the North continues to be variable"

although it was improving elsewhere. What do you attribute that to?

Derek Penman: That is partly because of the challenges of maintaining staff. That is not because of the statutory consultation but because staff have now had 18 to 20 months of uncertainty about their future. Some staff may choose to take other jobs if they can, while others may hang on to see whether they can get voluntary redundancy. There are some aspects of the situation that involve the technologies that are in place and how they are being measured. Although calls are not being answered in the north but are being transferred down to the central belt, we have said that that position needs to be stabilised and the control rooms and service centres in the north need to be kept open, and that performance needs to be monitored more closely.

Alison McInnes: It seems to me that the position is not yet stabilised and that a moratorium with a proper timetable—a year's grace, say—would help to stabilise and improve the situation in the north.

Derek Penman: This is my view on how the situation should play out. Police Scotland is currently working on a detailed plan of what needs to be done and delivered to allow the service centres to close. That is what the police have been asked to provide and I know that they are working

hard on that just now, although it needs to be assured. Once that is done, it will give us a much more informed view of what the timelines will be; that is, perhaps, the time to take decisions about how long the service centres should stay open.

If everything works well and it can be demonstrated that the staff are in place, that the technology is robust and that people are satisfied, that would allow the service centres in the north to close. If that does not come through the due diligence that is being done, more work will need to be done, which will move out the timescale. I have made it clear in our report that the centres in the north should continue and should be maintained until such time as Police Scotland is ready to move, and there are sufficient staff, the technology is working properly and the process is in place. The lessons that were learned from closing the Stirling and Glenrothes centres have to be heeded, so that Police Scotland can close centres in a way that provides a good-quality service to the public.

Alison McInnes: On system outages, your report states that

"Between January and September 2015, there were 151 outages with average incident duration of approximately three hours."

Can you explain the impact of those outages?

14:15

Derek Penman: It is hard to talk about the specific impact, because the outages relate to a number of systems. We say in the report that Police Scotland has robust business continuity processes, so when systems fail it can move to a manual process or shift resources to a different control room. My take on that is that the impact of outages on the provision of services to the public was relatively minimal, because a lot of that stuff was not picked up on.

We came across a number of examples in which systems had fallen over. When I was in Motherwell, the area control room was not working at all, but because it is a virtual centre, the demand on that control room was transferred electronically to the other control room in Govan where it could be managed: staff were then relocated. Although that was a significant system outage that required staff to move from one area to another, the impact on the public and officers on the street was negligible.

Alison McInnes: Does that relate to what the report refers to as "near misses", or is that a separate issue?

Derek Penman: With something as complicated as call handling, where a lot of processes are being changed, the staff are the ones who know

how the systems work and the services that they provide. On near misses, we were trying to get behind situations where, perhaps as a result of changes in process or technology, staff thought that a call was not dealt with as well as it could have been, or staff had resolved something by drawing on their experience—nothing went wrong but they identified something that needed to be sorted. For us it was about their having a system for feeding that back to management, which would ask what happened in a particular incident and then learn from it by amending processes. It was about ensuring that where a staff member who deals with a call comes off the phone and thinks that it did not go as well as it could have gone, they can ensure that that information is passed back to management.

Alison McInnes: Are you saying that when you started your inspection that was not happening and that the senior staff in C3 were basically flying blind when it came to some of the problems that existed?

Derek Penman: My view was that if it was apparent that something did not go as well as it should have gone, managers would certainly pick that up and follow it through, and some staff would come forward in that way, but the picture was probably a bit too variable. Police Scotland needs to have robust systems and to create a culture in which staff are encouraged to come forward, such as by taking 10 minutes away from their calls to tell their supervisors what happened in a particular incident, which would then allow something to be done about it.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): On the recommendation for a training strategy, you state in your report that

"The implementation of a professionally accredited industry best practice programme of ongoing consistent training and development should be a priority."

How much of a priority should it be and how easy is it to access such training?

Derek Penman: Our view is that Police Scotland should take a look at its training, which we found to be variable across the country. There is a need to make sure that training has been done.

Since our report was produced, Police Scotland has introduced what it refers to as a training academy, which is, in effect, a mentoring programme whereby once staff are trained in the basic systems they come into the service centre environment and work alongside trainers who sit with them, tutor them and give them additional training. They are not put on to calls right away; they are brought in in that way and individual training plans can be developed for them. We have seen significant improvement in the quality of

the training that is being provided to staff. In many respects, that recommendation has been addressed for us.

The accreditation aspect was perhaps more of an aspiration for us. We recognise that it is not just about training people how to use systems; it is also about training them in providing customer care and in being able to handle the calls and deal with vulnerability and other factors—the softer skills. Some of that kind of training will be available externally, given the number of call centres that operate across the country. The accreditation part of the recommendation was to encourage Police Scotland to look at good practice beyond the police and to draw from it in the training programme.

The Convener: We have gone over cost centres, but I want to raise one final little issue about the calls themselves. Committee paper JSP/S4/15/11/2 says that the three centres receive 600,000 emergency 999 calls a year but that 30 per cent—or 180,000—are not appropriate. That is an awful lot of calls from the public bunging up the service. What recommendations do you have to ensure that people do not do that? We have the 101 service, and a substantial number of the public's calls should not be made to 999.

Derek Penman: I will pass your question over to Laura Paton, because she did our call audit. As you say, 30 per cent of calls are inappropriate. Again, to use the jargon, as I tend to do in such reports, that is referred to as failure management, where matters that could have been resolved come through. Laura will be able to give you examples.

The Convener: That would be useful in the final few minutes of our meeting.

Laura Paton (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland): We audited 1,501 calls as part of our wider call-handling review. We applied eight different tests to the calls to which we listened. When a call was made to 999, our final test was to ask whether it was an appropriate use of the service. As has been noted, in almost 30 per cent of cases, we found that the calls were not appropriate. There was a range of reasons for that. Sometimes, it was the result of a misdial, such as a pocket dial from a mobile phone, and sometimes it was a child playing with a phone. At other times, which is where more work could be done, it was because some people still seem to be unaware that the 101 service is available for non-emergencies. There is scope for the 101 service to be marketed more.

In addition, 101 costs the caller—I think that it is 15p a call, no matter its duration; it is a one-off cost—and some people are aware that 999 calls are free, so they use that service if, for example,

they have no credit on their mobile phone. The call might be appropriate if they thought that they were in an emergency, even if the call taker did not perceive the matter that they had raised to be an emergency. People use 999 for various reasons when they should not.

The Convener: Of that 30 per cent, if you take out the children and the misdialling, what are we left with?

Laura Paton: I am not sure that I can estimate that.

The Convener: I was quite startled by the 30 per cent figure because I thought that the 101 service had solved the problem much more than it apparently has.

Laura Paton: We were quite generous with our assessment of whether the 999 call was appropriate. For example, if the situation was not an emergency but the caller was, for whatever reason, significantly panicked or distressed, we accepted why they had used 999: perhaps they were not thinking clearly enough to say to themselves, "No—this isn't an emergency, so I'll use 101." Given our generosity, I would say that the figure is probably higher than 30 per cent.

The Convener: That was helpful. Thank you very much for your evidence. We move into private session—at a rate of knots.

14:22

Meeting continued in private until 14:30.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.scottish.parliament.uk

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
Is available here:

www.scottish.parliament.uk/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk
