

Item 4

REPORT TO AREA 1 FORUM

6TH SEPTEMBER 2004

DURHAM CONSTABULARY – SOUTH COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE

Further to Minute No. AF(1)2/04 of the meeting held on 7th June 2004, Members of the Forum and local residents visited Durham Constabulary's South Communications Centre at Division Headquarter, Woodhouse Lane, Bishop Auckland on the evening of Tuesday 29th June 2004.

Inspector Peter Foster showed the Group around the Centre and gave details of how it operated.

The Centre was responsible for the handling of calls for the south of the County – Weardale/Teessdale/Sedgefield and Darlington areas. The remainder of the County was covered by the North Communications Centre at Aykley Heads, Durham City.

It was explained that calls were taken by officers/support staff known as "call takers", who had a list of questions to ask the callers to ensure that they received the necessary information. A Minicom system was available at each Communications Centre for callers who were hard of hearing. There were 6 levels of response, which ranged from an immediate response within ten minutes to the matter being referred to the local beat officer to be dealt with on a non urgent basis. The "call takers" transferred the information they had received regarding incidents electronically to the "call dispatchers". A paper copy of the reported incidents was also produced. The "call dispatchers" were aware of the officers on duty and their location when assigning incidents/jobs.

All 999 calls automatically jumped to the top of the queue. 90% of 999 calls were answered within ten seconds. 999 calls from mobile phones were all answered by the North Communications Centre. The drop-out rate for calls was low and the Centre was answering more calls as the number of reported incidents had increased by 20% when compared with figures for 2002. From 1st January 2004 to date there had been 15,000 incidents reported on the incident log system for the Sedgefield area.

Specific reference was made to the three switchboard operators who were on duty at Bishop Auckland Police Office from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and took approximately 500 calls each per day.

It was reported that Durham Constabulary were currently in the process of recruiting more "call takers" – support staff. The newly appointed officers would receive two weeks training and then be mentored for at least ten weeks. It was pointed out that all calls and all radio transmissions were recorded.

The Group's attention was drawn to the fact that Durham Constabulary now operated on the Airwaves Radio System. The digital system provided secure communication channels and gave 98% coverage of the area. The quality of transmission was also excellent and the system would enable officers to communicate with all police forces within the country.

The staff at the Communications Centre could also link into the CCTV systems operated by Councils in the area and monitor the front desks of Police Offices in its area.

RECOMMENDED : That the information be received.

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