Identifying and supporting vulnerable repeat callers via 999 or 101

Structured analysis of police contacts in the control room to identify vulnerable repeat callers and signpost them to relevant agencies.

First published
5 March 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion
Topic	Criminal justice Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	South East
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Health services
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2018

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults

Aim

A small number of vulnerable people repeatedly calling the police led to increased demand on contact handling. This was potentially denying other members of the public the ability to contact police. These calls also affect the capability of wider policing resources to respond. To manage this, the aim was to:

- identify vulnerable repeat callers to Kent Police
- ensure appropriate safeguarding for those vulnerable callers
- reduce the impact of these callers on the force and as such on the public

Intended outcome

- Identification of vulnerable repeat callers.
- Safeguarding of vulnerable repeat callers.
- A reduction of calls into the control room from repeat callers.

Description

This practice is also known as Operation Engage.

Force control room central coordinator role

A force control room central coordinator was appointed. The Operation Engage working practice was designed and published on the force's intranet system. The force control room central coordinator was an abstraction of a member of staff who was a contact handler.

The central coordinator's role is to:

- manage all vulnerable repeat callers

- oversee the automatic systems in place to identify vulnerable repeat callers
- coordinate the progress of vulnerable repeat callers being referred to the relevant community safety unit

No specific funding was required to procure this staff member, but there were financial implications when backfilling their role.

This member of staff was a reduced hours staff member, working two thirds of full time. This was enough time for carrying out this role.

The control room coordinator was selected through an expressions of interest process within the control room.

Automated system for identifying vulnerable repeat callers

Operation Engage uses an automated system called BusinessObjects. This is used to cross-examine various call handling systems within the control room. BusinessObjects was a product the force already owned and as such did not require additional funding. This provides an overall profile of the caller – such as the frequency of calls, the day and time of the calls and the subject of the calls. These profiles help to identify vulnerable repeat callers.

These call handling systems include:

- a command and control system
- call recording software
- an automatic call distributor

Command and control system

This is used to record the details of a call. It's a manual entry system where contact handlers type in the name, location, telephone number and details of an incident. These records are then used to record actions taken and any result. Various systems are available, but Kent police use a product called Storm.

Red Box call recording software

This system automatically records phone calls in and out of the control room, as well as radio transmissions. Each recording is logged in the system with the times and telephone numbers.

Automatic call distributor (ACD)

This is a system that receives a call to the control room and passes it to the next available contact handler.

Criteria for repeat callers

The criteria for nomination as a repeat caller is someone calling the police (through 999 or 101) 10 times per rolling week.

When a repeat caller is identified, the nature of the calls is reviewed to assess whether the caller is a repeatedly targeted victim or a vulnerable repeat caller.

Individuals identified as repeatedly target victims are not managed through the vulnerable repeat callers process. They may still be referred to the force's community safety unit and other specialist departments.

Community safety unit (CSU)

Once identified, those repeat callers are referred to the police CSU relevant to the caller's location. The CSU are departments across the force area. There is a CSU in most Kent police stations and their coverage is for the full county. Most callers provide their name and location, and these details are used to establish which of the CSUs the repeat caller should be allocated to.

Staff from the CSU then manage the repeat caller with appropriate action, depending on need. This would involve a range of tactics including:

- personal visits
- liaison with partner agencies, particularly ambulance and fire and rescue, as well as mental health departments
- bespoke response plans
- acceptable behaviour agreements
- enforcement through courts

Regular meetings are arranged between police, fire and rescue and ambulance to discuss callers who may be affecting more than one service. This ensures a multi-agency approach.

Since the beginning of the operation, there have been more than 200 repeat caller referrals for intervention and support. Callers are discussed at morning and monthly performance meetings.

Overall impact

The intervention has led to early identification of vulnerable repeat callers. This early identification and engagement has led to those callers receiving the correct assistance and signposting.

The impact is mainly around the denial of service to the public. This is due to Kent not being able to answer other emergency calls when dealing with this type of caller, where the risk is not as great. Managing this involves an increase in staffing, which in turn has a financial impact. All of this is very difficult to measure.

Operation Engage has led to a successful reduction in calls from those individuals. Kent identified more than 200 repeat callers, with the Operation Engage process leading to a reduction in calls.

Learning

Coordinator role

It's vital to use a coordinator who understands both the:

- control room processes
- processes of the practitioners engaging with callers

Kent's coordinator developed working relationships with those practitioners, as well as those from partner agencies. They also maintained a working knowledge of the callers. This led to continued momentum of the operation, which remains ongoing.

If the role were to become permanent, it would require an in-force selection process. This however did not happen and instead the role is now part of an inspector's portfolio.

Analytical products

The main challenges were around the analytical products.

Initially, the coordinator was manually trawling the systems and taking referrals from staff who had noticed repeat callers. Now the automatic system is in place, most of the identification comes from the technical research and products such as BusinessObjects.

Data

Providing quantifiable data to show success remains a challenge. Kent still relies on identifying when repeat callers are no longer coming to notice.

Converting any such results into tangible results or savings is always an approximation without any statistically significant findings.

Partner agencies

Making links with other agencies was mainly problem free, with those other agencies welcoming the ability to work together to manage this demand.

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