

Operation Engage – identifying and addressing sources of repeat demand

Using automated monitoring systems to identify and support vulnerable individuals who frequently contact 999 or 101.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Contact management Intelligence Investigation
Organisation	Kent Police
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Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	May 2024
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Workforce

Aim

The aims of Operation Engage are to:

- identify repeat and inappropriate contact, including nuisance, hoax, and unsuitable calls at the earliest opportunity by using data sources such as command and control indicators and the control room solution (CRS) telephone system
- use THRIVE (threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement) assessments and the national decision model (NDM) to effectively manage repeat and nuisance callers
- distinguish between policing and non-policing demand to reduce the creation of avoidable computer aided dispatch (CAD) entries and deployments
- apply demand management tools ethically and confidently
- recognise vulnerability and unmet needs by taking appropriate safeguarding action to prevent harm to individuals, staff, and the wider public
- work with internal teams and partner agencies to identify alternative pathways, escalate concerns appropriately, and support timely, proportionate intervention

Intended outcome

The intended outcome of Operation Engage is to reduce repeat, nuisance, and inappropriate contact to the force control room's (FCRs) emergency and non-emergency lines.

Description

Operation Engage was initially implemented to manage the top 10 repeat callers to the force control room's emergency and non-emergency lines. These individuals were generating a disproportionate level of demand on Kent Police, restricting and delaying genuine contact from the public and placing ongoing pressure on FCR staff.

Further analysis revealed an increasing number of callers making persistent, nuisance, hoax, and abusive contact. Alongside this, there were significant volumes of complex mental health-related calls where police intervention was often not appropriate. In some cases, individuals were making hundreds of calls a week, repeatedly contacting 999 and 101 despite reassurance, signposting, and officer attendance.

In response, Kent Police recognised that the national development of Right Care, Right Person (RCRP), alongside a review of the public emergency call service (PECS) Code of Practice and the use of the NDM and THRIVE assessments, would equip staff with the skills needed to effectively manage repeat and nuisance callers. For the most persistent callers, call blocking can be authorised by an inspector, watch manager, or staff equivalent. Within Kent Police, a watch manager equivalent role was seconded into the business development team to focus on demand management and provide authorisation.

Operation Engage was initially supported through existing resources from within the force crime and incident response command. A dedicated demand management coordinator role has since been created to support implementation, focusing on identifying and reducing unnecessary demand across contact channels.

During a review of the initial phase of Operation Engage, the force identified the absence of a clear standard operating procedure (SOP). A formal SOP was subsequently developed to provide structure, consistency, and governance. An equality impact assessment (EIA) was also completed to recognise that the initiative involves some of the most vulnerable individuals and to ensure all decisions and processes remain ethical. The threshold for intervention was lowered from the top 10 callers to anyone making more than five contacts in a day or more than five in a week, enabling earlier identification of emerging repeat caller behaviour.

Implementation

Kent Police completed a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) and developed an Operation Engage database using Microsoft Excel. This allows the team to systematically monitor and track caller trends, providing insight into repeat and high demand contacts.

A dedicated tag was introduced within the command-and-control system (Storm) to improve the early identification of abusive, persistent and hoax callers. This enabled frontline staff to proactively flag and escalate emerging nuisance demand that was not always visible through standard analytical reports. As a result, previously hidden patterns of behaviour were identified earlier, enabling timely review, proportionate intervention and stronger governance of repeat calling behaviour.

It is not always clear at the point of initial contact to frontline staff if they are dealing with an identified repeat, nuisance or hoax caller. To positively support staff, OP ENGAGE flag within the telephony system (CRS) stating “OP ENGAGE – Create a CAD” has been introduced. This prompt encourages staff to create a CAD at the earliest opportunity and provides clear operational guidance on how the call should be managed, including proportionate options such as transfer to the TIMS, escalation for call blocking, or deployment where required.

The force also uses the transfer information messaging service (TIMS) as a structured demand management tool. TIMS enables call handlers to divert callers once an initial triage confirms the issue is not a policing matter, including repeat, nuisance, and hoax contact. Calls routed through TIMS can be directed to a range of appropriate information lines, with recorded messages played twice to ensure callers have sufficient time to absorb the information.

Specific recorded messages for repeat and abusive callers act as a deterrent by explaining the impact of inappropriate calls on genuine emergencies. These messages outline potential consequences, including call blocking or prosecution under relevant legislation. This approach supports proportionate demand reduction while maintaining public awareness and accountability.

Kent Police has implemented a risk based approach to managing individuals who repeatedly make emergency calls without a legitimate policing need. A formal risk assessment is undertaken by the watch manager, aligned to NDM and THRIVE principles. The assessment considers:

- patterns of calling behaviour
- risks to the caller and wider public

- existing multi-agency involvement
- any restriction on contact

The risk assessment can recommend a transfer to TIMS, escalation for call blocking, or deployment where required. The threshold for using this intervention depends on the individual and the nature and impact of their demand. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis to ensure they are proportionate, risk-assessed, and monitored.

Following the assessment, operational guidance on the individual is recorded within the command and control system to support consistent decision-making by contact handlers. Where appropriate, pre-authorisation may be provided to apply a block after an initial emergency call when it is clear that a police response is not required.

Overall impact

Kent Police has seen significant improvements in the identification and management of repeat, nuisance, hoax, and abusive contact across both emergency and non-emergency lines. Operation Engage is now fully embedded within the FCR, providing structured support for staff dealing with persistent and challenging callers. Feedback from call handlers and supervisors has been positive, with staff reporting increased confidence in managing complex situations, particularly where the legitimacy of contact is unclear at first point of call.

The implementation of clear operational guidance has reduced uncertainty and unnecessary call handling time. This has resulted in tangible efficiency gains, including an estimated saving of approximately 600 hours of contact handling time per month. These improvements have been achieved while maintaining robust safeguarding, appropriate oversight, and access to emergency services for those with a genuine need.

Learning

Kent Police has identified several key learning points from the implementation of Operation Engage. Strong processes and early staff engagement have been critical to its success. A clearer structure and improved support have contributed to a more positive attitude among FCR staff when dealing with repeat, nuisance, and complex mental health-related contact, reducing previously high levels of frustration.

The main challenge has been inconsistent engagement and capacity across community safety units and partner agencies, which has limited opportunities for joint intervention. In response, Kent Police is exploring the development of a formal service level agreement (SLA) to strengthen consistency and accountability. The force is also seeking improvements to intelligence systems such as Athena, so that information can be recorded more effectively to support management plans and warning markers linked to Operation Engage.

A further weakness has been the significant volume and complexity of demand compared with the size of the dedicated team. As a result, Operation Engage has focused primarily on the highest impact individuals. While this approach has delivered clear benefits, the force recognises the potential to expand the initiative to address wider repeat contact beyond nuisance and hoax calls.

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