

Appendix B – Silent solution

1. In April 2014 the Lead Investigator spoke with a representative from BT regarding the way in which silent solution is dealt with. Notes were made during the conversation and a statement was subsequently drafted from such notes. The BT representative later refused to sign the drafted statement on the advice of their legal department, who advised they were not the appropriate person to respond. Rather, BT agreed to respond to specific questions about Miss Power's call and signposted the IPCC to contact other relevant organisations who they felt should be able to assist. On 17 February 2015 the Lead Investigator sent a summary of the information provided by the representative from BT and the legal team confirmed there were no inaccuracies contained within it.

How are emergency phone calls dealt with in the United Kingdom?

2. Emergency phone calls from fixed landlines or mobile phones are initially directed to call centres run by call handling agents such as BT. Call handling agents will seek to obtain information from the caller to enable them to route the call to the appropriate emergency service. The Government Public Emergency Call Service Code of Practice (PECS) deals with the method of handling 999/112 public emergency telephone calls between call handling agents (such as BT) and the Emergency Authorities in the UK.
3. The PECS sets out that when emergency calls are received, call handling agents will seek to establish which emergency authority the caller requires and the telephone number of the caller. It is understood that in most circumstances the call handling agent's console will automatically display sufficient information about the location of the caller to enable the call handling agent to transfer the call to the appropriate emergency authority area.
4. In circumstances when the caller responds to the call handling agent, the necessary information will be obtained and the call will be directed to the appropriate emergency service. There are however many calls to 999/112 when the caller does not actually request an Emergency Authority. The overwhelming majority of such calls are accidental calls or customer misdials, but there is always the possibility of a genuine caller who cannot speak.
5. In order to prevent the Police from being overwhelmed with these calls, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) introduced a system in 2001 which allows call handling agents to filter such calls. Call handling agents must follow carefully designed procedures and if following navigation through such procedures, they cannot decide whether an emergency authority is needed, the call will be connected to the Police

Voice Response System (also known as 'Silent Solution'). The Police Voice Response System is hosted by the Metropolitan Police and features a recorded message which seeks to identify genuine emergency calls.

6. It is understood that emergency calls without service request will only be transferred to the Police Voice Response System in certain circumstances. Connection to the service depends on a number of factors including whether the emergency call is made from a fixed landline handset or a mobile phone, and which number (999 or 112) the caller has dialled.

What is the process the call handling agent goes through when dealing with an emergency call without service request?

7. It is understood that the call handling agent will firstly ask the caller which emergency service is required so they can route the call appropriately. If there is no response, the call handling agent will try to engage the caller and ask a series of questions which include an instruction to tap the screen in the event they require an emergency service, but cannot speak. The call handling agent will keep the line open and listen for any response to their questions. The call handling agent will also listen carefully to identify if any of the phone keys are being pressed, or there are any suspicious noises in the background. In the event there is any suspicion, the call handling agent should route the call through to the relevant Police Force.

Emergency calls without service request from landline fixed phones

8. When emergency calls from landline fixed phones are received by call handling agents, the subscriber details (name and address) should be made available to them. Calls without services request from callers who have dialled 999 are dealt with differently to calls without service request from callers who have dialled 112.
9. It is understood that 112 calls from landline fixed phones without service request will not be automatically transferred to the Police, but will be directed to the Police Voice Response System. This is due to the fact that 112 can be readily generated by network faults and customer equipment and there is consequently a possibility that such calls from fixed landline phones are accidental. In the event call handling agents have asked their normal questions without a response, such calls will be transferred to the Police Voice Response System. This is because it is agreed there is almost a negligible risk of missing a genuine caller.
10. It is understood that 999 calls without service request from landline fixed phones will not be directed to the Police Voice Response System in any circumstance. The reason for this is the subscriber details (name and address) are always available from fixed landline phone calls and it is considered unlikely that 999 calls from landlines will be a result of accidental activations. Call handling agents usually have sufficient information to enable them to route such calls to the correct Force area. In the event the caller has not requested a specific emergency service/is silent/background noise only, the BT call handling agent will also inform the Police Call Handler that they have a call from an address but the caller

is not speaking. This is not covered by the code of practice.

Emergency calls without service request from Mobile phones (112, 999 or emergency call button activation calls)

11. Call handling agents receive very large numbers of accidental emergency calls from mobile phone handsets. It is recognised that when:

An emergency call is received from a mobile phone, there is no request for service, the caller does not engage with the call handling agent's questions and only background noise is present, call handling agents cannot decide whether an emergency authority is needed and such calls will therefore be transferred to the Police Voice Response System.

What happens when a call is transferred to the Police Voice Response System?

12. It is understood that once a call is transferred to the Metropolitan Police Automated Police Voice Response system, an audio recorded message is played which advises the caller that they are through to the Police and instructs them to press 55 in the event they require an emergency service. The recorded message lasts for 20 seconds. The call handling agent should remain on the line listening to the call whilst the automated message is played. The recorded message intends to identify if the call is a genuine emergency or accidental activation.
13. If 55 is pressed by the caller, the system will detect this and the call handling agent will be notified. The call handling agent will then transfer the call through to the relevant Police Force area as there is an indication of genuine emergency.
14. If the caller does not press 55, the system will detect this and the recording will instruct the call handling agent to terminate the call. This is because the call is considered to be an accidental activation. The Police Force which covers the area where the call is made from will not be notified in these circumstances.
15. If at any point during the process of dealing with a call without service request, including following the transfer to silent solution, the caller subsequently requests a particular service, the caller taps the handset or suspicious noises are heard by the call handling agent, they can override the Police Voice Response recording and connect the call to the appropriate Police Force.
16. It is understood there are fail safes in place for the possibility of a genuine emergency where the caller cannot respond to the call handling agent's commands. These include a strategy to notify the relevant police force when repeated calls are received from the same number within a certain time period, and a system whereby high risk victims of domestic abuse are given a specific phone to use in the event of an emergency. Calls from such phones will be flagged to be 'treated as an emergency' and will be directed straight through to the relevant Police Force regardless of whether the caller speaks or not. It is noted that Devon and Cornwall Police had not adopted this and Miss Power would not have benefited from this in any event as she was not deemed high risk.

Enquiries to identify the ACPO SPOC for 'Silent Solution'.

17. On 8 July 2014 the IPCC wrote to ACPO and asked them to identify the ACPO lead for 'Silent Solution'. On 9 July 2014 a representative responded confirming that the system had been set up in October 2001. The project had been progressed by the Communications Lead portfolio holder, Commander Ron McPherson, through the National Policing Information Management Business Areas (IMBA). The IPCC were informed Mr McPherson had since retired and the National Lead for that area was now DCC Richard Morris, seconded to the Home Office from the MPS. Several attempts were made to contact a previous staff Officer of Mr McPherson, however no response was received.
18. Simultaneously in July 2014, BT informed the IPCC that ACC Will Kerr was the portfolio holder for 'Silent Solution'. Several attempts were made to contact ACC Kerr between 11 July 2014 and 22 September 2014. On 2 October 2014 ACC Kerr's secretary redirected the IPCC's queries to the Metropolitan Police.
19. On 13 October 2014 the Metropolitan Police informed the IPCC the ACPO lead for 'Silent Solution' was DCC Richard Morris. DCC Morris was contacted and responded to the IPCC explaining he had delegated the queries to Superintendent Gurdip Singh at the Metropolitan Police Contact Command Centre to respond.
20. On 9 December 2014 the IPCC received a briefing from Superintendent Singh in response to queries posed. The Met CC was asked to provide information regarding the ACPO lead for 'Silent Solution', monitoring and review of the system, national training and police and public awareness. Additional clarification was sought and on 26 January 2015 the Chief Inspector in charge of Operations, Julian Morris, provided the information outlined below.

Briefing note from the Metropolitan Police Communications Control Centre (Met CC)

21. The Metropolitan Police Communications Control Centre (Met CC) operates 'Silent Solution' on behalf of the country. 'Silent Solution' was introduced by ACPO in September 2001, following a local trial in the Metropolitan Police.
22. The Met CC confirmed the way in which calls without service request are dealt with is set out in the PECS. When this document was first established, it was scrutinised by the 999 Liaison Committee who still review its terms. The Met CC advised the 999 Liaison Committee is chaired by John Sexton, who works for the Department for Media Culture and Sport.
23. Attempts made to identify the ACPO lead for 'Silent Solution' proved unsuccessful. The Metropolitan CC advised that following enquiries, neither Will Kerr, the ACPO Lead for National Contact Centre Management, or Simon Parr, the ACPO Lead for Information Management believed 'Silent Solution' fell under their remit. The Met CC explained they had contacted ACPO who confirmed there is currently no

specific ACPO Lead for 'Silent Solution'.

24. The Met CC established it appears that 'Silent Solution' has not been subject to regular review or monitoring in recent years. Furthermore, they confirmed that in recent years 'Silent Solution' has not been subject to any monitoring or research into the number of genuine emergencies sifted out by the process.
25. Confirmation was provided that there is no current provision to monitor how different Police Forces train their control room staff on 'Silent Solution'. Furthermore, whilst call centre staff should be made aware of the system, it is possible that a large number of patrolling response police officers will not be aware of 'Silent Solution'. There is no current arrangement for each Force to have a SPOC for feedback and learning in response to issues encountered with 'Silent Solution'.
26. The Met CC was unaware of any publicity which might have been circulated regarding the 'Silent Solution' system and did not believe the public have been made aware of it.
27. Despite the apparent absence of any formal monitoring of the system, the Met CC stated the media have reported on previous instances where an emergency response was required, but not received as the caller was unable to interact with the call handling agent. The media reported on a female named Hannah Foster, who was abducted, seriously sexually assaulted and then murdered in 2003 in Winchester. When she called 999 she was unable to speak and her call was cut off by the 'Silent Solution'. The same BBC article highlighted the case of Farah Noor Adams who was seriously sexually assaulted and murdered in Glasgow in 2005; she had apparently made a number of silent calls.

Enquiries with the 999 Liaison Committee

28. Enquiries were made with Mr. John Sexton, who currently chairs the 999 Liaison Committee. Mr. Sexton provided the following information for the IPCC investigation.

What is the role of the Liaison Committee?

29. The 999/112 Liaison Committee is a body that brings together Central Government Departments, the devolved administrations and the emergency services with the telecoms companies that deliver the emergency call system. Organisations such as British APCO and Police, fire and ambulance senior Officer Organisations are included. The object of the Liaison Committee is to monitor and try to ensure the effective day to day operation of the UK emergency call system from the time that a citizen picks up a telephone intending to make an emergency call to when the call is handed over to the appropriate emergency service.

How often do the Liaison Committee meet and is 'Silent Solution' monitored and reviewed via this system?

30. The Liaison Committee meets on a quarterly basis. Agenda items can be put forward by Government representatives, representatives of the

emergency services or telecommunications operators. Each quarterly meeting includes an overview of call numbers (including connected calls, dropped calls and an analysis of the trends in numbers). If put forward as an agenda item, the Liaison Committee would be happy to discuss 'Silent Solution' and look to share any experiences and learning from operational issues. It was however highlighted that the Liaison Committee is not a forum for routinely monitoring 'Silent Solution's' performance.

When was the last time 'Silent Solution' was discussed on the agenda? I.e. was it on there after the murder of Hannah Foster?

31. Mr Sexton was unable to find a record of any discussion in so far as he had been able to go back through notes of the Liaison Committee meetings. None of the current membership were involved with the Liaison Committee at the time of Hannah Foster's murder. Responsibility for the Liaison Committee has also moved across various Government Department's since then compounding the difficulty in tracing records. It was acknowledged that the issues highlighted by the IPCC investigation are the kind of matters the Liaison Committee might expect to discuss.
32. The Met CC has requested that 'Silent Solution' be placed on the agenda of the next 999 Liaison Committee to ensure it is reviewed moving forward.

Is there any forum whereby issues that arise with 'Silent Solution' can be addressed?

33. Mr Andrew Knight was contacted in his capacity as a Home Office Representative on the 999 Liaison Committee. On 13 April 2015 Mr Knight advised via telephone there is no current forum within the Home office where 'Silent Solution' could be discussed. He advised the 999 Liaison Committee was likely the most appropriate forum to discuss any issues arising, however stated he was happy to act as a point of contact to inform the Crime and Policing Group within the Home Office of any learning from the investigation.
34. Mr Sexton signposted the IPCC to contact Chief Inspector Chris Dreyfus, who is the Police representative that sits on the 999 Liaison Committee. Chief Inspector Dreyfus confirmed he chairs the National Control Room Managers' Forum, which sits under the ACPO Contact Management Portfolio chaired by ACC Will Kerr. Chief Inspector Dreyfus explained he had no direct dealings with 'Silent Solution', but was happy to disseminate learning through the Control Room Manager's forum.

Enquiries with Devon and Cornwall Police

35. The investigation has established there are varying understandings regarding the circumstances in which calls will be transferred to be 'Silent Solution' within Devon and Cornwall Police. It also appears there is no allocated SPOC for 'Silent Solution' within Devon and Cornwall, or Police Forces nationally.