

Case 3 Issue 41 – Call handling		
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Call handler raises alarm over allegations of police misconduct

A member of the public called 999 to report a domestic incident. At the end of the call, she reported an allegation of police misconduct which was reported instantly by the call handler, raising the importance of:

- *The role of call handlers in frontline policing*
- *Call handlers identifying further criminal offences*

This case is relevant to the following areas:

Call handling		Public protection	
Investigation		Professional standards	

Overview of incident

Ms A called 999 to report a domestic incident involving her friend Ms B. During the call, call handler C asked about the incident, and if anyone was injured. Ms A explained the argument was between Ms B and her mother, but she had also been involved in the fight. Call handler C asked if Ms A was currently safe. Ms A confirmed she was but Ms B and her mother were still fighting at a different address. Ms A confirmed the location and call handler C explained the police may visit the address to make sure everyone was safe.

Ms A gave more details about the fight. Call handler C explained she had also seen a report from Ms B’s neighbour about the disturbance and said officers would go to the address. It appeared the call handler was trying to end the call, but Ms A continued to speak about the “scrap”.

Call handler C made a second professional attempt to end the call. However, Ms B then mentioned that police officer D, who had been at her friend’s address earlier that week regarding a different disturbance, had sent her friend sexually explicit pictures. Call handler C asked Ms A to confirm the person sharing the pictures was a police officer. Ms A stated “100 percent”.

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Ms A explained this was why she could not take the police seriously and asked call handler C to see where she was coming from. Call handler C acknowledged the serious allegation and asked Ms A if she knew the name of the officer. Ms A stated she did not know.

Following a further exchange, Call handler C thanked Ms A for making the police aware and confirmed the allegation would be investigated before ending the call.

Checks were made on the police database. They showed the names of the two officers who had visited Ms B's address that week. It was found that following their visit to her address, one of the officer's had accessed police records on the friend and two other parties.

Call handler C reported the alleged misconduct. 12 days after Ms A's 999 call, officer D was arrested on suspicion of misconduct in public office, computer misuse and data protection offences.

The quick actions of call handler C in reporting the alleged misconduct led to timely actions by the anti-corruption command. The officer was arrested and the subsequent discovery of evidence revealed officer D had abused his position for sexual purpose with multiple other women over five years.

The officer pled guilty to three charges of misconduct in a public office and to two charges of computer misuse. He was subsequently jailed for the offences.

Type of investigation

IOPC independent investigation

Good practice

Following this incident, the IOPC sent a letter to the force to thank the call handler for their swift action in reporting the alleged misconduct. This resulted in the identification of widespread abuse of position by the officer in question.

Outcomes for officers and staff

The officer pleaded guilty to three charges of misconduct in a public office and to two charges of computer misuse. He was sentenced to prison for the offences.

Questions to consider

Questions for policy makers and managers

1. How does your force make sure call handlers have the knowledge and training to deal with potential allegations of police misconduct?
2. What training does your force provide on call handlers receiving intelligence about more than one incident in a single phone call?

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Questions for police officers and police staff

3. How do you make sure you ask relevant questions and listen to all the information you receive, even if it does not relate to the incident the caller initially reported?
4. Would you know how to respond if you were told about an allegation of police misconduct?
5. How can you, as a call handler, reassure members of the public that your force takes corruption allegations seriously?