



General Media Enquires

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'Band-Aid' solution becoming "management by crisis"?

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The public is still being let down by long response times when they call the Police Communications Centre on 131 444 because there aren't enough staff to handle the workload according to the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association.

In November Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan introduced new voice response technology that triages calls according to their priority with callers pressing '1' for immediate police attendance or '2' and '3' for other matters.

CPSU/CSA Branch Secretary Toni Walkington said it was nothing more than a band-aid solution and acknowledged that the Commissioner was doing the best he could with budget restrictions but it would be better if there were more people to staff the phones.

Response times are only being recorded for 000 and '1' calls with the '2' and '3' calls (that could take up between 20 and 30 minutes to answer) are not being included in the figures.

Ms Walkington said the public was expected to triage their own calls which meant they could be putting themselves at risk or would not get a timely response if they were placed in the wrong queue.

"Recently there was an example when an elderly woman called to say there was an offender in her yard and was stealing property," Ms Walkington said.

"It took about 20 minutes for her call to be answered and by that time the offender was long gone.

"The public expects a timely response to their calls and staff are struggling to keep up with demand – last financial year they fielded more than 1.1 million calls and that number will only increase."

Ms Walkington said the calls were often very complex and could not be resolved in a short conversation.

"Staff have told us they have to deal with people who are under duress – they could have been robbed, had a knife put to them or want to commit self-harm and the person who takes the call has to respond appropriately.

"Because of the high number of calls they are under pressure to get through them quickly but in reality the centre needs more staff."

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Ms Walkington said morale was low and they are concerned about the high staff turnover.

The union understands three staff resigned last week alone.

Ms Walkington said they were aware of an internal report recently submitted to the executive team that suggested up to 40 additional staff were needed to fill the gaps but questioned what would happen with that information.

“The Barnett Government needs to reassess its cutbacks to essential public services and the public needs to know what impact the ‘efficiency dividends’ are having.”

FOR COMMENT:

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