Request Reference: 895A/21

1. What apps or chatbots does your force use to communicate with the public?

West Midlands Police (WMP) use a variety of different channels and platforms when communicating with members of the public, which includes: face to face contact, telephony, Chatbots and Live Chat for non-emergency requests for help, email contact via our WMNOW platform, online reporting functionality via our website, conversations via social media channels (i.e. Facebook).

We have a webchat service called Live Chat. A caller can opt to have their query dealt with via a Live Chat conversation, as this can be quicker than waiting for a dedicated call handler. Through Live Chat, callers can be deflected away from any non-policing demand contact and signposted to more appropriate support.

We also have a Chat Bot function (called Bob-E) which was introduced in 2019. This bot acts as a 'concierge service by greeting citizens, taking basic contact details and triaging their enquiry, more quickly than is possible if a caller waits on the telephone. Bob-E seeks to manage engagements which are better resolved by other agencies, redirecting members of the public to the correct advice and contact details, to self-serve online to report crimes or incidents, or find the answer to their query.

2. Can the app/chatbot be considered "smart" (obtaining natural language understanding, natural language generation and machine learning engines)?

Chatbots are commonly used in the private sector and this shapes citizen expectations on service delivery within the public sector. Citizens view the presence of a chatbot as an indicator of accessibility and efficiency. The speed with which the chatbot responds to queries, as well as its availability to the public, builds trust in WMP's competence, and efficiency.

The Chatbot can be configured to respond to expected responses, to refer onto a telephone advisor if it cannot understand what a caller is saying and to identify key words or phrases which suggest that a call is better dealt with by a human call handler. Bob-E identifies when a member of the public needs to transfer to a contact handler and before doing so gathers essential information.

Chatbot has a "natural language understanding" which means it can learn and adapt its response, based on experience.

3. If you do not make use of "smart" technology, what is your reasoning behind this decision?

Not applicable – see above.

4. Are these chatbots/apps used within third party applications or websites, such as Facebook?

No

5. Which service providers develop, deliver and/or maintain these apps/chatbots?

LivePerson Netherlands B.V via our ICT Solutions Framework Agreement with Specialist Computer Centres

6. How much has been spent on this app/chatbot since the contract began?

£517K

7a. What is the duration of the contract?

3 Years

7b. And has it been extended?

No

8. Please share any evaluation, review or report of the use of application or chatbot.

We monitor the use of all our digital channels to ensure that they provide VFM and meet customer needs. Performance for the last reporting period is:
• Current LiveChat usage accounts for 28% of non-emergency demand.
• The ChatBot manages 29% of LiveChat demand.
• Over the last 6 months, 81.3% of visitors rated the service as Good or Ok.

9. Please indicate how these chatbots or apps contribute to public confidence.

• Citizens can connect with us quicker
• Member of public can receive a record of their chat transcript
• Convenience for citizens – can report in locations where they wouldn't have previously
• Enables those who would have not previously contacted us feel more able to do so
• Provides an alternative channel to 101 telephone, from some groups of vulnerable people
• First contact resolution can be increased by use of the ChatBot directing citizens, and external partners to the most appropriate resolution point.

The investment in Bob-E is primarily to support citizens using online channels, whilst managing demand that West Midlands Police can't assist with, providing links with help and advice. Bob-E has been configured to deal with initial reports of anything from theft, fraud, damage to property and missing people to tackling some of the biggest demand which comes through on LiveChat including road traffic collisions, lost and found property, parking issues, abandoned vehicles and incident updates.

Bob-E answers chats within seconds, regardless of other demand levels and can provide help or gather initial details straight away. This means many citizens receive a response and resolution to their query quickly, releasing contact handling resources to deal with other citizens that need us more at that time. When chats need to be transferred to a contact handler, they are, on average, answered in just a few minutes, meaning less frustration for members of the public and reduced 101 demand. Bob-E has been designed in a way that recognises critical trigger words and if these occur in chats, immediately transferring into the next available contact handler.

Bob-E can easily and quickly collect and sort feedback from members of the public, both positive and negative, providing real-time statistics and key data metrics. This allows WMP to test and adjust its solutions in a cost-effective and responsive manner. The use of a technology-based solution (with no bias) reinforces a transparent process and maintains public confidence.

10. Please share the most recent force-level (NOT national level) document relating to how the force plans to gain or improve public confidence.

This information is available on the website of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner at the following link:

https://www.westmidlands-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/19012021-SPCB-Agenda-Item-9-Confidence-and-Satisfaction.pdf?x86491

11. Please share any official protocol or guidance for the use of the app or bot.

Guidance on how to use Bots is covered as part of normal procedures for contact handling, no new and/or customised procedure have been put in place. In addition, all training and procedural guidance is undertaken in situ by qualified staff.