
Updating of Postcodes and Postal Addresses by Emergency Services

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Strachur community raised concerns about Emergency Services incidents where the vehicle attended the wrong address.
- 1.2 Development and Infrastructure Services carried out further investigations with the assistance of Strathclyde Fire and Rescue who were able to determine that one of the highlighted incidents related to a council property where the call was made by the alarm company and an incorrect address provided.
- 1.3 Implications that the problem must be Argyll and Bute wide was not proven but further investigation into the processes used by the emergency services to find addresses was undertaken.
- 1.4 The address databases used by the emergency services and methods used to identify locations were investigated and both Ordnance Survey and the Improvement Service provided information on their efforts to deliver the best possible address solution for the emergency services in Scotland.
- 1.5 The specific problem in Strachur and the surrounding area where Royal Mail use Cairndow as a post town in the address was also investigated but Royal Mail refused to consider changing the Cairndow post town citing their Code of Practice, as approved by Ofcom, to support their decision.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The council supports the Strachur community by requesting that Royal Mail remove "Cairndow" as the post town for properties in PA24, PA25 and PA27 and amending addresses as required.
- 2.2 The "Street Naming and Numbering Policy" is adopted to inform the public of the street naming and numbering services undertaken by the council and increase awareness of the issues.
- 2.3 The Corporate Address Gazetteer team is identified as the main council contact for the emergency services address related cases and will carry out a full investigation into each incident.

3.0 DETAIL

Background

- 3.1 Strachur Community Council raised concerns over an incident where fire appliances from Strathclyde Fire & Rescue were called to Strachur Primary School but were sent to Cairndow.
- 3.2 Further discussions with the Strachur community also uncovered a Scottish Ambulance Service incident where the vehicle attended the wrong address.
- 3.3 The matter was raised at the Bute and Cowal Business Day in December 2012, the Community Planning Partnership Management Board in the same month and at the Bute & Cowal Area Committee in February 2013.
- 3.4 Strathclyde Fire and Rescue were able to listen to a recording of the call, which was placed by the alarm company, and reported the address as "Strachur Primary School, Forest View, Cairndow". As a result of the address reported the local fire appliance was not mobilised.
- 3.5 Strathclyde Fire & Rescue advised the alarm company and the address was updated to "Strachur Primary School, Forest View, Strachur". A call to this address was simulated and it indicated that the local fire appliance would be mobilised.
- 3.6 As this is still not the correct postal address for the school further reconciliation was undertaken by Property Services to update the addresses held by the alarm company.
- 3.7 Further investigation into the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) incidents is not possible as, for confidentiality reasons, no exact address was provided but a senior SAS officer has indicated they will look into any specific incidents notified to them by the council.

Emergency Calls

- 3.8 Emergency calls in the UK are received by BT at one of their seven emergency calls centres in Nottingham, Newport, Blackburn, Bangor, Glasgow, Dundee and Portadown and the BT call operator passes the call to the appropriate emergency service.
- 3.9 BT receives 31 million emergency calls a year and 50% are passed to the emergency services – 52% to the Police, 41% to the Ambulance Service, 6% to the Fire Service and less than 1% to the coastguard or mountain rescue.

Locating the Emergency

- 3.10 Calls made from a landline are recognised by BT and the location passed to the emergency service.
- 3.11 Calls from mobiles now make up 62% of emergency calls and the position of the caller can be located with some accuracy using the location of the nearest mobile mast or several masts in close proximity. The accuracy is greater in urban areas where a greater number of masts can be used to pinpoint the location.
- 3.12 The caller will also be asked for the location of the emergency and ensuring the emergency vehicle is despatched to the correct location requires a combination of efforts from both parties to identify the correct address or other location.
- 3.13 Each of the emergency services have additional intelligence built into their systems which, along with the automatic information from the location of the phone and the details provided by the caller, should direct the emergency vehicle to the exact location of the incident.

Addresses and postcodes

- 3.14 Each emergency service maintains its own control system with an address database of all addresses for its area of operation. For police, fire and ambulance this is now the whole of Scotland with the introduction of the new police and fire services on 1st April 2013.
- 3.15 Two main addresses databases are maintained for the whole of Scotland - Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) and the OneScotland Gazetteer (OSG) maintained by the 32 local authorities and centrally managed by Forth Valley GIS on behalf of the Improvement Service.
- 3.16 A similar arrangement exists in England and Wales where a joint Central/Local Government initiative called GeoPlace has delivered an Ordnance Survey product (AddressBase) which incorporates matched addresses from both the PAF and the England and Wales equivalent of the OSG – the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG).
- 3.17 Through agreement with the Improvement Service, GeoPlace was extended to cover Scottish addresses in May 2012.
- 3.18 Therefore there are now three options for national address data – the OSG, PAF and AddressBase, which combines both OSG and PAF in some versions of the product.

- 3.19 The Improvement Service is coordinating efforts in Scotland amongst the Emergency Services, local authority gazetteer custodians, Ordnance Survey and other interested organisations to produce the best available addressing dataset for emergency services use.
- 3.20 The latest information from the emergency services, the Improvement Service and Ordnance Survey (OS) indicates that the Police will use the OSG, augmented with their own address intelligence built up over a number of years; the Fire Service will adopt AddressBase as it includes the OSG and PAF and the Ambulance Service are looking at Address Base but are still using Address Layer 2, which is based on PAF with added OS grid references.

Royal Mail PAF

- 3.21 PAF was originally developed by Royal Mail to enhance and streamline postal delivery and it is still maintained by their dedicated "Address Management Unit" solely for that purpose. Local authorities also have an update role in identifying new properties requiring a postcode and liaising with the Address Management Unit on the full address for the property.
- 3.22 The PAF Code of Practice, agreed with the postal regulator, Ofcom, determines how and when addresses changes can be introduced.
- 3.23 The postal address maintained by Royal Mail for postal delivery purposes may differ from the geographical location which a resident believes to be their address.
- 3.24 PAF is bought by many organisations with updates provided at intervals ranging from daily to yearly so it is not possible to ascertain how up to date any companies PAF holding is at any point in time unless they advise how often an PAF update is supplied and applied to their database.

OneScotland Gazetteer

- 3.25 The need for a national address infrastructure was first recognised in the 1990s and, with the creation of a British Standard (BS7666) in the mid 1990s, work on the NLPG was started in 1999. All statutory Street Naming and Numbering authorities in the UK were tasked with maintaining a local gazetteer which would record all addresses and land required in the public sector and feed into the NLPG.
- 3.26 In 2003 the Scottish Government's Customer First programme funded the initial creation of gazetteers in Scotland's 32 local

authorities and these are now maintained through a Service Level Agreement between the local authorities, the Improvement Service and Forth Valley GIS, the national custodian on behalf of Stirling Council, the lead council for the OSG project.

- 3.27 The OSG is freely available to public sector partners including Police, Fire and Ambulance and user requirements are incorporated into an OSG improvement plan to ensure the product meets the needs of all customers. This has highlighted, for example, the need to include organisation names (e.g. Tesco, The Flower Shop or Argyll and Bute Council) in the OSG rather than just the property address such as 1 Argyll Street.

GeoPlace / AddressBase

- 3.28 From the early days of the NLPG central government also maintained an address gazetteer – Ordnance Survey's Address Point product, which evolved into the product named Address Layer 2. After many abortive attempts the two government address databases were brought together in April 2011 and GeoPlace, a public sector limited liability partnership between the local government and Ordnance Survey, was created.
- 3.29 Through GeoPlace a new address product, AddressBase, was developed in September 2011 which brought together both NLPG and PAF addresses. Scottish addresses from the OSG were added in May 2012.
- 3.30 Local authorities have played a critical role in the development of AddressBase by matching OSG addresses to PAF and will continue to be the keystone to locally verified address information.

Argyll and Bute Council address maintenance

- 3.31 The GIS Team within Development and Infrastructure Services has dealt with all Argyll and Bute address enquiries since 2005 and has accumulated a considerable knowledge of address information and developed robust processes to maintain addresses.
- 3.32 New addresses are added daily from a number of sources, weekly updates are applied to the OSG and monthly updates are sent to all emergency services and other interested parties.
- 3.33 A Street Naming and Numbering Policy has been developed to raise awareness of the council services provided on addressing and set standards for dealing with enquiries on any addressing issue.

Argyll and Bute Council property addresses

- 3.34 As the initial incident related to a council property the background to the address used was investigated.
- 3.35 Addresses held by Property Services were consolidated into the new Property Management System (PMS) in 2012 and reconciled with the CAG where possible. Prior to the introduction of the PMS addresses were not maintained consistently and the addresses passed to external bodies such as the alarm company were not matched to any recognised address database.
- 3.36 A review of the addresses held by the alarm company has been undertaken and addresses changed where necessary to ensure that a similar incident does not occur in the future at any council property.

Strachur address issues

- 3.37 The initial correspondence from Strachur Community Council highlighting the above incidents also provided a background to the use of "Cairndow" for all addresses in Strachur and the surrounding area.
- 3.38 Cairndow is the post town used by Royal Mail for all addresses in the PA24, PA25, PA26 and PA27 postcodes (see Appendix 1) as the post was previously sorted in Glasgow and dropped in Cairndow for onward distribution. This is no longer the case as the mail is now sorted in Paisley and delivered by ferry to Dunoon for distribution across Cowal.
- 3.39 As the initial correspondence from Strachur Community Council and the Strathclyde Fire and Rescue call out include the mention of Cairndow as part of the address this was investigated as a possible reason for the two incidents occurring in the Strachur area.
- 3.40 Royal Mail were asked if they would consider changing the Cairndow post town for the Strachur postcode and they advised:

"..we would not be able to consider this request as we can only amend this part of a postal address when it is operationally or postally required as outlined in our code of practice. In this instance we have not been informed of any operational issues with this area and so we would not be able to change these details at this time."

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Approximately 85,000 emergency calls are made every day. No figures are available for callouts which attend the wrong address and although it is a very small percentage, every mistake is potentially life threatening.
- 4.2 The emergency services take this extremely seriously and use all possible means to identify the location of the incident but the caller must also be able to correctly identify the location using the available information. It is a combination of effort from both parties and where the caller is unfamiliar with the area they may be unable to provide an accurate location for the incident.
- 4.3 On the few occasions where they fail on this the emergency services will investigate and implement changes if required.
- 4.4 In the Strathclyde Fire and Rescue incident which initiated this investigation the call was fully investigated and the address held by the alarm company was changed.
- 4.5 In the last ten years the maintenance of robust address data to meet all public sector addressing needs has become extremely important for central and local government and address products are now available which can assist public bodies such as the emergency services.
- 4.6 One of the benefits of the address gazetteer being maintained by the public sector for the public sector is that changes can be implemented easier than with a chargeable product like PAF.
- 4.7 Through the OSG Service Level Agreement Argyll and Bute Council maintains the property gazetteer on a daily basis and will investigate any address query notified by a member of the public.
- 4.8 The Street Naming and Numbering Policy determines how the service will be carried out and the standards expected for delivery of the service.
- 4.9 The Royal Mail PAF address is the definitive address for postal delivery and the PAF Code of Practice makes it clear that some elements of the address cannot be changed which makes it impossible for the council to implement all address change requests.
- 4.10 The Strachur community firmly believes that the Cairndow post town is part of the problem in their area and the Strathclyde Fire & Rescue investigation would appear to back this up. A review of the addresses held in the council's Corporate Address Gazetteer may also assist in allaying concerns in the Strachur Community.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – new Street Naming and Numbering Policy
- 5.2 Financial – none
- 5.3 Legal – none
- 5.4 HR – none
- 5.5 Equalities - none
- 5.6 Risk – none
- 5.7 Customer Services – improved addresses will improve delivery of services to the Strachur community.

6.0 APPENDICES

- 6.1 Appendix 1 - Map of postcode sectors in Bute and Cowal

7.0 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

- 7.1 Street Naming and Numbering Policy

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Appendix 1 - Map of postcode sectors and post towns in Bute and Cowal

