Shared Services & Smarter Contact Handling: Beyond Increasing Headcount

This is not the future.
It is a chance to make the NHS faster, smarter and more human.

The NHS challenge

NHS call centers are overwhelmed with demand, receiving tens of thousands of calls daily for appointments and test results. This leads to excessive wait times despite staff efforts.

Hiring more people is no longer a viable solution due to stretched budgets, lengthy recruitment and persistent burnout.

NHS leaders must adopt smarter solutions to automate routine inquiries, allowing staff to focus on complex cases.

> We staffed up our control room to handle the demand... but there comes a point where you can't just keep increasing headcount, and you need to look at investing in technology.
>
> – Colin Dring, Digital Innovation Manager at Humberside Police

A parallel from policing

Humberside Police faced a similar crisis in their Force Control Room, where thousands of calls each year overwhelmed staff despite constant hiring.

The force realised the problem wasn't just about capacity; it was about managing contact. Manual processes and a lack of automation kept skilled officers occupied with tasks that could be handled by a system, necessitating a shift in strategy.

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The police solution - digital response

Instead of hiring more people, Humberside Police, like several other forces, turned to digital technology to manage routine demand more effectively.

AI-powered Live Chat
Working with Single Online Home (the national police website), they introduced an Agentforce-powered chatbot. It dealt instantly with common queries and escalated only those that needed human input. This reduced call volumes and freed staff for urgent incidents.

Process automation with MuleSoft
MuleSoft's integration platform became the backbone of the back-office transformation.
The probation team previously handled around 10,000 requests a year manually, searching records, compiling information and sending reports by email. Automation now completes the same work within hours rather than a full day, entirely without manual input.

Protecting Vulnerable People Unit
In the Protecting Vulnerable People Unit, about 80% of work was manual and double-keyed. By automating those administrative steps, a task that once took up to eight hours now finishes in around twenty minutes.

Impact

The results were immediate and measurable. Routine demand was handled digitally, freeing people to focus on critical work.

Technology didn't replace people — it amplified their impact.

The control room became faster, calmer, and more efficient without increasing headcount.

Relevance for the NHS

The same pressures exist across the NHS: rising contact volumes, limited staff capacity and the constant need to do more with less.
The digital tools already proven in policing can help healthcare services manage demand in exactly the same way.

Smarter Patient Contact
AI-powered assistants can manage routine patient queries instantly by checking appointments, test results or referral progress, and thus easing pressure on switchboards and staff.

Faster Processes
Automation of referrals, discharges, prescription requests or other manual workflows to reduce turnaround times to minutes.

Connected Systems
With MuleSoft integration, data flows automatically between departments. Updates are instant, accurate and available to both staff and patients. No more double entry and delays.

The Opportunity Ahead

The foundations are already in place. The technology has been tested, proven and refined in one of the most demanding public service environments. What worked for policing can work for healthcare.

For NHS leaders, this is a chance to move beyond short-term fixes and create lasting change.

Potential NHS impact

80% of manual work automated
Police units removed the bulk of repetitive admin through automation — the NHS can do the same for referrals, discharges and prescriptions.

Thousands of hours returned to care
Every hour saved in policing was reinvested in frontline work. For the NHS, that time goes back to patients.

Processing times cut by up to 90%
Tasks that took a full day in policing now take minutes. The same speed can transform patient pathways.

Greater accuracy and reliability
Automation eliminated duplication and data errors. In healthcare, this means fewer delays and safer care transitions.

Capacity increased without extra staff
Police forces met rising demand without new hires. The NHS can unlock the same sustainable workforce gains through digital automation.

Lessons from Policing. Innovation for Healthcare.

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