**‘Time seemed to stand still … I just knew I had to keep the call going’**

**November 15, 2017**

It was just two months after joining West Yorkshire Police’s control room team when Deborah Griffiths took the 999 call that made her a critical part of the police response to a crime that shocked the nation.

The call was from eye witness Darren Playford describing the scene of chaos immediately after the murderous attack on MP Jo Cox in the West Yorkshire town of Birstall in June last year.

Mr Playford had seen Thomas Mair’s appalling attack and was tracking the assailant as he left the scene.

It was Deborah’s job to keep the caller calm and focused, ensure he was safe, and relay vital information to police officers as they raced to the scene.

It was a job she carried out with the utmost professionalism for 20 minutes, keeping police updated on the suspects’ description and movements continuously until officers were able to apprehend the killer.

Deborah’s exemplary performance under extreme pressure illustrates the vital role control room staff play in responding to traumatic incidents and why call handlers are so deserving of the recognition they will receive in the first Control Room Awards, launched by mission critical solutions specialist APD Communications.

Deborah recalled: “It was all quite surreal – I can’t even remember the words the caller used when he came on the line.

“He told me somebody had been attacked but I’m not sure he knew what weapons had been used. It was clear from what he said that there had been a very serious, potentially fatal attack.

“I couldn’t think ‘oh, my god, somebody is dying’. I had to deal with it as I would any other call. It was only afterwards that I could think about that.

“The caller was quite upset so I had to try to get him to calm down. I just tried to get him to tell me where he was, what was happening, what he could see and in what direction the suspect was heading, so we could get officers to the scene as quickly as possible.”

Deborah said that, above all, she was conscious of the need to ensure the caller was not at risk of becoming another victim.

She said: “The caller was in danger – everyone in the vicinity was – so, first of all, I needed to make sure he was safe, so he could give me the information I needed to pass on. If he wasn’t safe and could have been injured I wouldn’t have been doing my job.

“I wasn’t aware how long the call lasted – time seemed to stand still while it was going on – but I just knew I had to keep the call going because it was an ongoing incident. I needed to keep relaying the latest information by updating the incident log to ensure the officers knew exactly what was happening throughout that time.

“When it was over I told the caller he’d done a fantastic job, he’d kept himself safe and he’d given us lots of valuable information and been a great help to the police.

“He was able to tell us what he had seen, gave a good description of the man who carried out the attack and the direction he took in leaving the scene. That helped the police to locate, identify and arrest the suspect.

“It was only when I got home after my shift that I could reflect on what had happened. I was more worried about how the caller was, and how he was feeling, because he had witnessed what had happened. I don’t think about what I’ve done – I think about what the callers have experienced.”

Deborah is modest about her contribution to the emergency services response to an appalling act of hate-fuelled violence, but supports the introduction of the Control Room Awards that will ensure the work of contact centre staff in emergency services and other mission-critical organisations is publicly recognised.

She added: “Control room staff don’t look for recognition, but it’s a good thing they will be acknowledged by these awards. People don’t appreciate the amount of skill, empathy and caring goes into handling the calls we take.”

Nominations for the Control Room Awards are open until January 18, 2018, with the awards ceremony taking place on March 8, 2018.

To nominate an individual or team for the APD Control Room Awards, visit <https://www.controlroomawards.com/nominate/>