



Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

25th November 2022

Contact Services Within Devon and Cornwall Police

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides the Panel with additional information regarding the key actions taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner in relation to contact services within Devon and Cornwall Police following the Police and Crime Panel meeting in September 2022. This report covers investment and scrutiny activities over the Commissioner's term of office and future planned activity.
- 1.2. As the Panel are aware the delivery of contact services is a responsibility of the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police who has operational independence in law. The role of the Police and Crime Commissioner is to set the strategic priorities for policing through the Police and Crime Plan and to hold the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of an effective and efficient police service.
- 1.3 In October 2021, the Commissioner published her second Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025. The Plan includes a recommitment to improving connectivity between the public and the police and making as many channels of contact available as possible.
- 1.4 Delivery towards the objectives in the Police and Crime Plan is reported through the Plan scorecard which is presented to each Police and Crime Panel meeting. The scorecard reports on and includes assessments of
 - Number of customer contacts (999, 101, Online)
 - 999 wait time
 - 101 (P1 and P2) wait times.

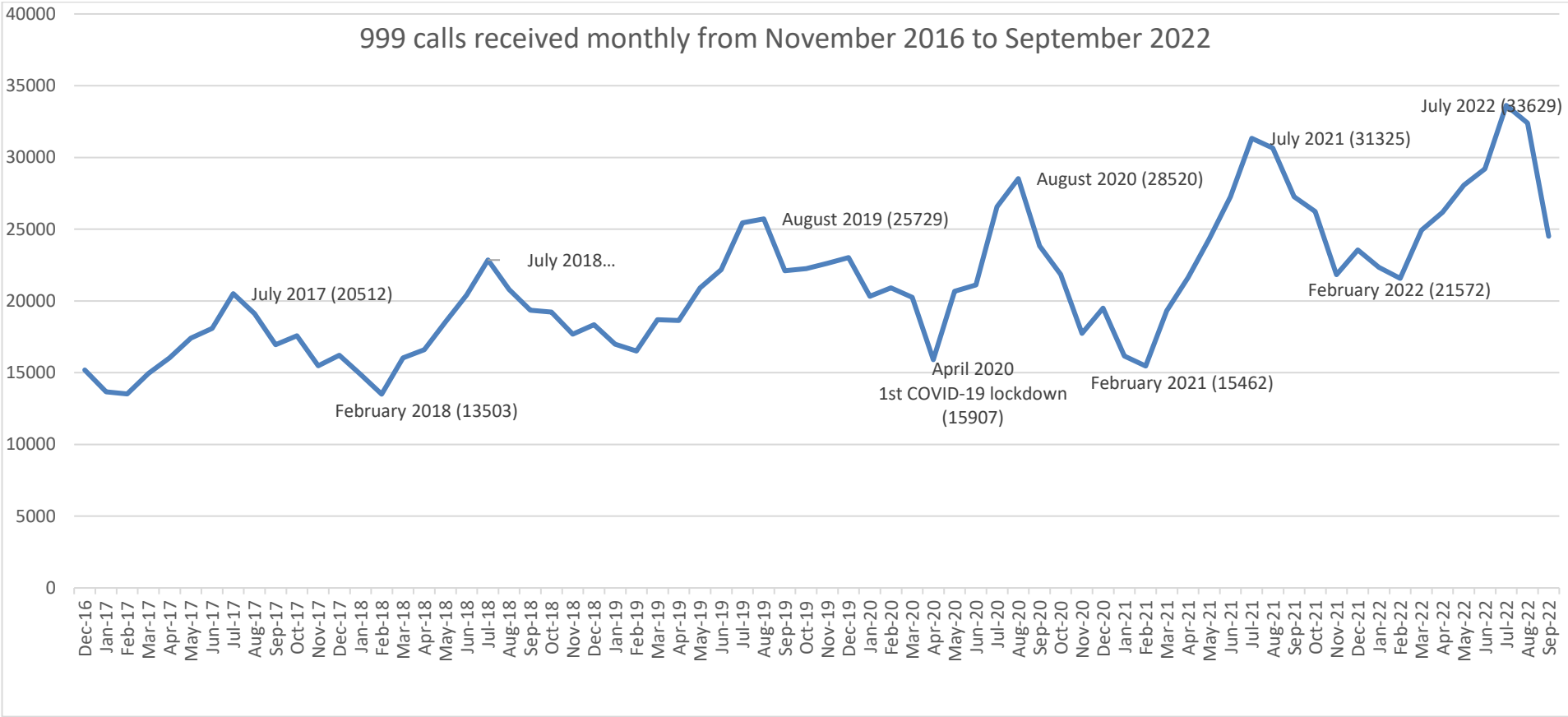
2. Background

- 2.1 The provision of efficient and effective public contact management by the police is fundamental to meeting public expectations, providing good customer service and to the delivery of core police services. For many members of the public, contacting the police through the non-emergency number may be the only interaction they have with the police service and their experience may affect the confidence they have in the police and their likelihood of choosing to contact the police again.



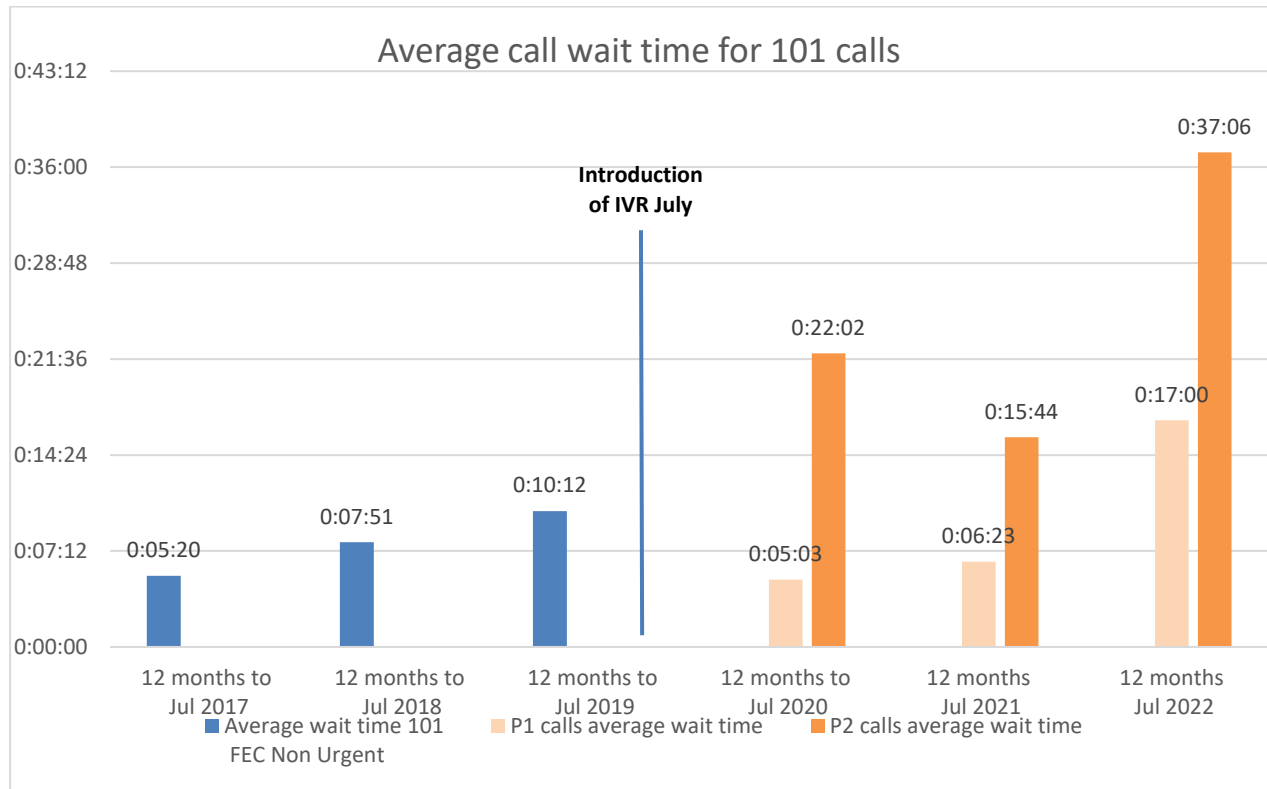
- 2.2 Call management is one of the areas of police service delivery that has received the most scrutiny and attention from the Commissioner, the Panel and the public. However, despite this focus, additional investment and repeated activity to improve and maintain service standards, waiting times performance has remained inconsistent and at times poor. There have been periods of considerable improvements in waiting times, albeit with seasonal peaks, but it has not been stable or consistent. The introduction of new and alternative contact methods such as webchat and online reporting have not led to significant reductions in the levels of calls to the 101 non-emergency line or helped to reduce or stabilise waiting times. It should be recognised that the quality of service that callers receive when contacting the 101 non-emergency service is generally considered to be high but the persistent challenge has been the length of time that people must wait to get through to someone. Information on waiting times for 101 non-emergency calls is provided in this report at Graphs 2 and 3.
- 2.3 In considering 101 non emergency services (which includes webchat, 101 email and online reporting as well as telephone calls) it is important to recognise that this service does not occur in isolation but is part of an integrated service with emergency 999 calls and resource dispatch. As the Panel are aware from previous reports and from the performance report provided to this meeting, the volume of 999 calls to Devon and Cornwall Police has been continuing to increase over recent years. This increased volume impacts both answer times for 999 calls and the performance of 101 non-emergency services given the need to prioritise the answering of 999 calls. The public expect policing to be available in an emergency.
- 2.4 Recent months have seen the volume of 999 call services continue to grow placing further pressure onto contact services for both emergency and non-emergency calls as highlighted by Graph 1 below. In the year to July 2022 there were 82,322 more 999 calls received than in the 12 months to June 2019 – an increase of over 35%.
- 2.5 The Commissioner has regularly scrutinised performance of contact services during her term of office, raising issues and public concerns with the Chief Constable in a range of forums including the Policing and Crime Joint Executive and in annual budget discussions. The Commissioner has consistently provided additional targeted investments to support and enable Devon and Cornwall Police to seek to address the challenges within the service and investments and key activities are detailed in the timeline in section 3 of this report.
- 2.6 In 2020/21 the Commissioner conducted a public scrutiny review of 101 to consider how the service was meeting the needs of the public and engaged the Panel in this process. The scrutiny resulted in 12 recommendations being made to the Chief Constable which were published and reported back to the Panel.

Graph 1: 999 Emergency Call Volumes from 2016 – 2022



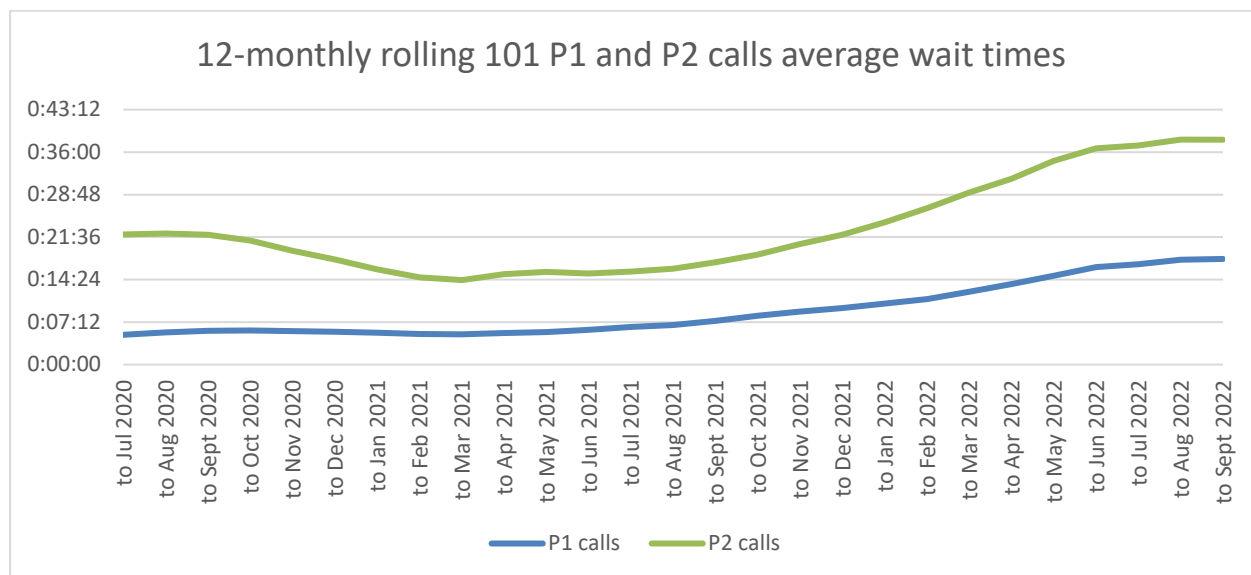
Graph 2: Average waiting times on 101 non-emergency line since July 2016

Please note: Prior to the introduction of Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) in Summer 2019 the average waiting time related to the time waiting for an answer from the Force Enquiry Centre (FEC) after an initial triage by the switchboard operator. At the introduction of IVR callers routed themselves into call lines rather than speaking with the operator. Devon and Cornwall Police has recently begun to re-introduce triage by the switchboard operator in Force Contact Centre prior to being placed in a call line.

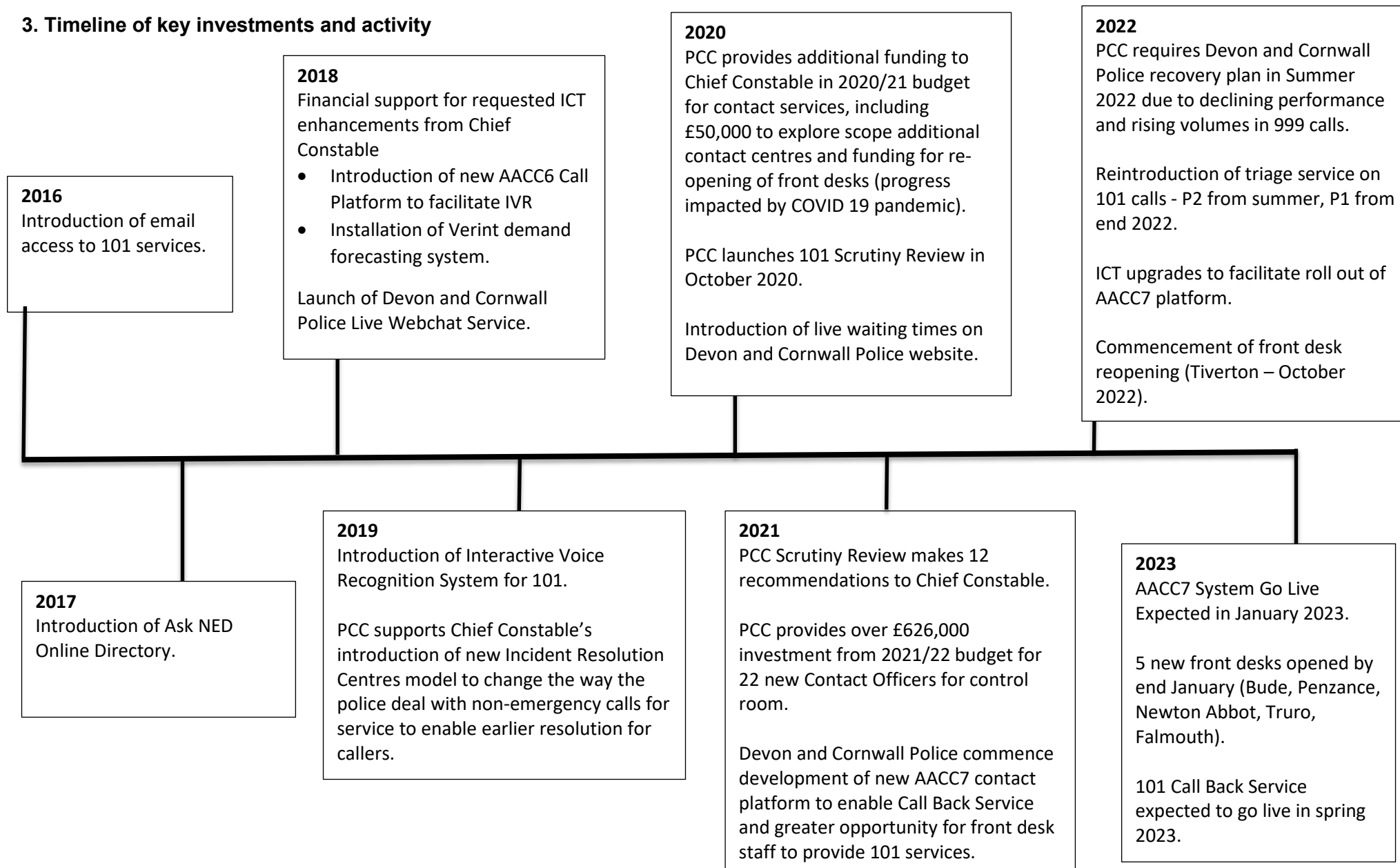


Graph 3: Average waiting times for 101 non-emergency P1 and P2 call lines

P1 call lines include the dedicated call lines for domestic abuse, sexual violence, missing persons, road traffic incidents and hate crime. P2 call lines are the lines for all other reports.



3. Timeline of key investments and activity



4. Police and Crime Commissioner's Thematic Scrutiny of the 101 Service 2020/21

- 4.1 In autumn 2020 the Commissioner launched a thematic scrutiny review of the 101 non-emergency service due to her continued concerns about waiting times. The scrutiny review terms of reference were presented to the Police and Crime Panel in September 2020 and amendments were made to the terms of reference in response to the Panel's views.
- 4.2 The OPCC convened a bespoke panel which brought together the Commissioner, OPCC scrutiny panel members, Victim Support and councillor advocates. The review was carried out in November and December 2020. The findings of the scrutiny review were published and presented to the Police and Crime Panel in February 2021.
- 4.3 The review made 12 recommendations to the Chief Constable.

The public's experience of the 101 telephone service	
<p>Recommendation 1.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable reviews the existing service standard of 20 minutes for P2 calls by 31st March 2021 and considers setting a revised service standard of 10 minutes or less for all call types and a clear, costed plan of action to support its delivery of service standards. Service standards on waiting times should be focused on the percentage of callers answered in that time period not the average waiting time.</p>	<p>Status: The Chief Constable did not accept this recommendation and retained the service standard level at 20 minutes for P2 calls.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31st March 2021 whether the IVR is adding value in its current format and whether changes should be made to the IVR system to re-introduce a triage assessment at the start of the call, in particular for the P2 line.</p>	<p>Status: The Chief Constable concluded that triage services would not be widely introduced but established a system for temporary use of triage at periods of peak summer demand in 2021. This position has now altered and triage services on 101 non emergency calls has been introduced from Summer 2022 on the P2 line and are due to commence on the P1 line by January 2023.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable consider by 31st March 2021 revising Devon and Cornwall Police's service standards for victims to include a clear time period within which victims can expect to receive an update after initial contact with the police and that this expectation is communicated to the public and performance against it is measured and published.</p>	<p>Status: Victim service standards were not altered by the Chief Constable. The Commissioner will be discussing Devon and Cornwall Police's approach to victim services with the incoming Chief Constable on his arrival.</p>
Understanding and managing demand for the 101 Service and Wider Public Contact	
<p>Recommendation 4.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police build a clear evidence base on the nature of calls to 101 and that this information is used to inform discussions with partners to seek to reduce the volume of unnecessary calls coming into the system and with the public to help direct them to the right services.</p>	<p>Status: The volume of calls that come into the 101 non-emergency service which relate to matters that are not for the police remain high. Communications campaigns to advise the public on the correct reporting pathway for issues are undertaken by Devon and Cornwall</p>

	Police but there remains further analytical work to do in this area which is underway.
<p>Recommendation 5.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police develop a force-wide, community orientated and evidence informed Public Contact Strategy which brings together all aspects of its public contact, including the role of corporate communications, victim care, investigating officers, local policing and front desks in providing contact services to the public.</p>	<p>Status: a new Digital Contact Strategy has been put in place by Devon and Cornwall Police. This strategy is focused on digital contact channels in line with the NPCC Digital Contact Strategy and does not bring together all aspects of public contact as recommended.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6.</p> <p>That Devon and Cornwall Police should ensure it fully explores the potential that public enquiry offices and their staff can play in providing 101 services to the public.</p>	<p>Status: Investment for the reopening of front desks has been provided by the Commissioner and 6 new front desks will be open by the end of January 2023. These desks are staffed by Public Enquiry Officers who will also carry out key 101 non-emergency contact duties, including 101 email and online contact forms.</p>
Investment: staffing, skill retention and technology	
<p>Recommendation 7.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31st March 2021 re-prioritising work under the PRISM programme to speed up the introduction of the upcoming service improvements which have the biggest potential to improve the public's experience (the Call Back Service, in call messaging and the Voice Activated Directory).</p>	<p>Status: The speeding up of key services by Devon and Cornwall Police was not feasible ahead of the introduction of the new AACC7 contact system as the current AACC6 system did not support those functions. The delivery of AACC7 by Devon and Cornwall Police has been subject to delays due to a range of factors, including national supply issues. The AACC7 system will go live in January 2023. Call Back services have been prioritised for early adoption and are expected to be in place in Spring 2023.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8.</p> <p>While longer term technological changes may reduce levels of demand for 101 the Panel recommends that interim solutions, including an increase in staffing, should be considered by the Chief Constable and, if budgetary pressures allow, be included within the 21/22 budget.</p>	<p>Status: The Commissioner provided over £626,000 in funding to the Chief Constable to deliver an additional 22 contact staff in the 2021/22 budget. Funding has also been utilised through the £400,000 annual Op Marnow summer funding allowance to provide additional resources into the contact centre.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police consider what options might exist to reduce turnover within the 101 contact centre, including the opportunity provided by remote sites to cover a wider labour market.</p>	<p>Status: Options for new locations have been explored alongside remote working options once the relevant technology is available.</p>
Public information and communications	
<p>Recommendation 10.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police gives much greater priority to communicating</p>	<p>Status: Devon and Cornwall Police do undertake regular communications campaigns</p>

regularly with the public about 101, using traditional media, advertising campaigns and community networks and local publications. The focus of engagement should be: to improve awareness about what can be dealt with by 101 and what should be 999 or another agency, to inform them of the levels of service they should expect to receive (including waiting times) and performance against these standards: and to guide them towards alternative contact channels.	regarding contact services focused on peak times of the year. However there remains considerable scope in the view of the Commissioner for greater action to inform the public and reduce pressures on the system.
<p>Recommendation 11.</p> <p>The Panel recommends that a formal assessment is carried out by 30th June 2021 to compare the relative costs, benefits and merits for the public and for policing, of the existing Devon and Cornwall website and the new national policing single online home platform.</p>	<p>Status: Devon and Cornwall Police are adopting Single Online Home and the system is expected to go live in early 2023 as part of the planned national roll-out timeline of the service.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12.</p> <p>The Panel recommend that a survey and assessment of Ask NED is carried out by 30th June 2021 to understand how the system is being used by the public and whether it is meeting their needs.</p>	<p>Status: The directory services provided by Ask NED will be addressed in the roll-out of Single Online Home in line with Recommendation 11 above.</p>

4.4 The Commissioner will be discussing the scrutiny review findings, progress in delivery and additional steps within Devon and Cornwall Police with the incoming Chief Constable on his arrival.

5. Going forward

5.1 In February 2022 the Commissioner's budget proposals set out an updated position on 101.

"It is clear that the Force have not been able to keep pace with the public expectation of (the 101 non-emergency telephone service) and although substantial investments have been made in this contact service the anticipated improvements have not been realised quickly enough. The public need the police, and their calls for service are not reducing. I am supporting a structured financial approach with the Force to facilitate additional resources to the Chief Constable in the coming year to provide additional capacity into the contact centre."

5.2 In the early summer of 2022, waiting time performance declined, impacted by a large number of staff absences and increased demand (including rising volumes of 999 emergency calls). Detailed discussions between the Commissioner and the Temporary Chief Constable resulted in an action plan being developed and a commitment of the Temporary Chief Constable to take remedial action.

5.3 In October 2022, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) announced that it had moved Devon and Cornwall Police into an enhanced level of monitoring, known as "engage". Public contact was one of three areas identified by HMICFRS <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/news/news-feed/devon-and-cornwall-police-moved-into-enhanced-monitoring/>. As part of the response to HMICFRS's findings the Temporary Chief Constable is developing an improvement plan – which includes the Call Management and Communications Unit. The Commissioner has also written to the Temporary Chief Constable setting out her clear expectations for urgent attention in advance

of any formal reporting mechanisms with HMICFRS. The Commissioner has been explicit that she does not expect frontline resources to be impacted by these immediate changes.

- 5.4 As noted in 5.2 above the Commissioner raised concerns in summer 2022 with the Temporary Chief Constable about waiting times and required a series of actions to be undertaken. This included the introduction of an external specialist company to review the processes employed by the Contact Centre. The aim of this work was to get an understanding of how processes are working currently, to identify pinch points and opportunities for change, and to model potential efficiency savings. The findings from this review were presented to the Force earlier this month and are under active discussion.
- 5.5 The Temporary Chief Constable is also taking a number of further immediate steps to enhance contact services. These include the introduction of a switchboard triage service for 101 non-emergency calls before they are routed into call lines. It also includes the deployment of a new “rapid response model” which includes 19 officers posted to the Contact Centre by end November 2022. This model will enable trained Contact Officers to focus on answering 999 calls, reduces the number of process exchanges on any one incident between the call handlers and resource dispatch officers to and frees up capacity. Recruitment campaigns have been prioritised for January and March with vetting and onboarding also prioritised for Contact Services. It is also intended to replace the email system with online reporting forms from March 2023 when “Single Online Home” is enabled to help reduce repeat email traffic by ensuring that key information is provided at first point of contact.
- 5.6 These initial steps which will be enhanced by a more detailed action plan over the coming weeks which will be presented to the Commissioner and to HMICFRS.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Waiting times within the Contact Centre continue to be disappointing and unstable. The staff working within the Contact Centre do a fantastic job of providing a front-line response to members of the public in distress which is recognised by the Commissioner and HMICFRS. However, the escalations in demand for 999 and continued system challenges in 101 non-emergency contact have exceeded the ability for Devon and Cornwall Police to deliver the improvement needed at pace.
- 6.2 The Commissioner is grateful to the Panel for its continued attention to this important area of policing and welcomes its continued scrutiny and support in relation to her actions in respect of the 101 non-emergency service to assist in delivering improved performance in this critical area.

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