



Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

7th July 2023

Update Report on Contact Services within Devon and Cornwall Police

1. Purpose

1.1. This report provides an update to the Panel on actions taken by the Police and Crime Commissioner on contact services and performance since the previous reports to the Panel in November 2022 and January 2023.

2. Background

2.1. 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 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, and to secure resources for policing.

2.2. The provision of efficient and effective public contact management by the police is fundamental to meeting public expectations, to providing good customer service and to the delivery of core police services.

2.3. In February 2022 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services published the findings of the police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police. This inspection identified that in the field of "responding to the public" the service was inadequate and recommended that "The force should improve the time it takes to answer emergency and non-emergency calls for service and reduce its abandonment rate".

2.4. The Commissioner has acknowledged that despite continued focus and scrutiny from her office, the Panel and the public, 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 but it has not been stable or consistent, and the service has not met the needs or expectations of the public.

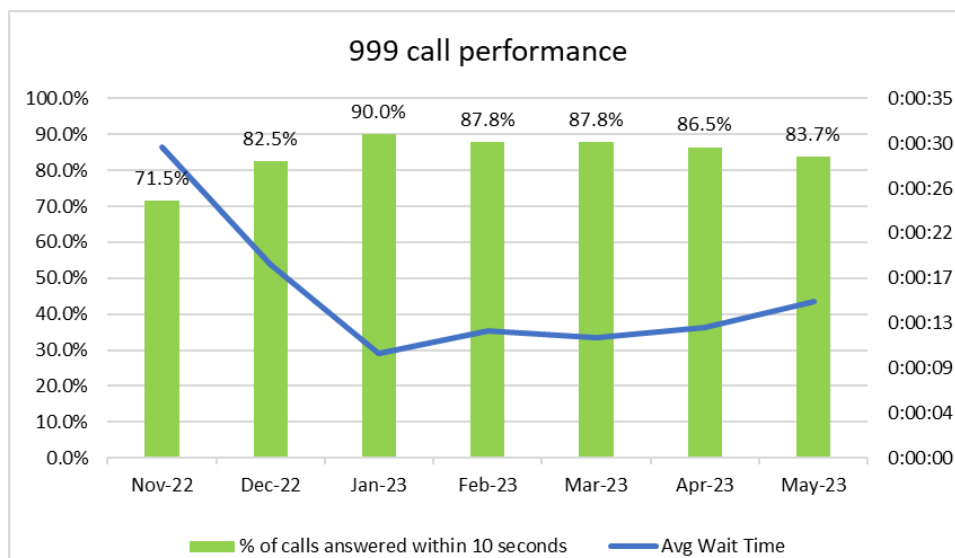
2.5. At its meeting on 25th November 2022 the Panel received a report on key actions taken by the Commissioner in relation to contact services. The report set out



investment and scrutiny activities over the Commissioner’s term of office and future planned activity. The Panel requested that they receive a report at each meeting going forward on contact services and the actions being taken by the Commissioner in this area. The first of those reports was submitted to the Panel in January 2023 and this report provides an update on activity and performance since that time, including the actions that the Commissioner has taken to scrutinise and hold the Chief Constable to account for necessary improvements.

3. Performance: 999

3.1. Since HMICFRS’ inspection in November 2022, improvements in 999 call-handling have been realised. The latest data, covering the month of May 2023, shows the average wait time for answering a 999 call in Devon and Cornwall was 15 seconds. This is half the time recorded at the time of HMICFRS’ inspection in November 2022 (30 seconds) and wait times have consistently remained under 15 seconds since January 2023.



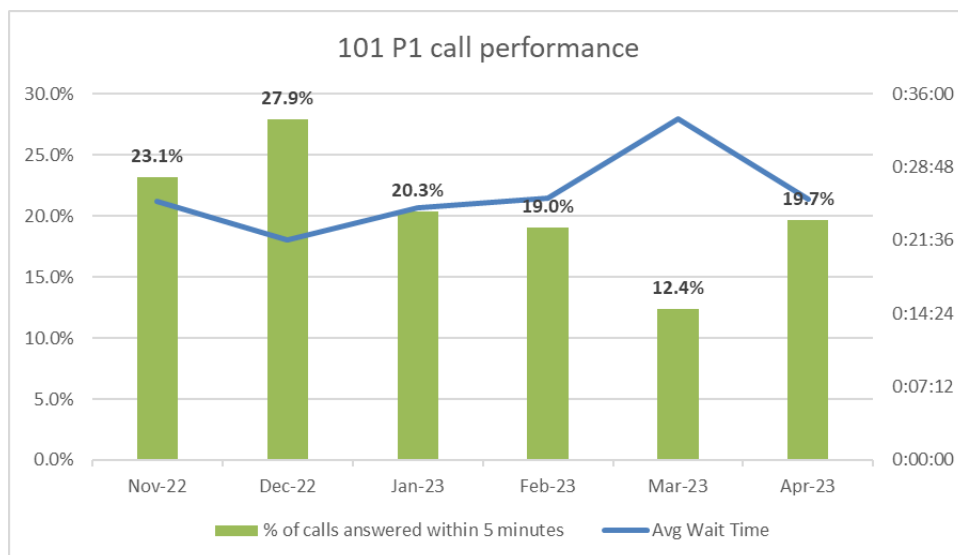
3.2. The target answer time for 999 calls is 10 seconds and nationally all police forces aim to answer 90% of calls within this timeframe. Over the past six months, the percentage of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds in Devon and Cornwall has ranged from 82.5% to 90%. Whilst performance is not consistently reaching 90%, improvements have been realised since HMICFRS’ inspection, at which 71.5% of calls were answered within the 10-second target.

3.3. The demand for 999 has increased locally and nationally during 2023. Some of this increase has been linked to technological changes to certain mobile phone operating systems, making it easier to make an emergency call. This has inadvertently increase accidental calls, which has resulted in the volume of 999 calls doubling nationally since December. In Devon and Cornwall this translates to around 200 additional calls per day. A national fix from the manufacturers is due at

the end of June but requires a manual update from the public. However, during this time Devon and Cornwall Police have not only maintained but improved timeliness of answering 999 calls.

4. Performance: 101

4.1. Whilst some improvements have been evident in monthly 101 call handling performance, overall, wait times have remained stable and sustained improvements have not yet been realised. P1, or priority 1 calls, relate to 101 calls that are identified as urgent. These include calls related to domestic abuse, sexual offences, hate crime, missing persons, and road safety. The latest data covering the month of April 2023 shows the average wait time for 101 calls received on the P1 line was 25 minutes and 36 seconds. This is consistent with the wait time at the time of HMICFRS' inspection, at 25 minutes and 26 seconds (November 2022).



4.2. The target answer time for P1 calls is 5 minutes. Since HMICFRS' inspection in November 2022, no improvements have been maintained in the percentage of calls answered within 5 minutes. In the month of April 2023, 19.7% of calls were answered in 5 minutes, compared to 23.1% at the time of the inspection.

4.3. P2, or priority 2 calls, relate to 101 calls that are not identified as urgent. This may include calls relating to anti-social behaviour, or callers requesting updates about ongoing investigations. In the month of April 2023, the average wait time for 101 calls received on the P2 line was 52 minutes and 52 seconds. This is slightly higher than the wait time which was reported at the time of the HMICFRS inspection in November 2022, which was 50 minutes and 15 seconds. Improvements have been evident in the months of December 2022 and January 2023, where average wait times were 36 minutes and 46 minutes respectively, but sustained improvement is not yet evident.

4.4. At the end of April 2023, Devon and Cornwall Police made changes to the routing of 101 calls by simplifying the P1 and P2 channels. All 101 callers now speak to a contact officer who will triage their call based on an assessment of risk. The caller is then routed into an appropriate line following this assessment. To reflect these changes, and the simplification of the routing system, the force is now measuring the wait time of all 101 callers, instead of measuring performance against the P1 and P2 lines. In May 2023, the average wait time for all 101 callers was 27 minutes and 18 seconds.

5. Improvement Activity

5.1. At the November 2022 Panel meeting the Commissioner confirmed the prioritisation of improved performance on answering 999 emergency calls combined with the reintroduction of triage services onto all 101 lines to ensure that people phoning for a non-emergency can speak to an operator early on. In November 2022 the Commissioner had set out her clear expectations in terms of the immediate focus of service improvement in four areas:

- a) 90% of 999 calls should be answered within 10 seconds by the end of 2022
- b) All 101 calls (P1 and P2) should be triaged by the end of November 2022
- c) The call-back function must be delivered as a top priority
- d) Re-opening of front desks with a new plan for the next six locations

5.2. With respect to those four areas:

- a) The percentage of 999 calls which are answered within 10 seconds has improved but is not consistently reaching 90%. In May 2023 Devon and Cornwall Police were answering 75.9% of calls in under 10 seconds, placing the force 28th out of 44 Police Forces in the UK. This demonstrates significant improvement since November 2023 when the force were placed 41st out of 44.

National League Position for D&C	
Oct-22	38 th
Nov-22	41 st
Dec-22	37 th
Jan-23	33 rd
Feb-23	28 th
Mar-23	25 th
Apr-23	27 th
May-23	28 th

- b) The new switchboard triage service for 101 calls was implemented by the end of 2022 with all 101 callers now speaking to a call handler at the start of the

process. As of May 2023, the average time taken to speak to a call handler on Switchboard was 2 minutes and 38 seconds.

- c) The call-back function has been developed and will be introduced for all callers to 101 in early July. An update on this launch will be provided to Panel at the meeting on 7th July.
- d) Six public enquiry offices were opened in 2022/23 in Penzance, Falmouth, Truro, Bude, Newton Abbott and Tiverton. The locations of the next six Public Enquiry Offices to open were announced in March 2023. The six locations are: Devonport, Ilfracombe, Kingsbridge, Honiton, Looe and Okehampton and these offices will open by early 2024. The Commissioner has also confirmed funding for a new police enquiry office in the new Exmouth Police Station.

5.3. These improvements have been achieved through a significant programme of work under the leadership of the Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable, ACC for Innovation, Contact and Demand and Head of Estates. The Commissioner receives regular updates on this work through formal reports to the Policing and Crime Joint Executive Board, attendance by the OPCC Executive Team at Force improvement boards and through her regular bilateral discussions with the Chief Constable.

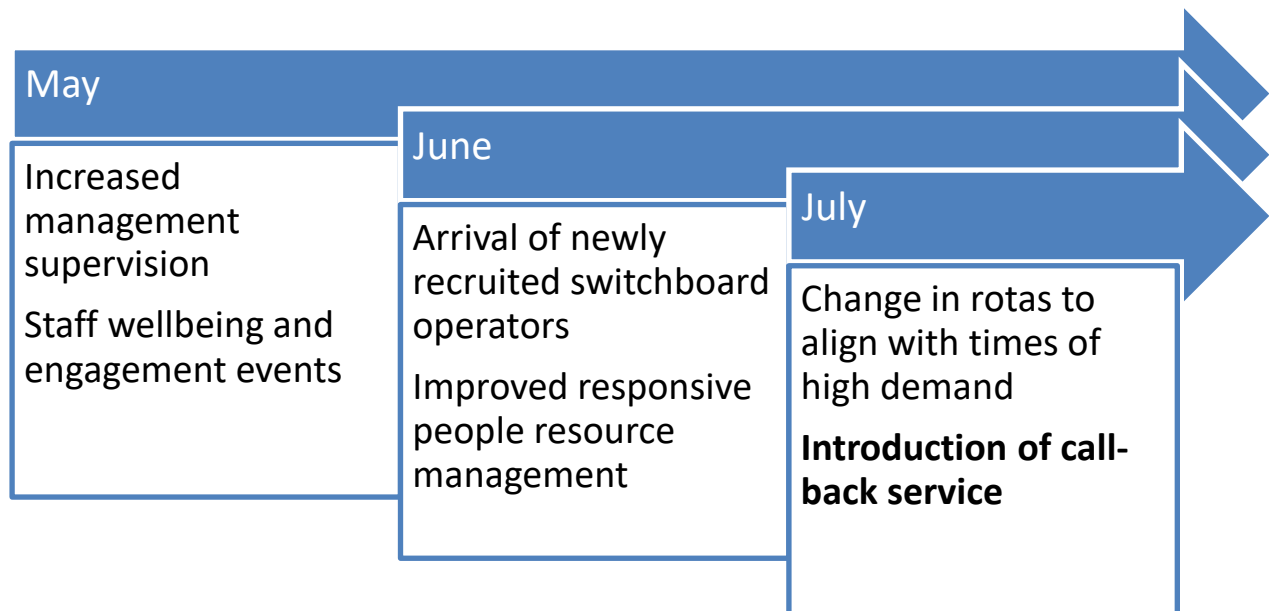
5.4. In addition to the achievements outlined above, the improvement programme has also included:

- Independent reviews from peers in a best practice force, an independent consultancy with a specialism in contact, HMICFRS and the college of policing.
- Enhanced leadership capacity, bringing in additional management and HR support
- Introduction of the new Niche crime recording system and the national Single Online Home webpage to improve data processing capacity
- Reviewed policies and processes to streamline the service, including a review of the handling of abandoned 999 calls
- Recruitment of over 100 new members of staff into the control room, many of whom are now fully trained and in operation.

6. Accelerated Improvement Plan

6.1. Whilst this activity has delivered some improvements, particularly in relation to 999 performance, the Commissioner and Chief Constable have acknowledged that greater levels of transformation are required to deliver the necessary improvements to meet the needs and expectations of the public. As such the Chief Constable has implemented a new Accelerated Improvement Plan from June 2023. This plan set out a series of tangible steps and targets to see demonstrable change in service levels by the end of September 2023.

6.2. The Accelerated Improvement Plan will include changes to processes and systems alongside additional support and development for staff to ensure an engaged and empowered workforce in the contact service. The key areas of change include:



6.3. Within this Plan the Chief Constable has also set out an intention to manage the level of demand into the contact centre, so that available resources can be focused on the greatest need. This will include communications campaigns to reaffirm the role of the police to ensure that the public are aware of enquiries which are not for the police, and staff can signpost to appropriate alternative support services where required.

6.4. The plan is supported by clear targets to deliver improvements by the end of September, with specific aims to reduce the level of inappropriate demand, increase the number of calls answered and decreased abandoned calls and reduce the overall handling times of calls and webforms. The Chief Constable has then committed to ongoing improvement targets each month after September.

6.5. The Commissioner has accepted the Chief Constable's Accelerated Improvement Plan and acknowledged that this represents the most comprehensive plan to deliver the required achievements since she identified concerns with contact performance. The targets agreed in the plan alongside significant changes such as the introductions of call-backs and triage will supersede most of the

recommendations made by the Commissioner in her 101 Scrutiny recommendations (January 2021).

6.6. The Commissioner will continue to monitor performance and the delivery of the Accelerated Improvement Plan and will report to the Panel in September 2023, in anticipation of seeing initial improvements at this point.

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Report prepared on 28th June 2023