



Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

4th October 2024

Police contact services update

Context

The Panel last received a full report from the Commissioner on contact services in November 2023, followed by an update on contact services performance in the Commissioner's Update report in July 2024.

This paper provides analysis of the performance of Devon and Cornwall Police's contact services and the steps that the Police and Crime Commissioner has taken to drive improvements and increase the accessibility of policing services for the public.

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. This paper therefore represents the way in which the Commissioner is monitoring performance and improvement in contact in her regular oversight and scrutiny activities.

Background

Substantially improving the service that the public receive when they contact the police has been an enduring priority for the Commissioner. This need for improvement in contact services was also recognised by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in their 2021/22 PEEL (police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy) assessment of Devon and Cornwall Police, which found the force to be inadequate in the field of responding to the public.

The Commissioner has invested significantly in contact services and called on the Chief Constable to put in place a number of mitigations to address poor performance. An extensive programme of work to improve the speed at which both 999 and 101 calls are answered (including a focus on reducing 101 call abandonment rates), and to deliver a timely response to enquiries through the Devon



and Cornwall Police website, has now delivered tangible and consistent improvements to the service that the public receive when they contact the police.

HMICFRS PEEL 2023-25

HMICFRS's PEEL 2023-25 inspection report acknowledged that Devon and Cornwall Police has made several improvements in the force control room to address performance concerns, including recruiting and retaining staffing levels, improving training, process reviews and slowly improving its IT systems, which have achieved some positive results for the public.

However, despite improvements being identified, HMICFRS judged Devon and Cornwall Police to be inadequate in the area of responding to the public. The report states that the force needs to further improve how quickly it answers 999 calls from the public and reduce the number of times callers abandon non-emergency 101 calls. It also needs to respond to incidents within published timescales and update callers if there is likely to be a delay.

HMICFRS PEEL inspections are retrospective, and whilst inspection reports are a useful tool to support the Commissioner in her role of holding the Chief Constable to account, they do not always reflect current performance, particularly where there has been significant change or improvement over a relatively short amount of time.

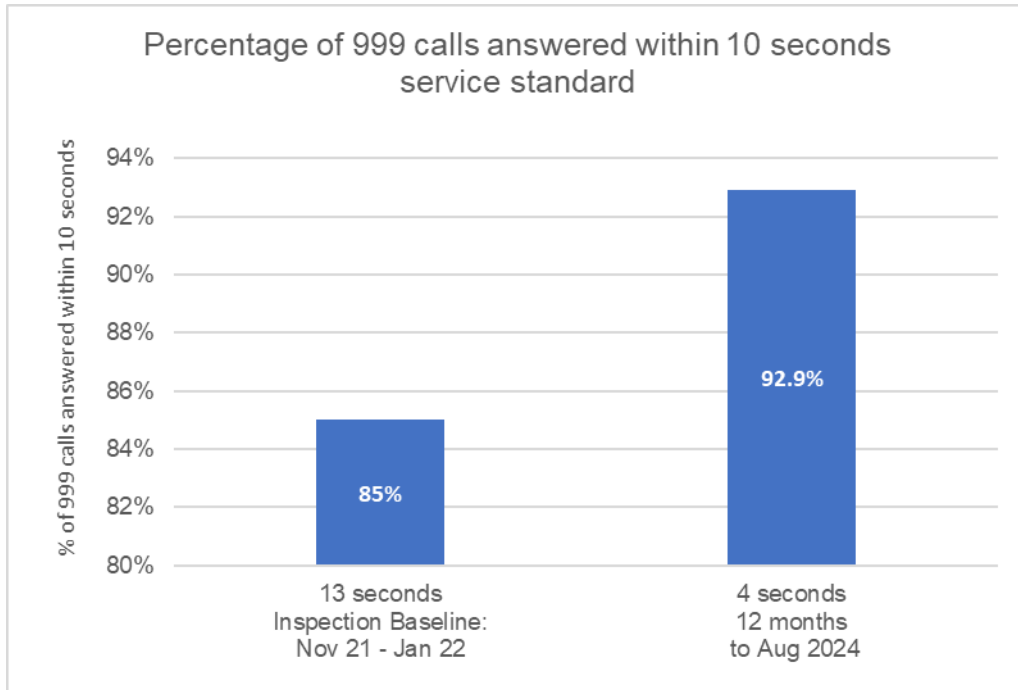
999

Performance overview

The latest yearly 999 performance indicates sustained performance improvements. In the 12 months to August 2024, 310,007 emergency 999 calls were received by Devon and Cornwall Police, equating to a daily average of 847 calls. During this period, 92.9% of 999 calls were answered within the service standard of 10 seconds and the average¹ wait time for calls to be answered was 4 seconds. This shows significant improvement compared with last year when 83.3% of 999 calls were answered within 10 seconds and the average wait time for emergency calls to be answered was 15 seconds.

Performance has also improved significantly since HMICFRS's PEEL 2021/22 inspection. The baseline period the inspection used to inform its judgement examined 999 performance data between November 2021 to January 2022. Within this 3-month period, 85% of calls were being answered within 10 seconds and the average wait time to answer emergency calls was 13 seconds.

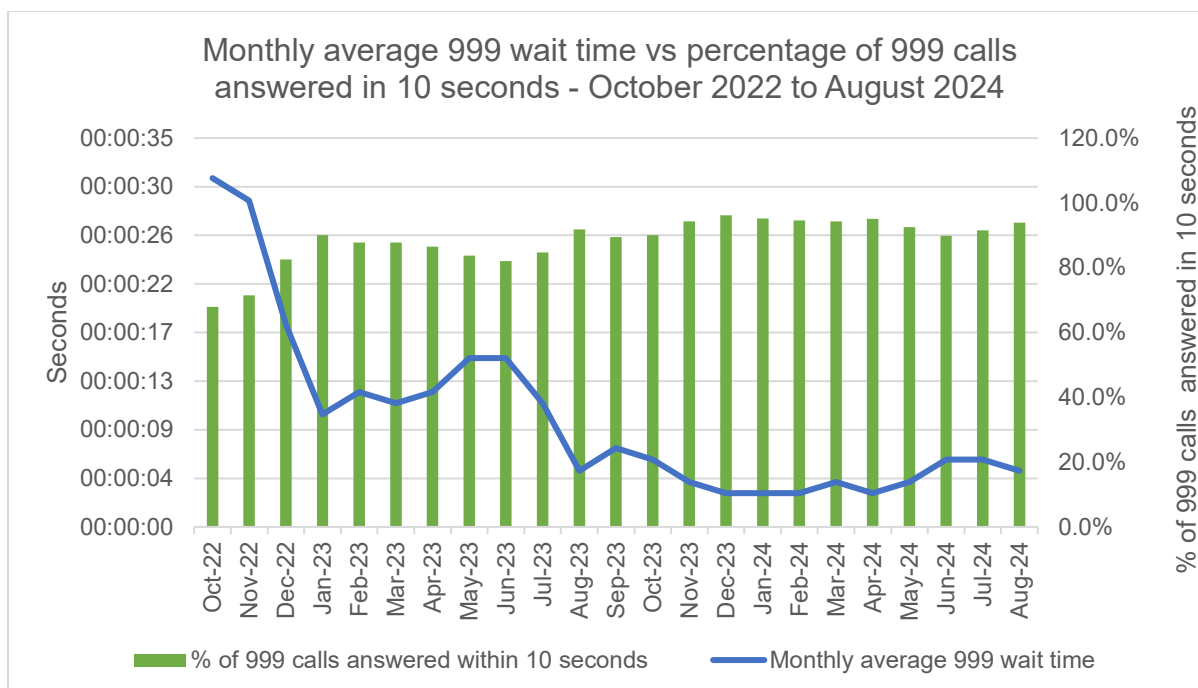
¹ Mean



In October 2022, the monthly average time for an emergency 999 call to be answered peaked at 31 seconds. Since then, average monthly wait times have continued to improve. Average wait times have been as low as 3 seconds in three months of 2024 so far² and in April 2024, the proportion of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds reached 95.1%. In August 2024, our busiest month, the proportion of 999 calls answered within 10 seconds was 93.9% with a five seconds wait.

As expected with demand levels, average monthly wait times tend to fluctuate and historically wait times tend to increase during the summer months when demand is at its highest. This year however, performance data shows that despite an increase in the number of calls received from April 2024 onwards the improvements evident in 999 performance have been maintained. Average wait times have remained below 10 seconds and the proportion of calls answered within 10 seconds has been 90% or above - achieving the force's service standard of answering 90% of 999 emergency calls within 10 seconds.

² January, February and April 2024



National rankings

National performance rankings for 999 were introduced in October 2022, and are [published on Police.uk](https://www.police.uk).

Police.uk data includes the time taken for BT to answer and transfer the call to Devon and Cornwall Police. This time period is not within the control of the Devon and Cornwall Police contact centre and differs to the 999-performance data reported internally by Devon and Cornwall Police for which performance is assessed against.

Devon and Cornwall Police were ranked 16th out of 44 forces (where 1st is best performing) in August 2024, with 88.7% of calls answered within 10 seconds. This is the highest position Devon and Cornwall Police have held this year.

National performance had started to improve between June and August 2023 (in August 2023, Devon and Cornwall Police were ranked 1st and the best performing nationally) but dipped again in September due to a technical IT fault, which meant that the automated transfer of data from the BT 999 hub to Devon and Cornwall's contact centre was disrupted and a verbal handover of the caller details had to take place. This added around 2-5 seconds before the call could be fully transferred to Devon and Cornwall Police which adversely impacted average answer times. This issue has now been resolved and the national league position for Devon and Cornwall has improved from 30th in June 2024 to 18th in July and 16th in August.

Percentage of 999 calls answered in under 10 seconds:

	National league position
Jun-23	10th
Jul-23	15th
Aug-23	1st
Sep-23	28th
Oct-23	39th
Nov-23	38th
Dec-23	33rd
Jan-24	38th
Feb-24	37th
Mar-24	33rd
Apr-24	29th
May-24	25th
Jun-24	30th
Jul-24	18th
Aug-24	16th

101

Process and system changes

Following prolonged periods of poor performance, as reported to the Police and Crime Panel in the Police and Crime Plan scorecard and performance report, the Commissioner and Chief Constable agreed that significant change was required to improve contact services, particularly 101 call wait times and abandonment rates.

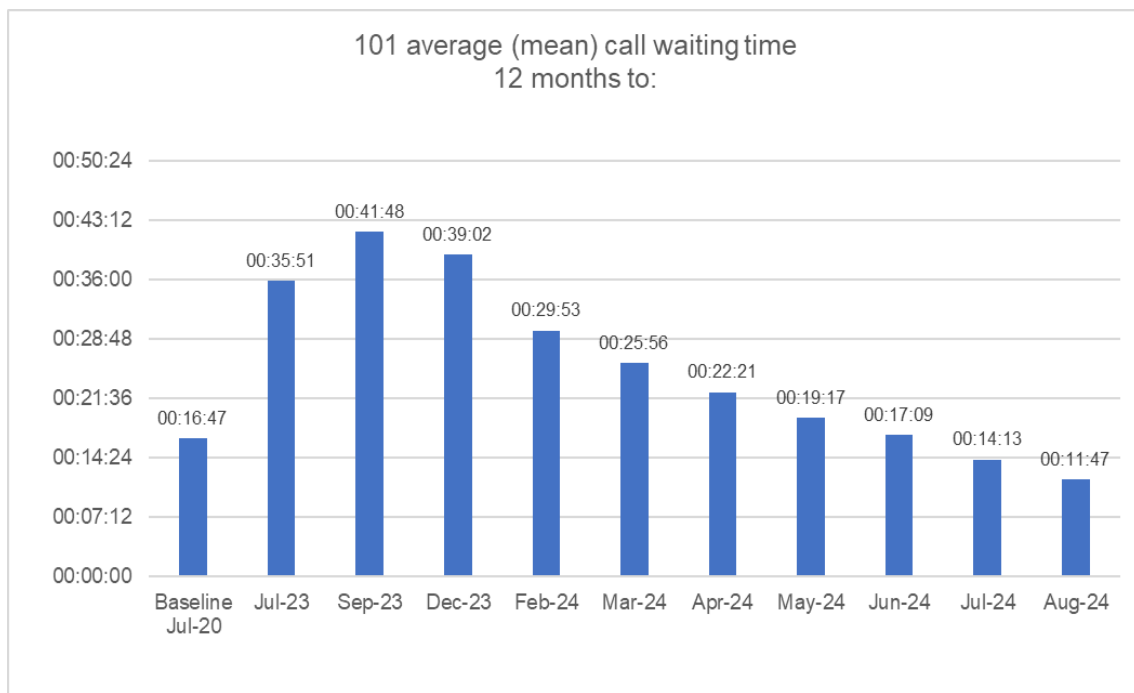
The most significant and impactful of these changes are as follows:

- **Switchboard 'triage'** – implemented for all 101 calls from September 2022, this means that all callers will speak to a switchboard operator within a target time of 30 seconds. As well as providing a 'human' voice before passing callers to the 101 queue, switchboard operators can deal with some enquiries directly, including redirecting callers to other agencies where appropriate, or transferring calls internally such as through to custody suites.
- **Call back function** – now fully implemented following the upgrading of the telephony platform to a new system called AACCC7 in September 2023. 101 callers are now given the option of receiving a same day call back, rather than waiting in a queue for their call to be answered. Most callers will be contacted within one or two hours. In August 2024 the average wait time for a call back was 21 minutes.
- **Ringfencing of call handling** – enabled by AACCC7 and implemented in November 2024, 'ringfencing' technology uses improved demand modelling to ensure that the right split of call handlers are available to take 999 calls and 101 calls, ensuring the most efficient use of resources in the control room at any given time.

- **Improved processes and working practices** – these are wide ranging but changes to supervision, performance frameworks, enhanced training and shift pattern reviews have had a significant impact on the performance of call handling teams.

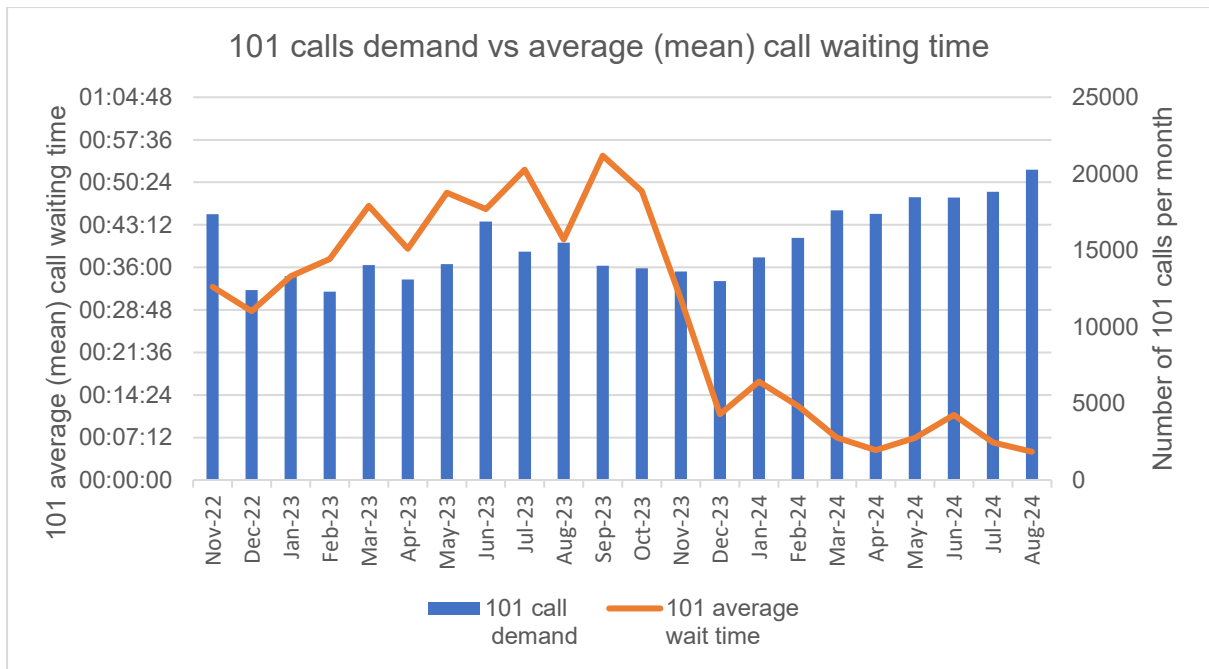
Performance overview

In the 12 months to August 2024, the average wait time to speak to a contact officer dealing with 101 calls was 11 minutes and 47 seconds. This is now below the baseline of the Police and Crime Plan measure ‘101 average wait time’ of 16 minutes and 47 seconds. During this period 72.5% of calls received were answered within service standard of 20 minutes.



The latest monthly data for August 2024 saw the 101 average call wait time to speak to a contact officer decrease to just 4 minutes and 47 seconds compared with 40 minutes and 42 seconds this time last year when call demand was lower.

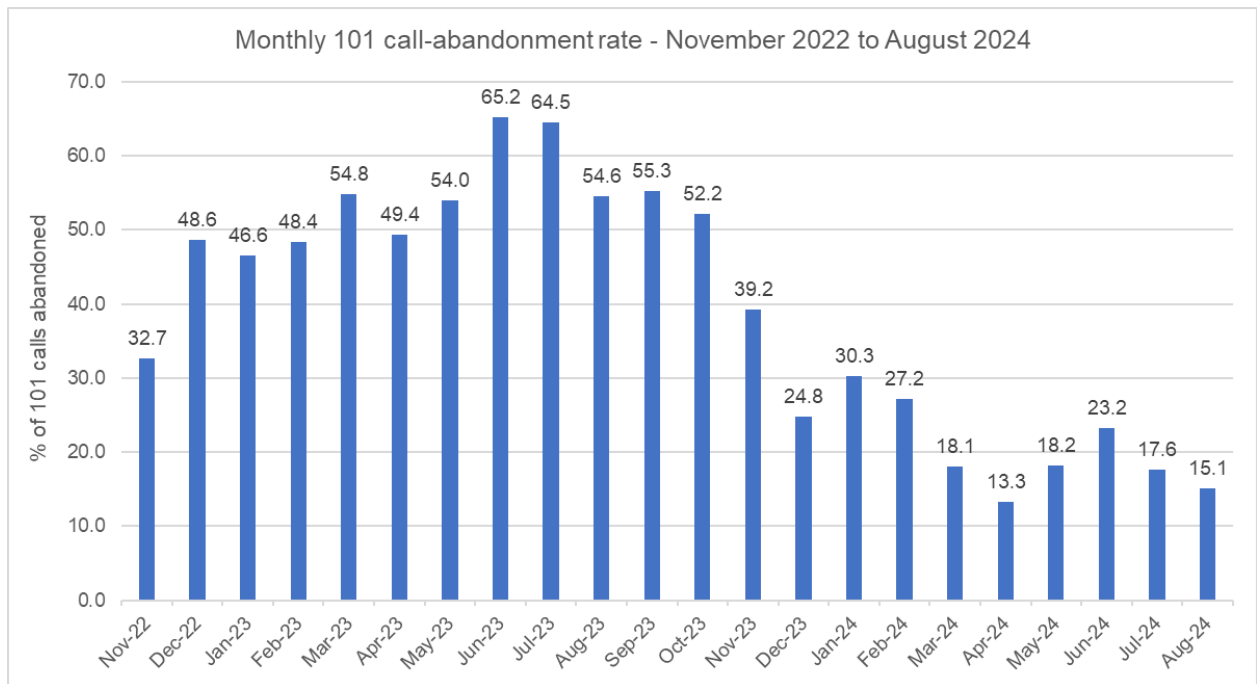
Monthly 101 average call waiting times have decreased significantly since they peaked at 54 minutes and 54 seconds in September 2023. Whilst it was anticipated that average wait times would increase over the summer months, despite demand increasing, lower average wait times have been maintained and are considerably lower than this time year.



In the 12 months to August 2024, 98.1% of callers to 101 who requested a call back were contacted successfully. The feedback from the public using this service has been generally positive since its introduction last year.

Furthermore, the calls and correspondence that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner receives from the public relating to 101 wait times has dramatically decreased, reflecting the improved service the public are now receiving. In the last 12 months the office has received just 5 contacts about 101 call wait times, whereas in the previous year around 55-60 emails, letters and calls were received on the subject.

The reduction in 101 average call waiting times appear to of had a positive impact on abandonment rates. The 101-abandonment rate has decreased to 27.1% in the 12 months to August 2024 compared with 61.5% in the 12 months to August 2023, when the average call wait time was 37 minutes and 29 seconds. More recent, monthly data show that lower abandonment rates are evident and decreased to 15.1% in August 2024 with an average wait time of 4 minutes 47 seconds.



Police Enquiry Offices

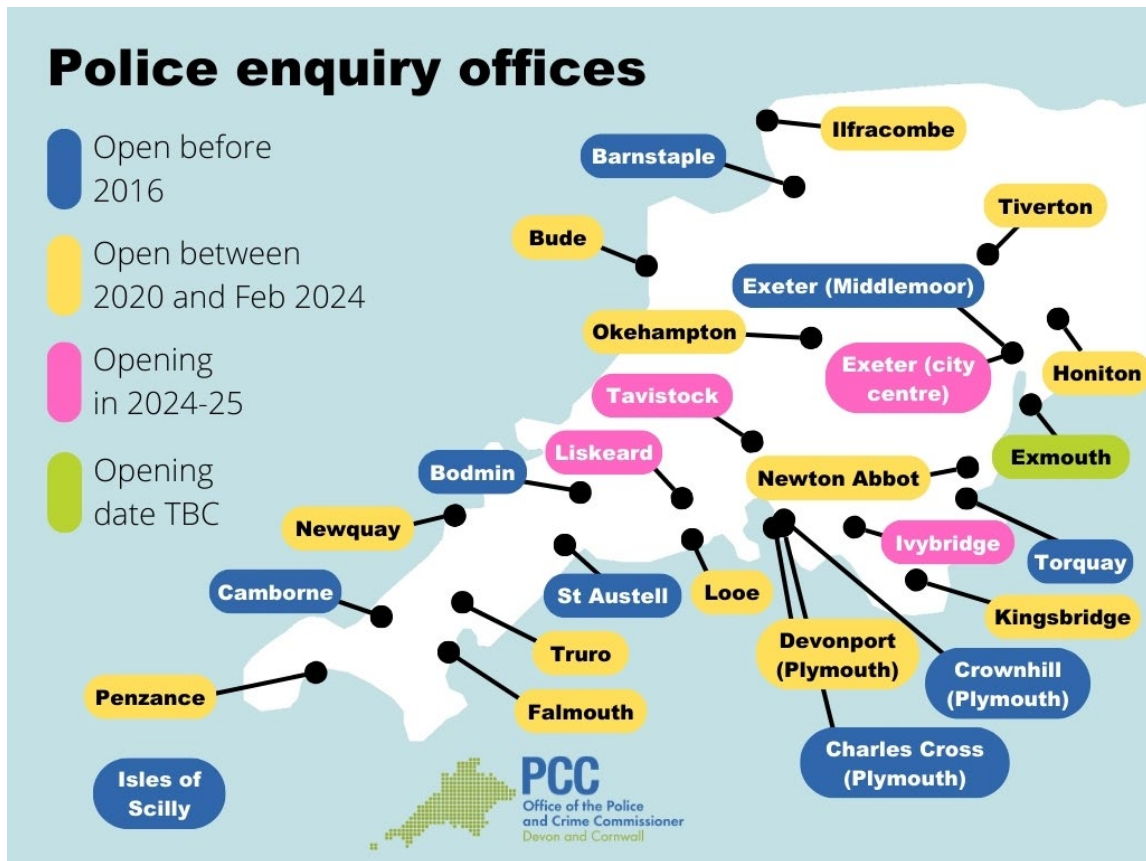
As previously updated to Panel, 6 police enquiry offices (PEOs) were successfully reopened in 2022/23 in Penzance, Falmouth, Truro, Bude, Newton Abbot and Tiverton. A further 6 PEOs Devonport (Plymouth), Looe, Ilfracombe, Honiton, Okehampton and Kingsbridge were re-opened to the public in 2023/24.

The next phase of the Commissioner's project to reopen police enquiry offices will see front desks reopened to the public in Ivybridge, Liskeard and Tavistock, and a new front desk created in Exeter city centre.

Building and estates work is progressing well in Ivybridge, Liskeard and Tavistock and staff have been recruited for all three sites and have begun their training. All three sites are expected open in early 2025.

Discussions with Exeter City Council about the development of a front desk at the Civic Centre on Paris Street have been very positive and feasibility and design planning conversations are underway. A separate recruitment process is ongoing for the Exeter city centre PEO, and subject to works progressing as planned, this site is expected to open to the public Spring 2025.

In addition, Exmouth Police Station is being rebuilt and the new station is to include a police enquiry office. Due to the scale of the rebuild work and planning requirements, the current expectation is that this front desk will open in 2026/27.



The Commissioner has made connectivity with the public a cornerstone of her Police and Crime Plans, arguing that face to face contact with the public helps victims and provides a long-term solution to rebuilding confidence in policing.

PEOs are now seeing a footfall of around 300 visits a day across the estate. In addition to assisting face to face visitors, PEO staff are now also managing and responding to between a third and half of all online enquiries from the public submitted via the Devon and Cornwall Police website.

Conclusion

The Commissioner has access to a range of performance data which is being carefully monitored to understand contact performance and the impact of system changes on customer experience.

The Commissioner recognises the findings of the most recent HMICFRS PEEL report, which (whilst acknowledging improvements) judged Devon and Cornwall Police to be performing inadequately in the area of responding to the public.

The Commissioner also recognises the clear and sustained improvement in 999 call waiting times, along with the more recent improvements in 101 call wait times and reduced abandonment rates, seen particularly this calendar year, and which were maintained over the busy summer period.

Consistent, long term and sustained improvement in contact services remains a priority for the Commissioner. Performance in this area will be closely monitored, and the Commissioner will continue to challenge the Chief Constable to sustain improvements across contact services, including significantly improving the judgement in this area in future HMICFRS PEEL inspections.

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