Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2021

Report to: the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

Title of Report:	**Emergency and Non-Emergency Public Contact Management**
Classification of Paper:	**Official**
Agenda Number:	**11.0**
Chief Officer:	**A/DCC Prophet**
Date Paper was Written:	**26/08/2021**
Version Number:	**2**
Report from:	**Essex Police**
Date of Meeting:	**30/09/2021**
Author on behalf of Chief Officer:	**Supt Craig Saunders**
Date of Approval:	**08/09/2021**

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Office of the Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) with an assessment of Essex Police performance across recent years on public call handling of emergency and non-emergency contact routed through the Contact Management Command.

No decisions are required as a result of this paper.

2.0 Recommendations

This paper is for noting only.

3.0 Executive Summary

This paper has been requested to assess performance of the service provided to the public by Essex Police Force Control Room (FCR) and Resolution Centre (RC) since 2016 to present, highlighting improvements in call handling performance and new methods now available for members of the public to report crime and anti-social behaviour.

It should be noted that due to the replacement of certain IT platforms used within FCR in Summer 2019 some data is only available from this point forwards.

In recent years the volume of 999 emergency call demand has increased. This is a national trend. The volume of non-emergency, telephony-based contact has reduced. This coincides with more online services becoming available.

It is argued that, since 2018/19, Essex Police has made improvements in the following areas:

- 999 average answer time
- 999 re-presented/abandoned rate
- 101 average answer time
- 101 abandoned rate
- Contact platforms available to the public
- Public use of online services

4.0   Introduction/Background

Essex Police receives reports of incidents and crimes from members of the public through a variety (and expanding number) of platforms. The primary method of contact from the public remains the 999 emergency, and 101 non-emergency telephony systems.

Emergency 999 Calls

The level of demand placed upon the 999 and 101 system varies depending on the day of the week, time of day, and time of year and at its peak can see over 1200 emergency and over 1000 non-emergency calls in a 24 hour period. Increases in demand could be a result of simply a busy period of the year, a warm summer as an example, or a spike in calls following a particular incident.

All emergency 999 calls should be answered within 10 seconds. UK Police Forces tend to either follow the older target of 10 seconds or follow the more recent National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) recommended target of 12 seconds. Essex Police has historically always deferred to the 10 second target. Our 'grade of service' is determined as the percentage of calls answered within this time frame. Our current YTD GOS is 86.7% (Aug 2021) against a 90% target. Essex Police has shown an improving performance trajectory across the past year.

In the event that a 999 call is not answered within 10 seconds, BT will re-present the call again to Essex Police. No emergency call will ever drop out unless the member of public hangs up.

Non-Emergency 101 Calls to FCR

Non-emergency calls to police control rooms are not subject to a national performance target. The NPCC Contact Management Group have advised against setting a notional target for this non-emergency service. Some years ago, Essex Police established an aspiration to answer non-emergency 101 calls within 60

seconds. Our 'grade of service' is the percentage of calls answered within this time frame.

FCR 101 non-emergency calls initially come through to our switchboard who are responsible for answering all general enquiries in the first instance. The performance of our HQ Switchboard is very strong with 89.2% of calls this YTD answered within 30 seconds. The Switchboard team will transfer the caller to most appropriate option available which can be:

- To an officer or member of staff that they know the name of
- To a public facing department
- To 101 non-emergency response call takers
- To 101 resolution centre call takers

RC Non-Emergency Calls

There are also non-emergency 101 calls transferred to the RC from HQ Switchboard. These are for members of public reporting or updating on a crime or anti-social behaviour incident that does not require initial police deployment but require a report to be taken for an investigation to take place in slower time.

The abandoned rate is the number of calls that are terminated by the caller prior to being answered.

The performance improvements made in the RC are something the Force is particularly proud of. In December 2019 the Force implemented a revised structure to the RC including the first volume crime central investigation team and a revised RC shift pattern and performance framework.

At the end of the financial year 2019/20 the YTD grade of service for public non-emergency calls to the RC was 30.8% (Target 90% calls answered within 5 minutes). As at August 2021, it is 68.9% YTD and on an upward trajectory. The RC public call abandoned rate in August 2019 was 18.68%, in August 2021 it is 7.89%.

Performance Headlines

Over the last 4 years, significant efforts have been placed on in improving the service level offered to the public which can be evidenced in the data shown later in this report. We are now quicker at answering both 999 and 101 calls than previously.

We also now offer more ways than ever before for people to get in contact with Essex Police which has included the introduction of online reporting of incidents through our Single Online Home (SOH) website. The current SOH system was introduced in September 2019. The introduction of "Live Chat" (in May 2020) has enabled a live instant messaging communication between a member of the public and the FCR. This is proving to be more convenient for those who do not want to use the non-emergency phone system. It is also a preferrable platform for people living with certain disabilities such as a neuro-diverse condition.

It is common for 101 call wait times to be sighted or discussed at public engagement meetings and is a frustration of residents who have previously attempted to get in contact with Essex Police. This paper highlights the improvements made to service offered, and the expansion of different methods to make contacting Essex Police easier and more convenient than it has ever been before.

5.0   Current Work and Performance

This section seeks to highlight the improvements in call handling in Essex Police which have been achieved through:

- Better aligning of staff to demand profiles
- Increased scrutiny and improved performance management structure
- Improved training and introduction of the Operational Support Team (OST) to manage resourcing, training, and performance improvement data
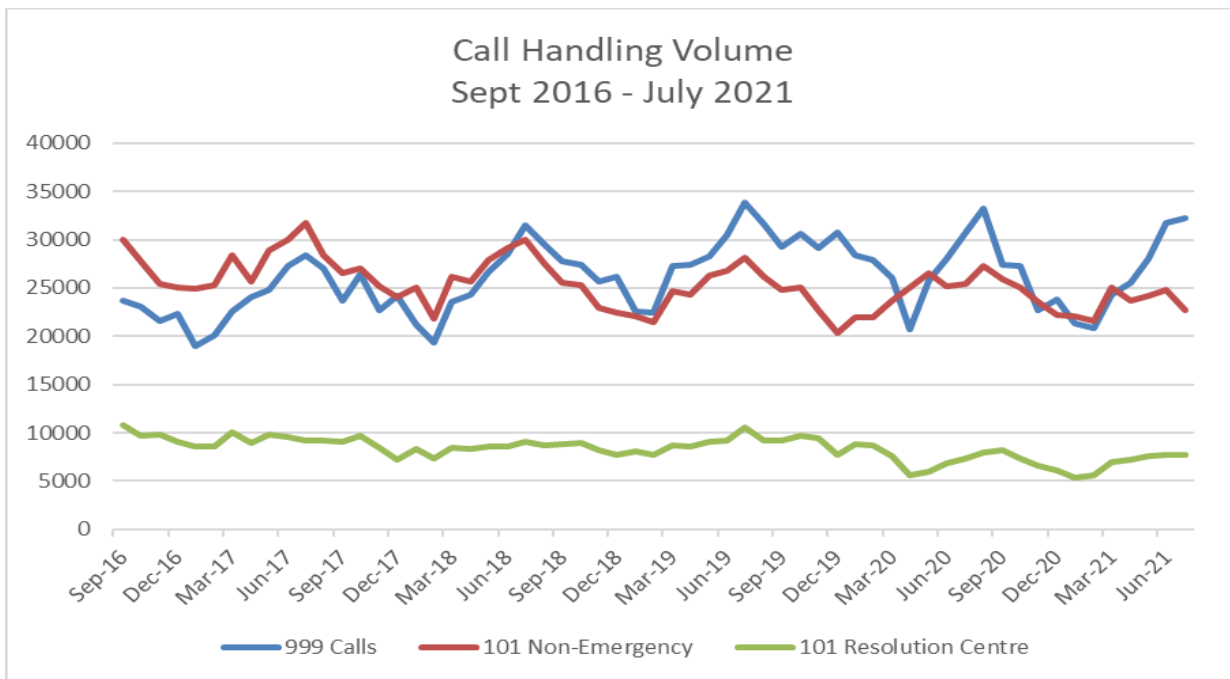
Call Volume

Fig 1 above chart shows the number of calls taken by the Force Control Room and Resolution Centre from September 2016 to July 2021. The seasonal demand through the summer months can evidenced by the spikes across emergency and non-emergency calls.

The data shows a gradually increasing volume of 999 calls (a national trend) against a gradual declining number of 101 calls over the reporting period. The reduction in telephony based 101 calls occurs at the same time that a number of online services have become available. The volume of 999 emergency calls to FCR is now greater than the total of non-emergency calls.

Average Answer Times
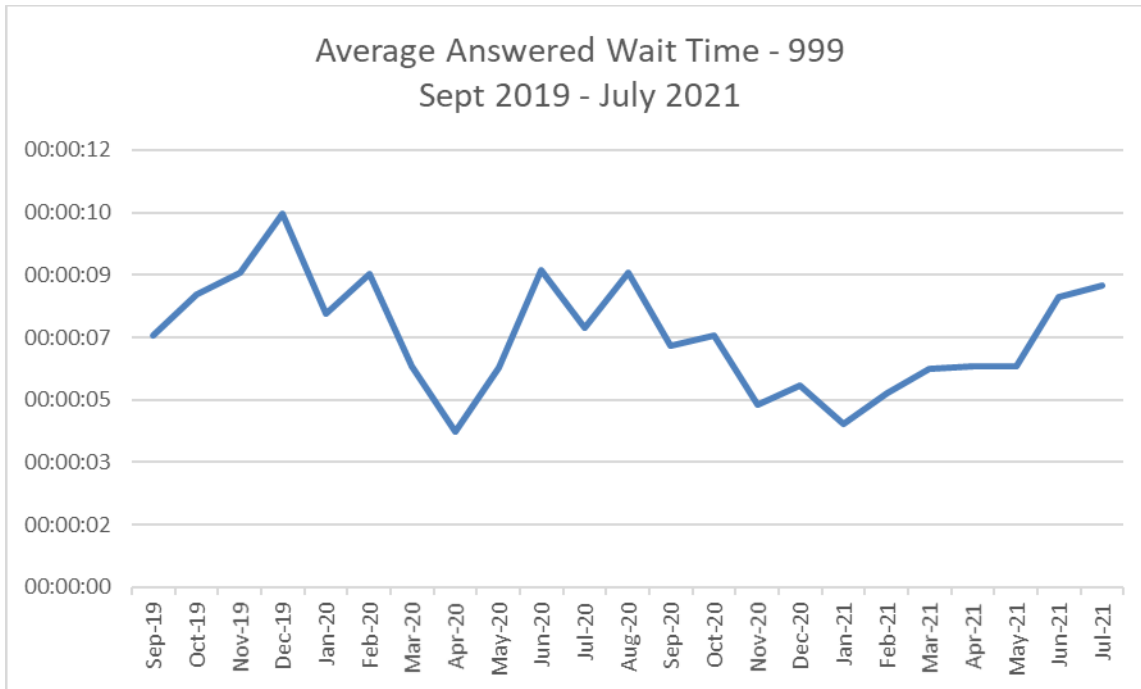
(Data available from September 2019 onwards only)

Fig 2 shows the average answer time between September 2019 – July 2021 for public 999 calls. The data shows on average all calls are answered within the 10 second target. Again, spikes can be seen across the summer months in line with seasonal demand.

The apparent increase in average answer time in June and early July coincided with an IT fault (now rectified) which meant that 101 calls were prioritised over 999 calls.

Average Answered Wait Time - 101 Non Emergency
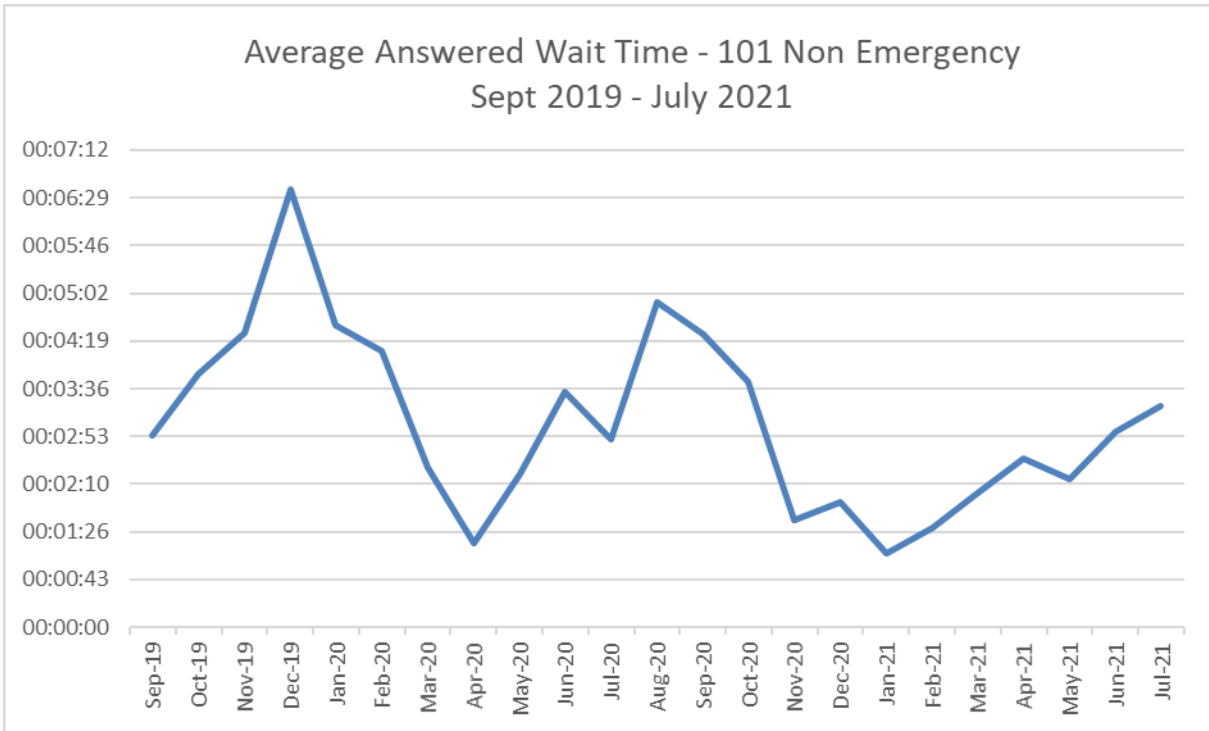Sept 2019 - July 2021

Fig 3 chart shows the average answer time between September 2019 – July 2021 for non-emergency 101 calls. The data shows an improving service level provided to the public in this time period. The chart shows the anticipated peaks in seasonal demand, and was further impacted in 2020/2021 by central adjustments to COVID related social restrictions which invariably led to a spike in non-emergency reports relating to breach reporting.

Abandoned Rates
(Data available from September 2019 onwards only)

The percentage of calls being abandoned by the caller prior to being answered is subject to a lot of internal scrutiny, in particular, the 101 non-emergency system. The time to answer an emergency 999 call is so quick that abandoned calls are extremely rare, and more likely because of a caller changing their mind, or because the nature of the emergency necessitates them to hang up the phone for their safety. In these cases, the number is always called back, and a policy exists directing how Essex Police manages such scenarios.

With regards to the 101 system, callers will abandon their call for a number of reasons:

- Wait time too long, or inconvenient to hang on at that moment in time
- Decided to report via another means (such as online)
- Change mind and will call back later (a recent dip sample revealed 22% callers abandoning will call back within 2 hours)

Whilst we strive to keep our abandoned rate as low as possible by answering calls as quickly as possible, at times off peak demand our emergency calls must always take priority.
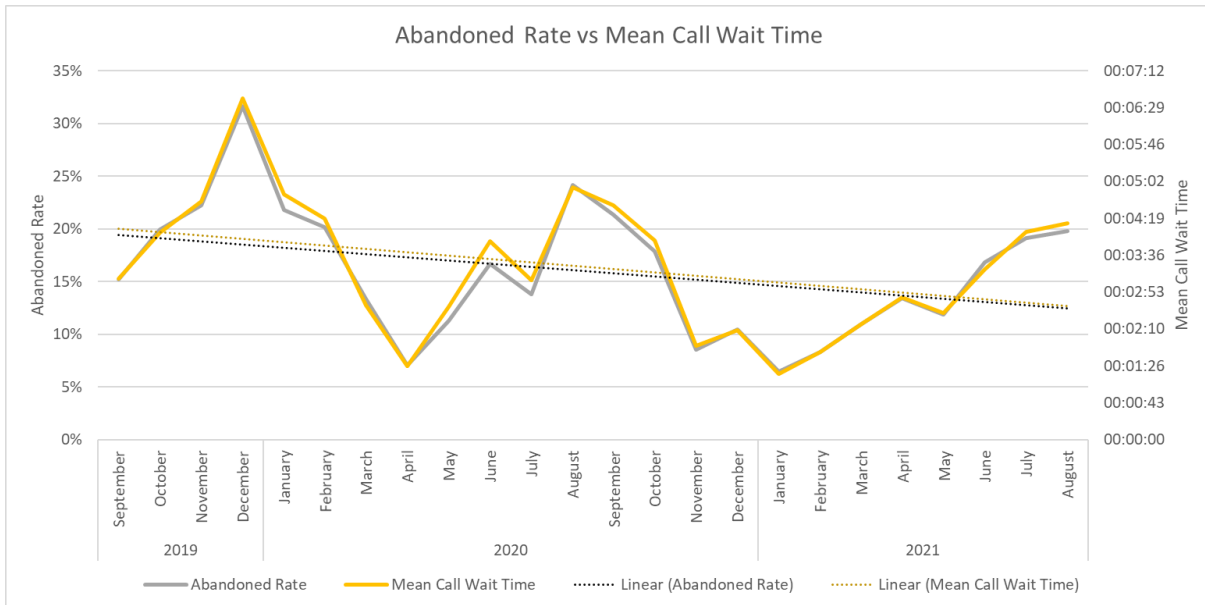

Fig 6 shows the abandoned rate from September 2019 to August 2021. There is a very strong correlation between the call wait time and the abandoned rate (99.4%). Given a 1 second increase in the wait time, we can expect a 0.05% increase in the abandoned rate, or, the abandoned rate will increase by 1% for every 20 seconds additional wait time (and the same in the opposite direction).

The trendlines demonstrate that overall, the wait time and abandoned rate are both decreasing which is pleasing to see.
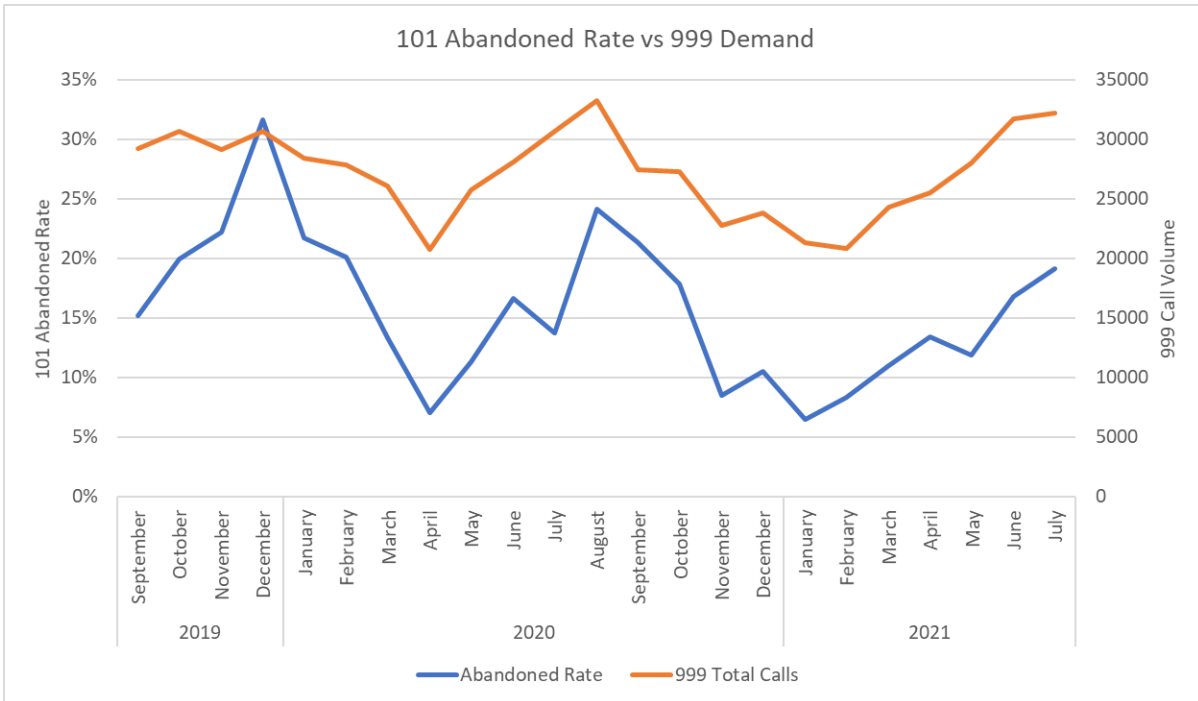
Fig 7 shows there is also a strong correlation between the 101 abandoned rate and 999 demand (78.2%), which is expected due to resource allocation/reallocation to prioritise emergency calls. Here, for every 1000 additional 999 calls, we can expect a 1.3% increase in the abandoned rate and the same in the opposite direction.
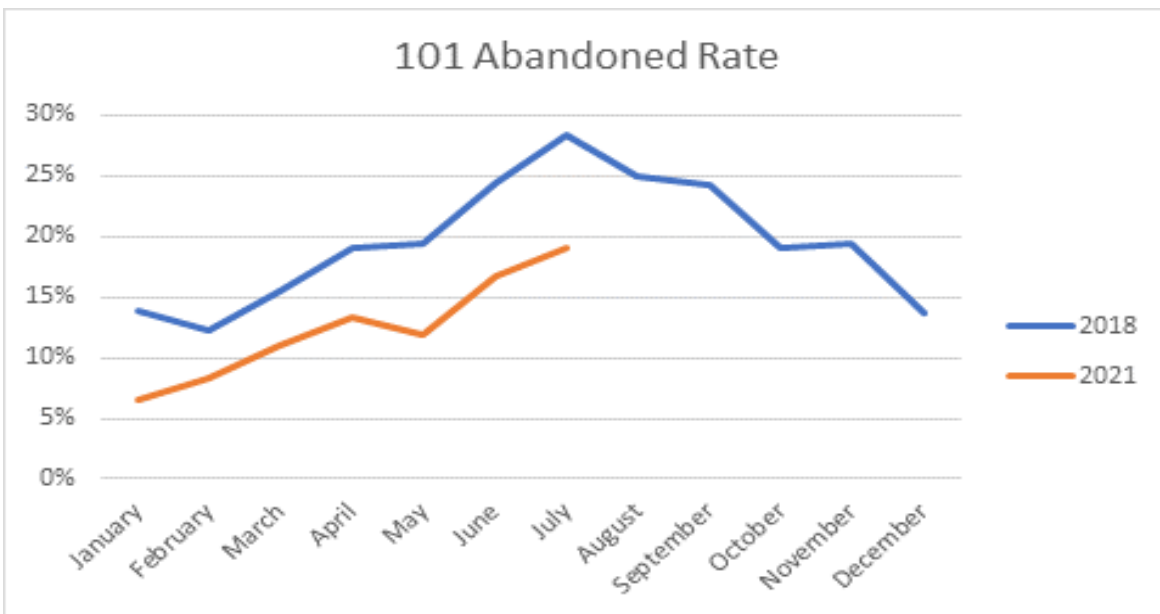

Fig 8 shows that our 101 abandoned call pattern this year is broadly following the same pattern as seen in 2018, if we continue on the expected seasonal trajectory we will start to see a reduction in the abandoned call rate over the coming months towards the end of 2021.

It is worthy of note that the current 101 abandoned rate is much improved from the 2018 position.

Digital Demand / Shift

As part of our ambition to make Essex Police as accessible to the public as possible, we have invested in our online provision to open additional avenues of contact for members of the public needing to report a crime or contact us.

Our newly designed website (known internally as 'Single online home') launched in September 2019 and makes it easier for crimes to be reported using online forms. This service follows a nationally delivered standard of platform and service presentation for police external internet services.
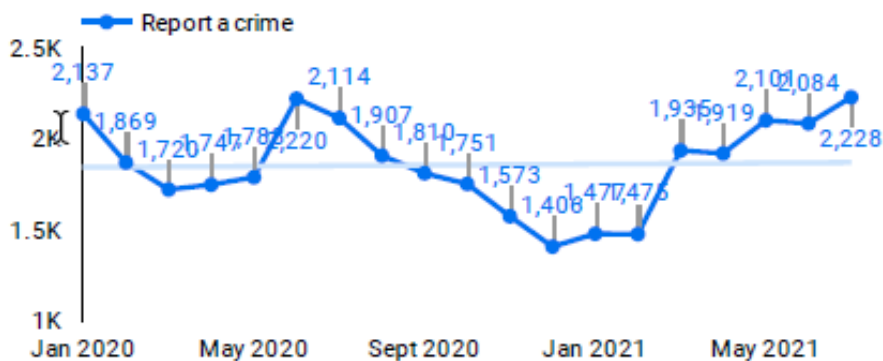
As demonstrated by Fig 9, the online reporting via our website is on an increasing trajectory, following a dip during lockdown restrictions for the Coronavirus pandemic.

In May 2020 we launched our 'Live Chat' function, allowing members of the public to have a live instant messaging conversation with a call handler, without having to wait for their 101 call to be answered.

The Force is exploring other services that may be provided through our online service. We are planning the implementation of online reporting for domestic violence victims following a successful national pilot.

We are working with our Media Department to promote these services to the public. We have recently targeted awareness with harder to reach groups working with our IAG colleagues.
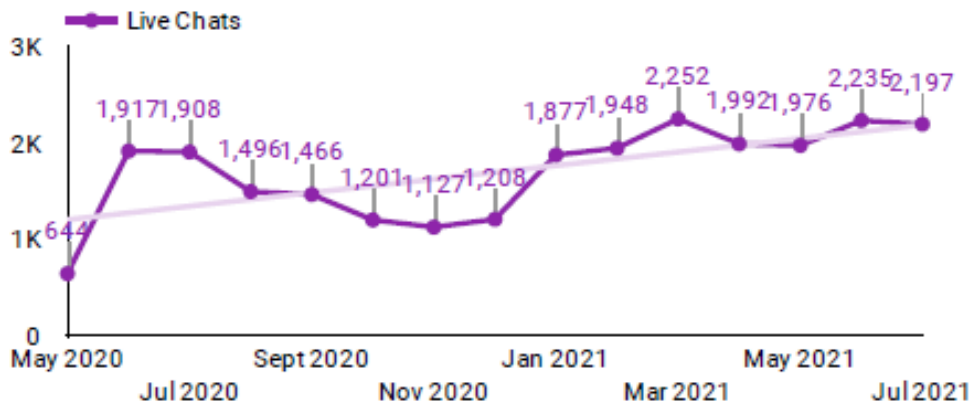
LIVE CHAT

Fig 10 shows the increasing usage of live chat since its implementation, it is likely that an element of our 'abandoned' 101 calls are contact us via this mechanism instead.

We promote our online services, including Live Chat, through our automated IVR message that callers to the 101 service receive at the point of initial contact. We are working with our Media Department to look at further revision of the IVR and the wider promotion of our Live Chat service including encouraging other agencies (for example the ambulance service) to utilise Live Chat to contact our FCR.

The Force has also promoted our online service provision through various media platforms including social media.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

None identified.

6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The very nature of the work within the Force Control Room and the Resolution Centre touches upon all 7 priorities within the Police and Crime Plan (Extension 2020-2021) but in particular:

Priority 1 – More local, visible, and accessible policing
Collectively we are known as Contact Management Command. We are the face of Essex Police to the majority of people who come into contact with us, we are also responsible for the front counter provisions across Essex where our staff welcome members of the public into our stations.

We are striving to be more accessible, provide a quicker and more efficient service than ever before. We will continue to search for innovative ways to improve, particularly where IT development is concerned.

<u>Priority 2 – Cracking down on anti-social behaviour</u>
By improving our year on year wait times on the 101 system, members of the public are more likely to hang on the phone to report instances of ASB so it can be properly investigated. We also accept reports of ASB via our online reporting system on our website.

Underpinning all of our public contact, we are putting the victims are the heart of what we do, taking time to understand their needs, and getting them access to the services or resources they need to help them in their time of need.

6.2   Demand

N/A

6.3   Risks/Mitigation

None identified

6.4   Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

None identified

6.5   Health and Safety Implications

None identified

7.0   Consultation/Engagement

Superintendent 77475 Craig Saunders – Deputy Head Contact Management
Klaudia Stockwell – Performance Analyst
Steven Pollard – Web Development Officer
Cameron Paynter – Contact Management Data Analyst

8.0   Actions for Improvement

The improving picture detailed in this report is a result of a more effective and efficient service including better mapping of resource against the demand profile.

We have improved our performance management framework including the use of a dashboard created by an external company to help us identify our resourcing vs demand picture, allowing us to work towards having the right staff in the right place at the right time.

We have also introduced the Operational Support Team or OST who provide training, guidance, project support, and performance management data for the Contact Management Command.

An enhanced level of scrutiny on daily performance by the command team has helped drive performance and focus our staff on priorities each day.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

We will continue to make ourselves more accessible and provide a better level of service to the public, several projects are underway to further our performance in the next reporting period:
- FCR Shift pattern changes to match staff with demand (in consultation currently).
- 'Soft phone' technology to allow 101 calls to be taken at home, providing greater flexibility for non-emergency call handling by our workforce.
- Planning for the procurement of a new, integrated FCR IT platform is underway (led by IT Dept), which will seek a long term solution that embraces digital efficiency for all aspects of FCR work.
- Public surveys via automated text message solution to help us understand the service we provide and how we can improve (due for implementation Q3 2021.
- We are also about to launch a new quality of service process in the FCR allowing line managers and Command Team to scrutinise the quality of call handling and further improve our performance framework.
- We are currently considering a recently prepared post-implementation review of our RC. The review acknowledges significant improvements in performance and makes a number of helpful recommendations which are intended to improve public service even further.
- By mid-October 100% of the police officer posts within FCR will be filled (currently there are 16 gaps)

10.0 Appendices

- **Appendix A: Raw Data**

OPFCC Public Call
Handling Raw Data