

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2023

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

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1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of the performance of Contact Management Command's (CMC) call handling for emergency and non-emergency calls within Essex Police. A separate paper has been created that specifically relates to High Harm and the Responding to Incidents Policy.

No decisions are sought.

2.0 Recommendations

This paper is for noting only, the CMC performance improvement is subject to a force change programme that will deliver the Target Operating Model (TOM) which is scheduled to go live in April 2024.

3.0 Executive Summary

This paper has been requested to provide an update on the activity and performance of the Essex Police Force Control Room (FCR) and Resolution Centre (RC) since the previous submission in April 2023. As in the previous paper, data is considered where available from April 2016, but there is a focus on data since October 2021 to consider the two-year comparison, and in particular and changes in the last six months.

As highlighted in the previous paper, the volume of calls since 2016 has grown exponentially. A decrease in 101 (non-emergency) calls into Essex Police has been replaced with an increase in 999 calls. Only a small percentage of incidents reported via 999 are converted to emergency dispatches (approximately 20%). These trends have continued in the reporting period and are expected to continue. Work is continuing to educate the public and partners about appropriate use of the 999 system, and to highlight the variety of other reporting mechanisms that are now available to residents of Essex.

The trend of increased seasonal demand can be seen from May through to October throughout the past seven years. This does not align with the idea that summer is limited to June, July, and August. This has been particularly noticeable in 2023. Throughout the peak months there are increases in call volume, but the impact is widespread across all Commands.

There is no evidence of any enduring impact from COVID-19.

Essex Police wait time for 999 calls still falls within the national agreed standard of 10 seconds, since the national data collection started in January 2022 the median answer time as recorded by BT has been 6 seconds every month, although the volumes of calls is not consistent, and this has been particularly highlighted over the Summer of 2023 due to issues which have had a national impact. Of note was the Android mobile phone issue of pocket dialling 999 in May/June 2023 which had an impact on the abandonment rate and ability to answer calls within the agreed time.

There is no national guidance for 101 call answering times. However, many forces including Essex have set an aspirational figure of 5 minutes. Contact Management is not consistent in the answering of these calls although there has not been much difference across the seven years in relation to the time the public waits for a call to be answered. There is a clear correlation between wait times and abandonment rates.

999 call data forms part of the Home Office metrics for police forces. The data includes the combined BT and force answer time. A monthly breakdown of Essex Police positioning compared to other forces is included within this paper.

January and February trend as the quietest months for public contact across all channels.

To be accessible for the public we have grown our “Single Online Home” function for the public and our “Live Chat facility”, providing the public with a range of methods to contact Essex Police. There is also a self-service function to offer ease of reporting for the public. By offering additional reporting mechanisms we aim to be accessible to all our communities. Any shift from the 101 telephony system to other reporting methods also positively impacts on call wait times and abandonment rates.

Recruitment and resourcing have had significant investment throughout 2022 and 2023 which has resulted in an uplift of staff. However, while new staff are still learning and embedding, this has so far not been reflected in improvements of performance. A considerable amount of Contact Management staff has less than one years’ service, and they need support from their peers.

A Public Contact Gold Group continues to meet to address the importance of how the wider force is prioritising the initial response to the public. Actions from this group are resulted quickly and efficiently in the hope of seeing improvement. There is a focus on getting contact right at the first opportunity to reduce failure demand.

Operation Analogy has continued throughout the summer to assist with the time it takes to respond to and answer non-emergency calls. The Quality-of-Service team has been supported with additional staff, with the intention of reducing the abandoned rate and wait times. The intention is to embed this process as business as usual in the coming quarter. A significant volume of the calls received into this team are requests for updates on investigations; there is a considerable amount of work ongoing across all commands to upskill staff to minimise the occurrence of this.

Contact Management need to address four areas for improvement which were identified in our own self-assessment and in our most recent HMICFRS PEEL inspection. A plan has been developed to address these issues. There is an awareness of the consequences to the public and the force if improvements are not made. Progress against the plan is positive and in line with expected timescales; this is monitored through the Deputy Chief Constable’s STAR chamber where consideration is given to progress made against identified actions and where any requirements for additional support can be discussed. The HMICFRS are due to visit the Control Room in October 2023 for a check on progress. It is anticipated that each of the areas for improvement should be discharged by June 2024.

A Target Operating Model (TOM) has been produced with the aim of becoming more efficient and effective through technological advancements and revised policies and processes. This is a work in progress and remains on target to be completed by 2025 with key milestones having already been achieved. An independent IT review is currently underway across Essex and Kent Police which will ensure the most innovative solutions are considered to enhance performance across both forces.

It is recognised that the current resource management tool used within CMC is not as efficient or accurate as needed to meet current and future demand. As part of the TOM, the commissioning of a Workforce Management Tool has been approved,

which will seek to forecast the required resource against demand and manage annual leave more effectively to the operational requirement. It also aims to support the recruitment requirements of having the right people, in the right place, at the right time.

It should be noted that not all data is available for the period requested.

4.0 Introduction/Background

Members of the public can contact Essex Police through a variety of channels to report crime. Their preferred choice remains 999 emergency and 101 non-emergency telephony.

Emergency 999 Calls

The Beating Crime Plan sets a national target of 10 seconds for answering 999 calls. This includes the BT answer time. Our “Grade of Service” (GOS) refers to the percentage of calls answered within the 10 second period.

999 calls unanswered in 10 seconds get re-presented. No calls ever drop out unless the user drops the call.

Non-Emergency 101 Calls to FCR

Essex Police has set an aspiration to answer 101 calls within 5 minutes. This was an agreed target based on performance. There are no national targets for non-emergency calls.

The level of 999 and 101 calls fluctuates by day, time, and month. This can be driven by events, weather, incidents, and seasonality. It can easily be impacted significantly in a short period of time if a significant incident occurs that attracts public attention.

On the busiest days, the call volumes can reach 1200 for 999 and 1000 for 101 within 24 hours. These numbers represent the calls received into the switchboard, but it should be noted that there is a considerable volume of other demand that is routed across the force via the Interactive Voice Response (IVR). The IVR has been amended as our understanding of the data and the make-up of demand is better understood. This creates a more efficient service for the public, as the caller can be quickly routed to the team or department they require and reduces the impact of volume on the switchboard.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

Throughout 2022 and 2023, Contact Management has sought to make improvements in call handling within Essex Police. Measures introduced include:

- New SMS text survey for FCR and the RC to help us understand the service we provide and how we can make improvements
- 15 Problem Solving and Service Improvement Sergeants into FCR scrutinising Priority 4 incidents and reviewing concern for welfare and high harm incidents

- New SMS text messaging platform to inform/update callers
- Increased scrutiny and improved performance management structure with the use of new performance dashboards for the command
- Better aligning of staff to demand profiles
- 'Help us Help you' recruitment campaign, working in conjunction with Media and Recruitment Teams to fulfil our establishment
- Continued improvements in recruitment processes which are seeing an increased volume of applications across the FCR and RC
- New training programme and delivery timetable
- Introducing new ways of continued professional development (CPD) delivery for the Command
- New Quality of Service to capture feedback for staff and future development
- Uplift of Police Officers into the Control Room to support call taking
- New SMS process for Crime Prevention advice introduced to ensure all victims of Crime receive the text message
- Op Analogy
- Call Triage Process

Call Handling

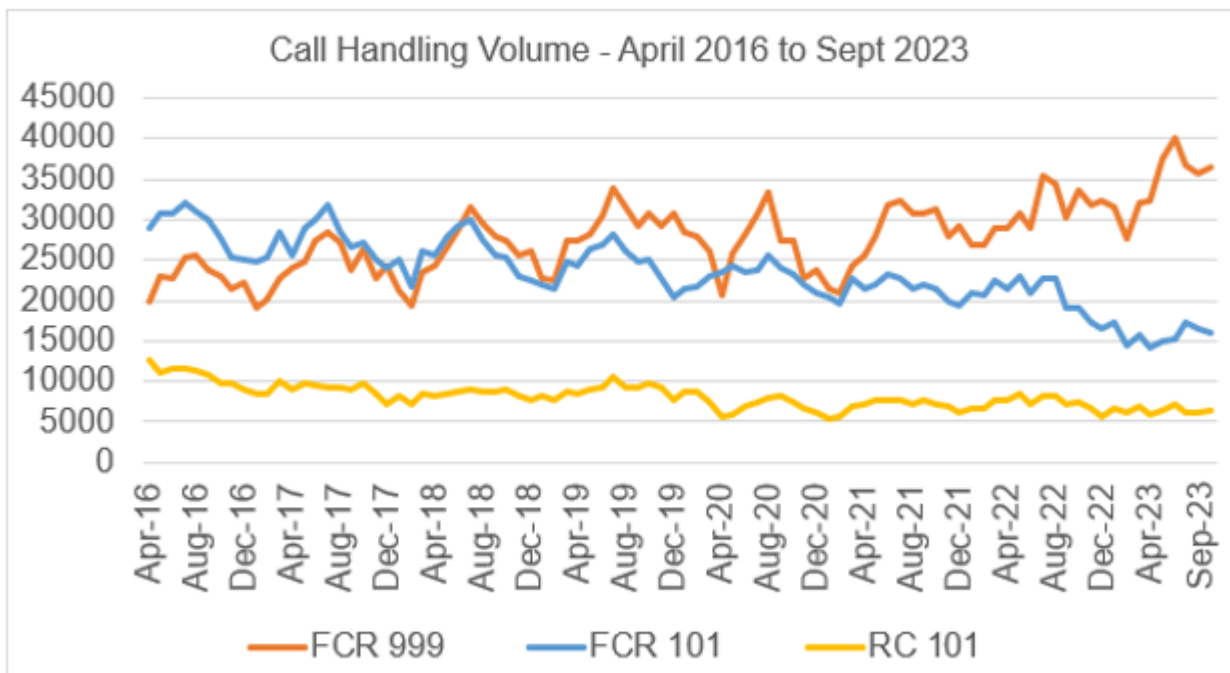


Figure 1 Call Volumes

Calls from the public and other services into Essex Police are primarily split into emergency (999) calls and non-emergency (101) calls. All 999 calls are directed into the Force Control Room (FCR). Non-Emergency calls will reach different areas of the organisation depending on the nature of the call. The two main areas that non-emergency calls are answered are within the FCR and the Resolution Centre. The Resolution Centre takes reports of crime from the public, the FCR also handles non-urgent incident reports.

Figure 1 shows the calls taken in the Force Control Room (FCR) and the Resolution Centre (RC) between January 2016 and September 2023. It highlights the drop in 101 calls over the past 7 years in comparison to the increase in 999 calls over the same period. There is a clear seasonal pattern to 999 calls between 2016 and 2021, with spikes during the warmer summer months. Since 2021, this pattern has been disrupted, with less of a drop in the autumn and winter and then even greater increases during the summer months. July 2023 saw the highest volume of calls on record at 36,712 (this is linked to the Android issue referenced in the report). Non-Emergency FCR calls have decreased slowly since 2016, with a notable drop from August 2022.

To illustrate the change in volumes since the 2016 Police and Crime Plan was introduced, the volume of calls in the 12 months to September 2023 against the same period in 2017 can be compared. There has been a 44.0% increase, from 18,599 emergency calls to 26,783 calls. In the same timeframe, 101 calls have gone from 40,034 in January 2016 to 27,639, a decrease of 30.9%. This may reflect a shift in choice for the public in how they reach us, which may be attributable in part to undesirable wait times on 101.

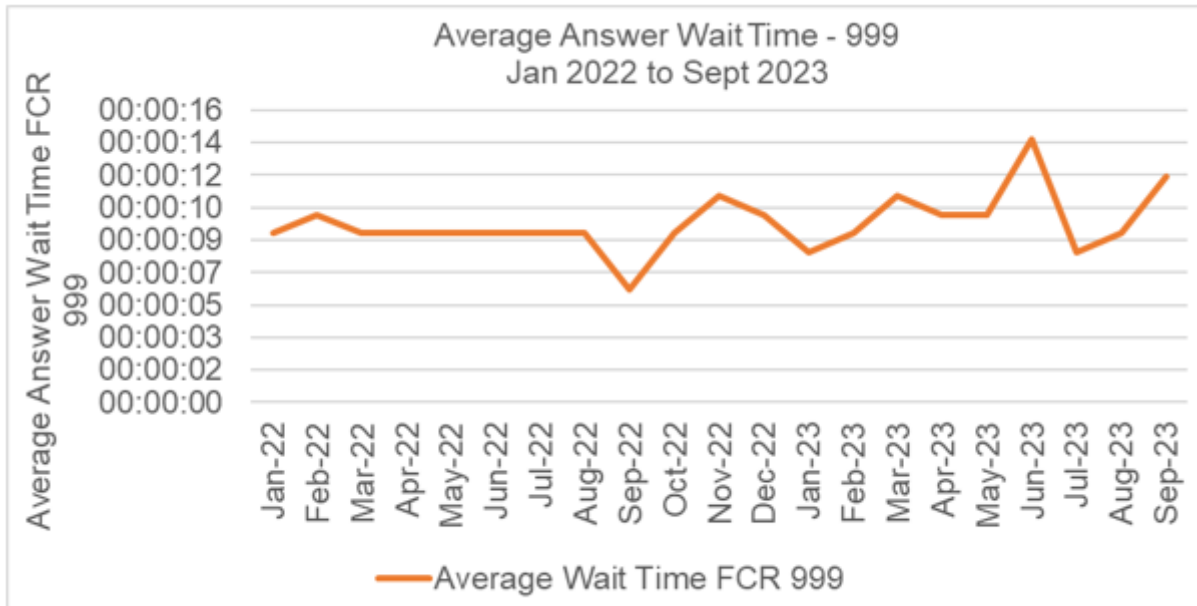


Figure 2 Average wait times

The longest average wait time for FCR 999 calls between January 2022 and Sept 2023 was 00:14:00 seconds. The shortest average wait time in this period was 6 seconds. The average time to answer a call has remained steady since January 2022 despite the large increase in 999 calls.

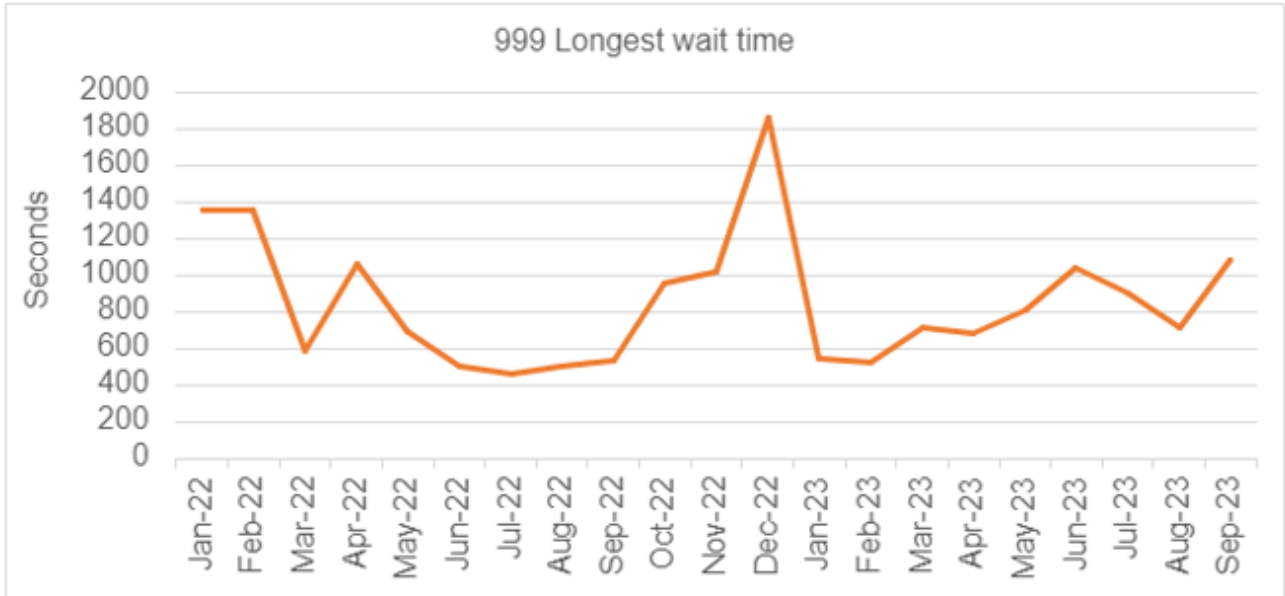


Figure 3 Longest wait time 999

The longest wait time for FCR 999 calls between January 2022 and Sept 2023 was December 2022 with 1,860 seconds (31 minutes). The lowest month in this period was July 2022 with 463 seconds (8 minutes).

Emergency calls flow into the control room through three routes:

- Public calls (the vast majority and what people would think of as 999),
- There is an internal Essex Police number,
- Then there an is 'other emergency' queue which is provided to other agencies such as prisons, ambulance, other police forces.

Emergency call handling focuses on the public line with the majority of calls answered within 10 seconds. In the year from April 2022 to March 2023, 83.9% were answered within 10 seconds. Therefore, the longest wait times for 999 calls comes from the other emergency line in all months across this period and are not 999 calls from the public awaiting pickup.

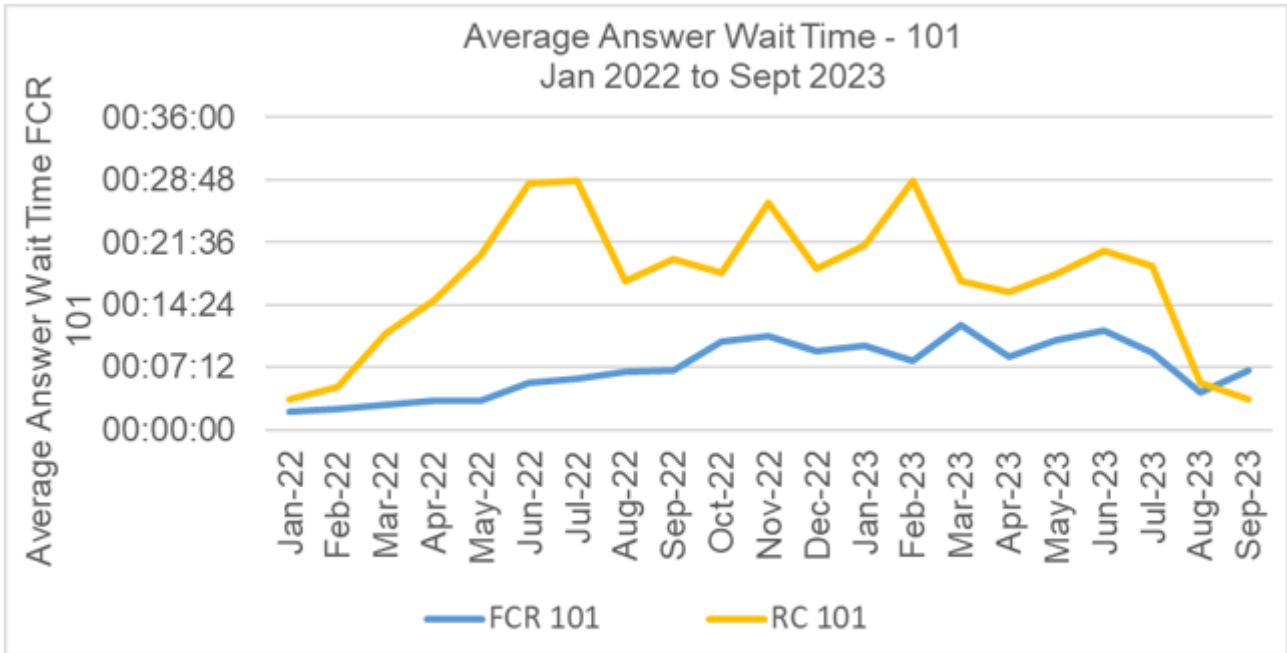


Figure 4 Average answer wait time for 101

The longest average wait time for FCR 101 calls between January 2022 and September 2023 was 00:12:04 seconds in March 2023. The shortest average wait time in this period was 00:02:02 seconds in January 2022. The average time to answer a call has remained steady since January 2022.

The longest average wait time for RC 101 calls between January 2022 and September 2023 was 00:28:43 seconds in February 2023. The shortest average wait time in this period was 00:03:26 seconds in January 2023. The average time to answer a call has been unsteady since January 2022.

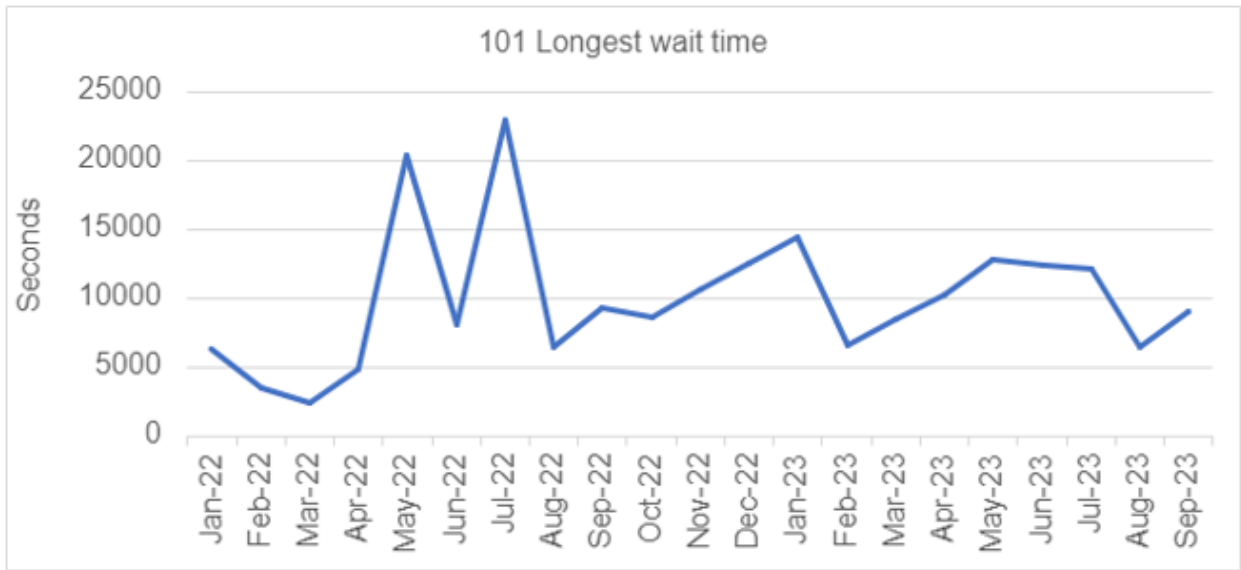


Figure 5 Longest wait time 101

The longest wait time for 101 999 calls between January 2022 and Sept 2023 was in July 2022 with 2,2961 seconds (49 minutes). The lowest month in this period was March 2022 with 2,386 seconds (39 minutes).

Abandoned Calls

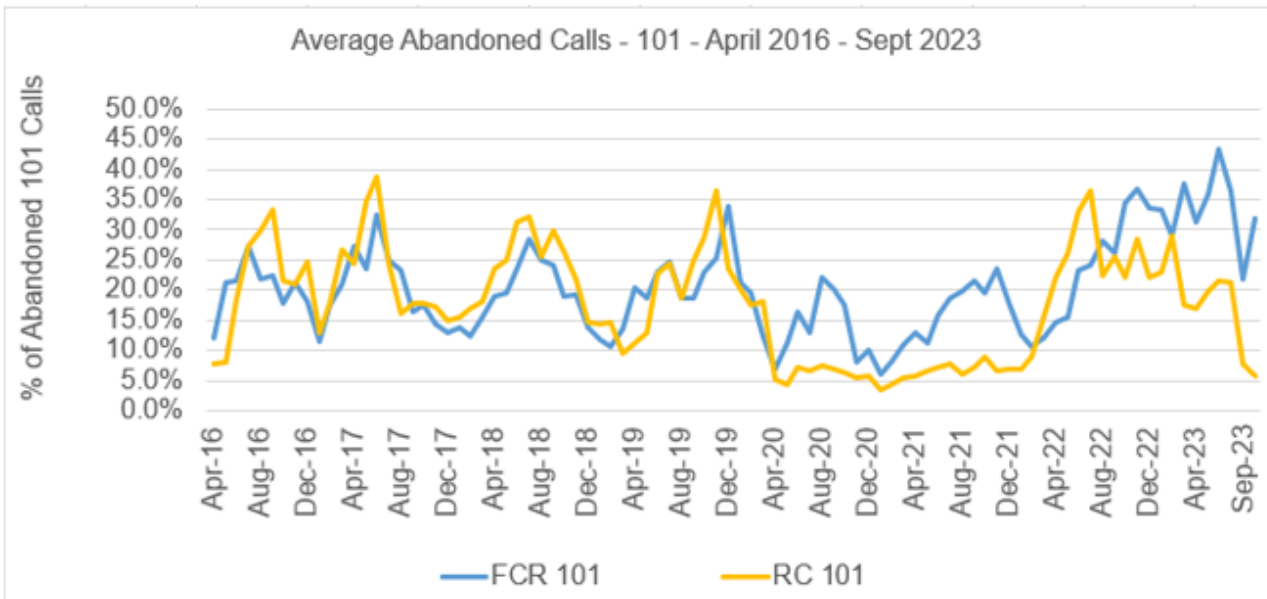


Figure 6 Percentage of calls abandoned 101

Figure 6 shows the proportion of calls abandoned within the FCR which during the Summer 2023 was at the highest rate since January 2020; the proportion of abandoned calls has been increasing since April 2022. The Resolution Centre also saw an increase in the proportion abandoned since 2022 following several years of less than 10% of calls being abandoned. Resolution Centre performance has improved during 2023, with a drop back below 10% of calls abandoned in August 2023. Figure 6 shows calls terminated after they have reached the FCR or RC. Contact Management Command now has more detailed analysis that allows us to understand the different points in which a call may be abandoned, including during the IVR and at switchboard.

When a member of the public is unable to receive a timely response through one reporting mechanism, they may utilise another. The chart below demonstrates there is some correlation between FCR 101 performance and 999 calls.

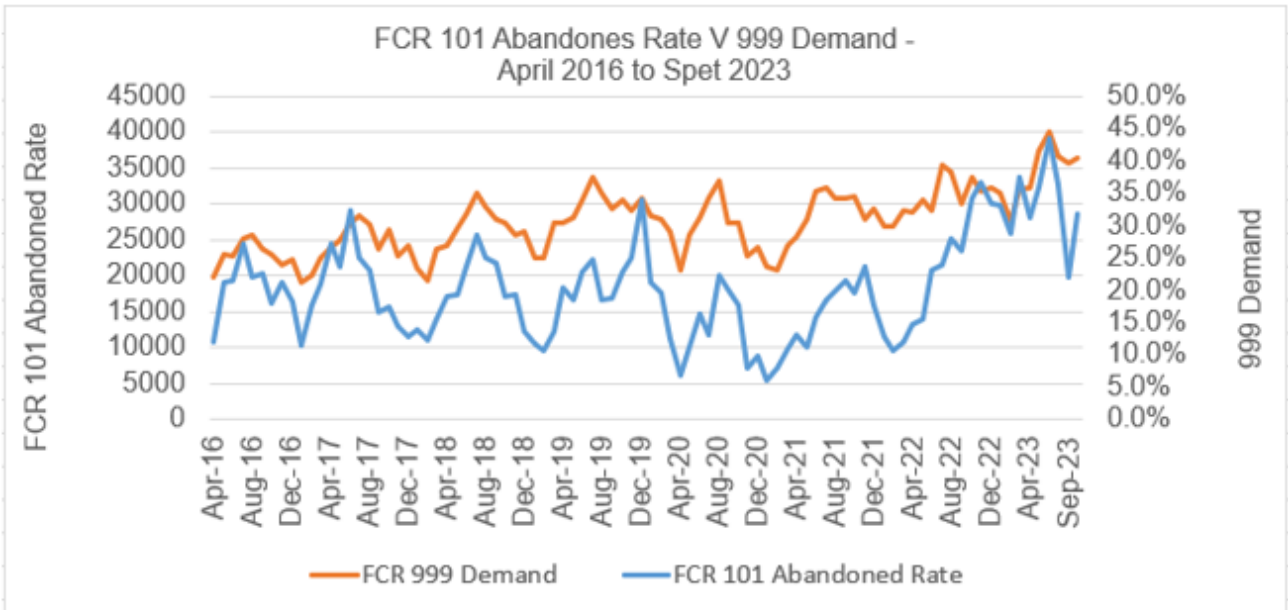


Figure 7 FCR 101 and Abandonment rate v 999Demand

Figure 7 shows the 101 Abandoned rates against the 999 call demand from 2016 to 2023. The 101 abandonment rate significantly dropped in March 2020 at the same time FCR demand increased. This pattern continued throughout 2020. In March 2022, the abandonment rates increased, rising to the highest it has been in the 7 years at 40,148 in June 2023. The 2020 reduction is clearly attributable to the COVID pandemic.

The abandonment rate also followed this trend of increasing since March 2022 rising to the highest it has been at 6620 (43.3%), showing the clear relationship between answering time and abandonment rate.

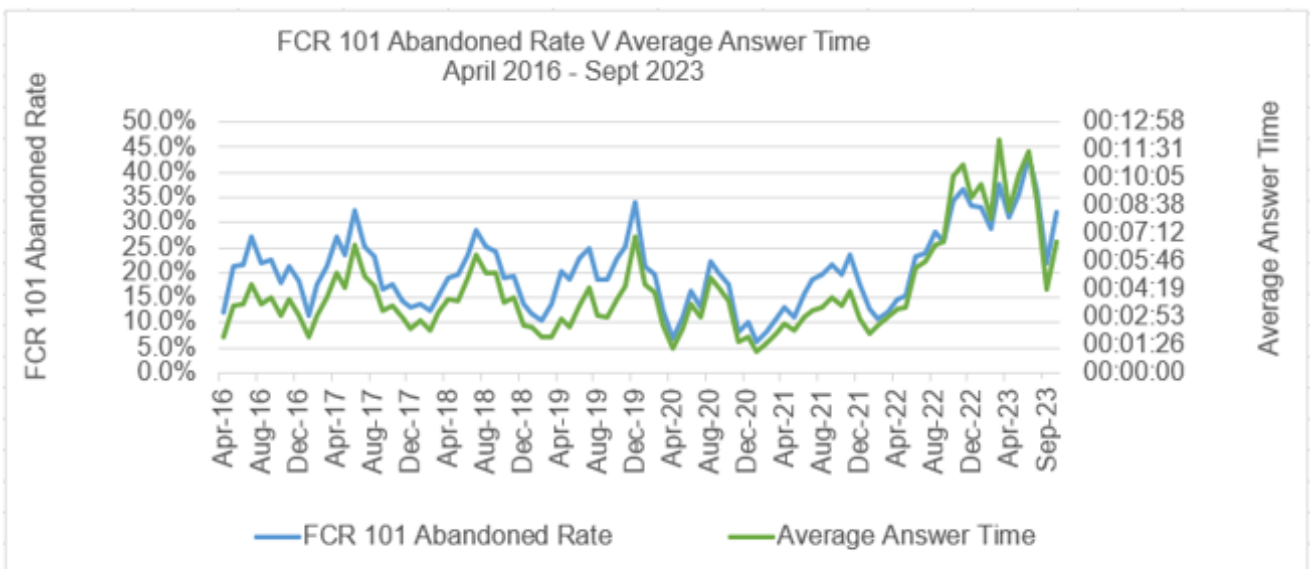


Figure 8 FCR 101 and Abandonment rate v Average answer time

Essex Police has a minimal abandonment rate for 999 calls which demonstrates a positive response to the public for emergencies. The abandoned rate has nonetheless grown across the years at a similar rate to the increase in 101 calls, which is being addressed through Operation Analogy – this was explained in the previous paper and more recently the command has introduced a call triage process on the 101 calls which prevents people representing on the 999 line. The early indications are that this triage has led to a significant reduction in call wait times and a reduction in the abandonment rate.

Call triage was trialled within the Resolution Centre to reduce the time it takes to answer 101 calls and to ensure that the caller is getting the service that they need. Due to the early indicators of success, this is now being piloted to apply to all 101 calls, regardless of where they are received.

In March 2023, the average answer time and abandonment rate were the highest they have been in the last 7 years at 00:12:04 seconds wait time and 37.5% of all calls abandoned. This significantly dropped in August 2023 with a 00:04:16 second wait time and 21.9% abandonment rate.

The time to answer an emergency 999 call is less than 10 seconds so abandoned calls are rare. A caller may change their mind, because the emergency necessitates them to hang up the phone for their safety or because they dialled in error. The number is always called back. A policy is in place for call takers in this circumstance.

The 101 callers may abandon their call as the wait time is too long, or if it is inconvenient to hang on at that moment in time. The caller may have decided to report via another means (such as online) - this is considered a positive abandonment and indicative of successful channel shift. If the caller represents on 101 or even 999, this is clearly negative. Contact Management Command now has an increased understanding of the data regarding abandoned calls, and it can be seen at what point a caller disconnects and if and where they represent. If the caller abandons during the first few seconds of the IVR message where they are advised to report online and subsequently do so, this is considered as positive channel shift. We are aware that some callers do abandon during the first few seconds that do not then represent; it is suggested that this is not related to wait time or channel shift. Work has been commissioned to explore this using bulk text messaging to phone numbers that have disconnected early in a call, to aid our understanding of why this may occur and identify whether there is any remedial action for the command.

HMICFRS visit – October 2023

HMICFRS conducted a visit to the force control room on 26 October 2023 where the abandoned rate was reviewed. The HMICFRS commented on the forces position to now understand its abandoned rate and the plan to improve the service to the public.

We are able to identify “positive” abandoned calls that abandon at an early stage when prompted to make their enquiry online. Our enhanced understanding is directing specific work to reduce our abandoned rate:

- New single force telephony 101 abandoned rate
- New triage function to reduce secondary and non-value demand
- Greater understanding of non-value demand to develop whole force response
- Scoping BT SMS feedback option for abandoned calls
- Delivery of the new target operating model

This activity will enable us to understand and seek to reduce the abandoned calls.

National Comparisons

National comparisons of emergency call handling are available monthly via Police.uk. They form part of the Home Office Beating Crime Plan which has the aim of improving the responsiveness of local police to 101 and 999 calls - by working with HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to develop league tables for answering calls and ensuring that the public know how responsive their local force is when they call them for help.

As of August 2023, Essex is ranked 25th of 44 of percentages of calls answered in under 10 seconds (81.1% of calls). Essex had a mean answer time of 12.06 seconds in August 2023. When compared to March 2023, mean answer time improved from 14.26 seconds and proportions answered under 10 seconds have improved from 76.3%.

Since national data has been published, Essex has consistently been above the national average in terms of both percentages answered in under 10 seconds and average answer time. The charts below show the trend since the national data was published.

(This data is only available up to August 2023).

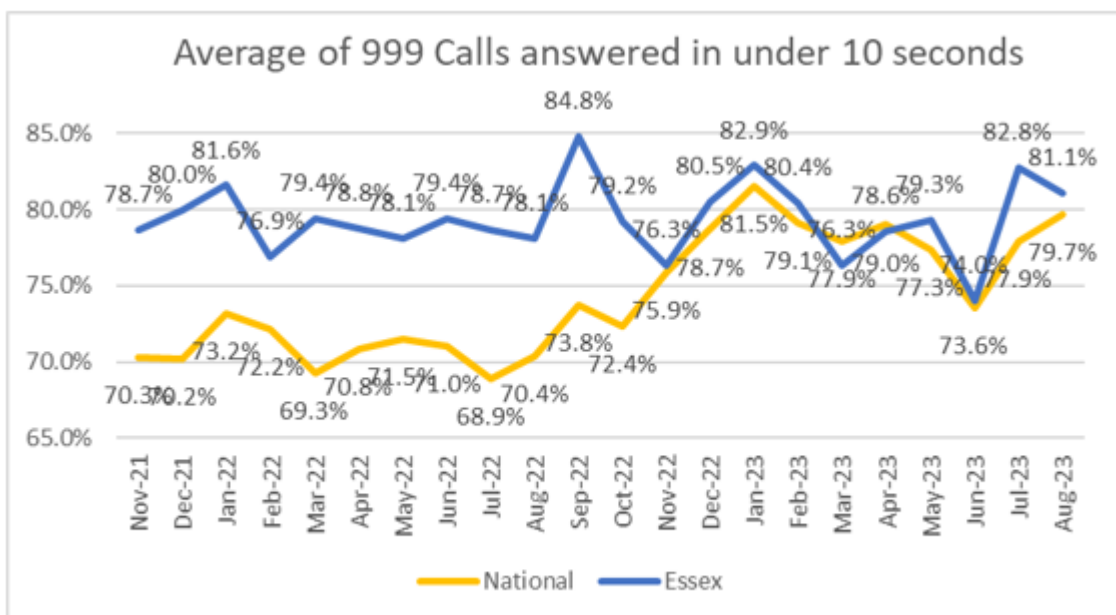


Figure 9 Average calls answered – National and Essex

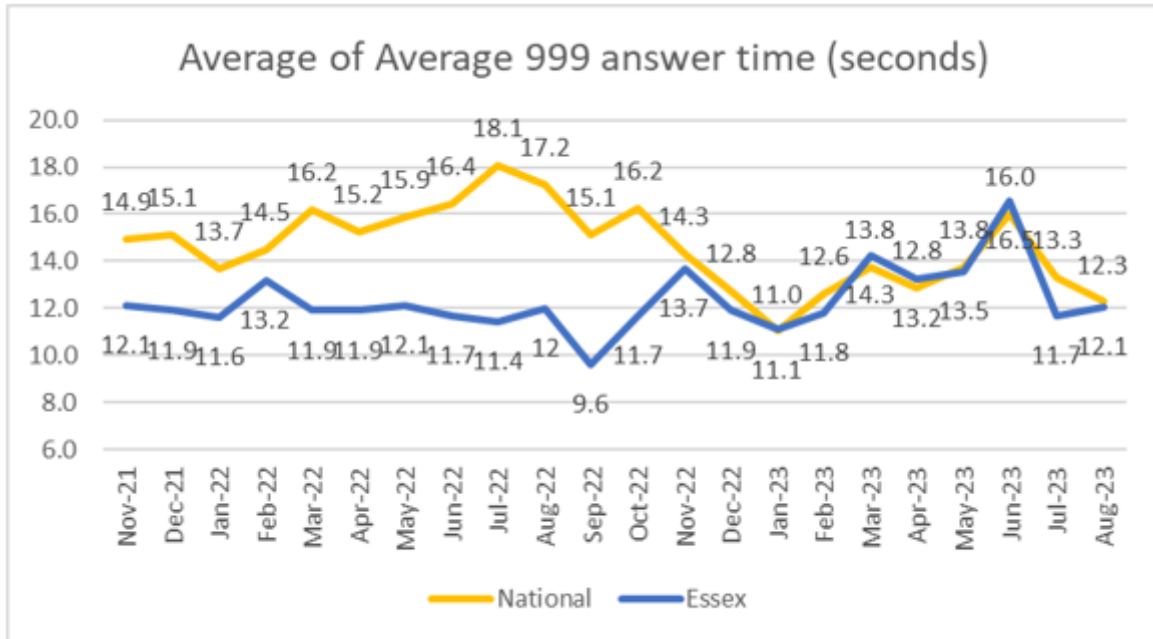


Figure 10 999 answer time – National and Essex

In the last 12 months, Essex has the 8th highest number of calls nationally. The increased volume of emergency calls this summer in Essex police replicates a trend seen at a national level. In the three months to August 2023, there were 3,506,195 emergency calls nationally, an increase of 15.5% (471,515 calls) compared to the same period last year. There was a smaller increase of 101 calls of 8.1% (394,631) nationally. This is largely attributable to the Android issue highlighted in the previous section which has subsequently been resolved.

Benchmarking

The below tables show Essex Police’s position in comparison to other forces of England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland for 999 call answering times. (This data is only available up to August 2023).

Month	Position	Median answer time
Jan-22	18th/44	6
Feb-22	18th/44	6
Mar-22	16th/44	6
Apr-22	16th/44	6
May-22	16th/44	6
Jun-22	19th/44	6
Jul-22	18th/44	6
Aug-22	21st/44	6
Sep-22	21st/44	6
Oct-22	22nd/44	6
Nov-22	22nd/44	6
Dec-22	23rd/44	6
Jan-23	25th/44	6
Feb-23	26th/44	6
Mar-23	24th/44	6
Apr-23	24th/44	6
May-23	25th/44	6
Jun-23	22nd/44	6
Jul-23	22nd/44	6
Aug-23	23rd/44	6

Month	Position	Mean answer time
Jan-22	25th/44	12.06
Feb-22	12th/44	13.2
Mar-22	17th/44	11.9
Apr-22	19th/44	11.9
May-22	18th/44	12.1
Jun-22	17th/44	11.7
Jul-22	11th/44	11.4
Aug-22	16th/44	12
Sep-22	11th/44	9.6
Oct-22	20th/44	11.7
Nov-22	28th/44	13.7
Dec-22	25th/44	11.9
Jan-23	28th/44	11.08
Feb-23	26th/44	11.79
Mar-23	28th/44	14.26
Apr-23	29th/44	13.23
May-23	28th/44	13.54
Jun-23	32nd/44	16.54
Jul-23	18th/44	11.67
Aug-23	25th/44	12.06

Essex answering time, based on median, is 6 seconds in every month. Any change in national position is based on the performance of other forces. The national guidance asks for calls to be answered in under 10 seconds, median answer time is a more reliable measure for time-based performance data that can be skewed by outliers (extremely long or short calls which are not usual).

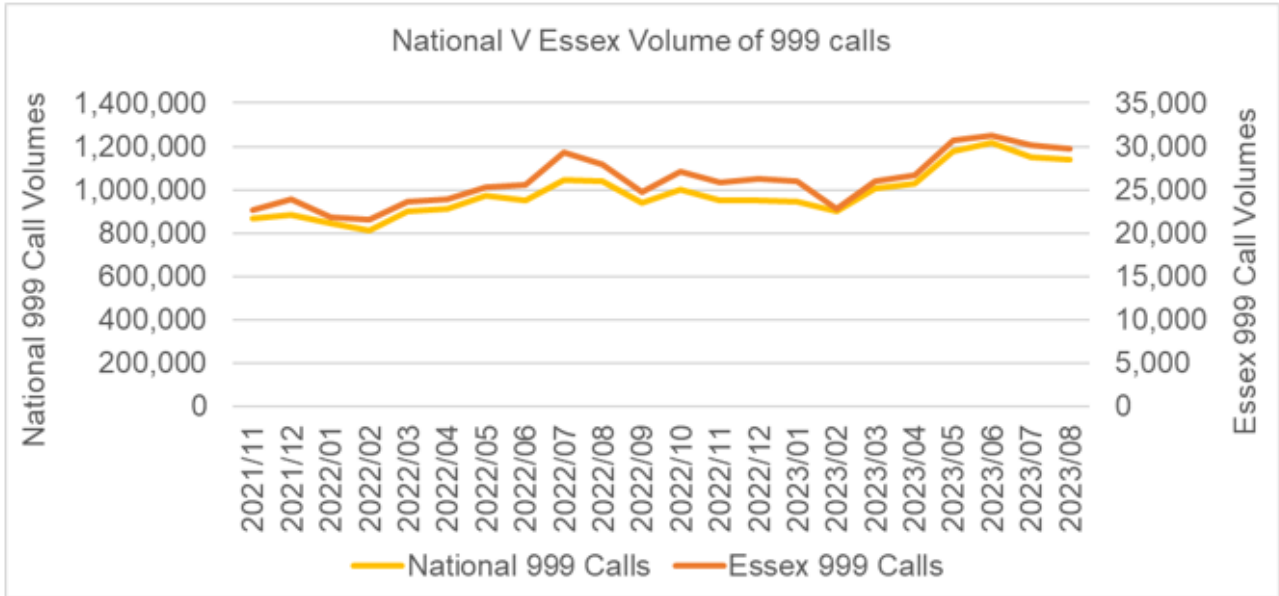


Figure 11 999 calls – National and Essex

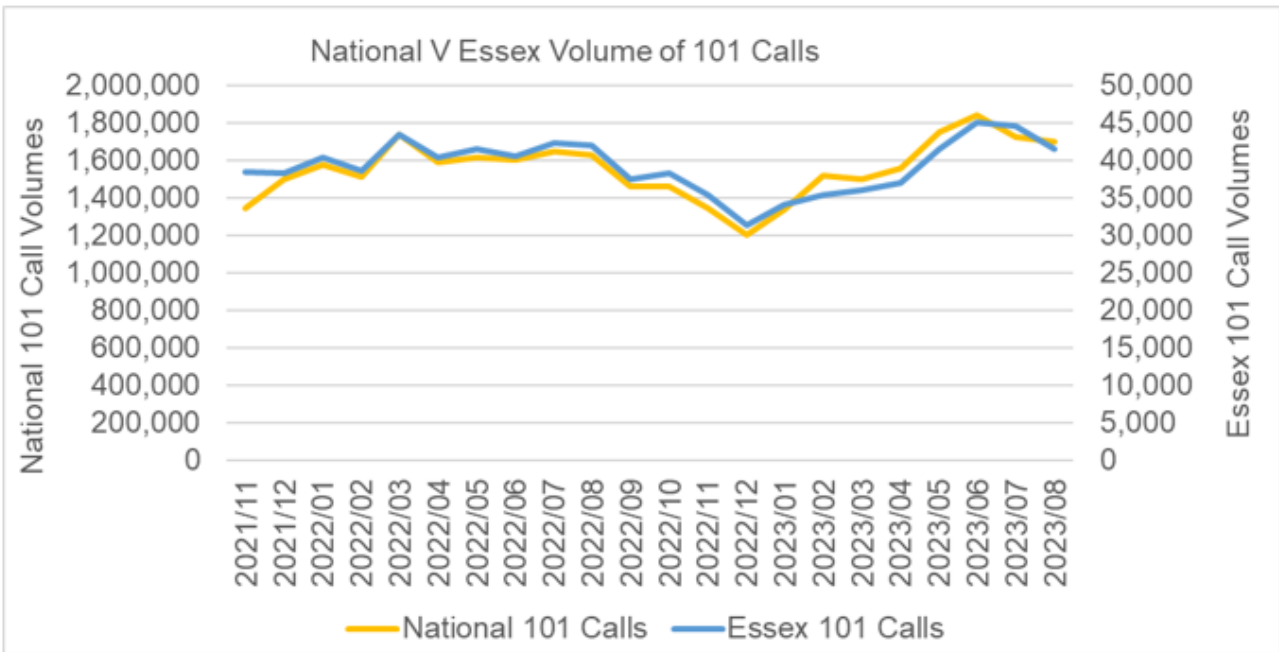


Figure 12 101 calls – National and Essex

Both these graphs show that Essex is following the national trend in terms of volumes of 101 and 999 calls.

Live Chat and Single Online Home

As an alternative to phoning, Essex Police has a 'Live Chat' option for the public to make contact. This is an instant messaging conversation held with a call handler. The service was introduced in May 2020.

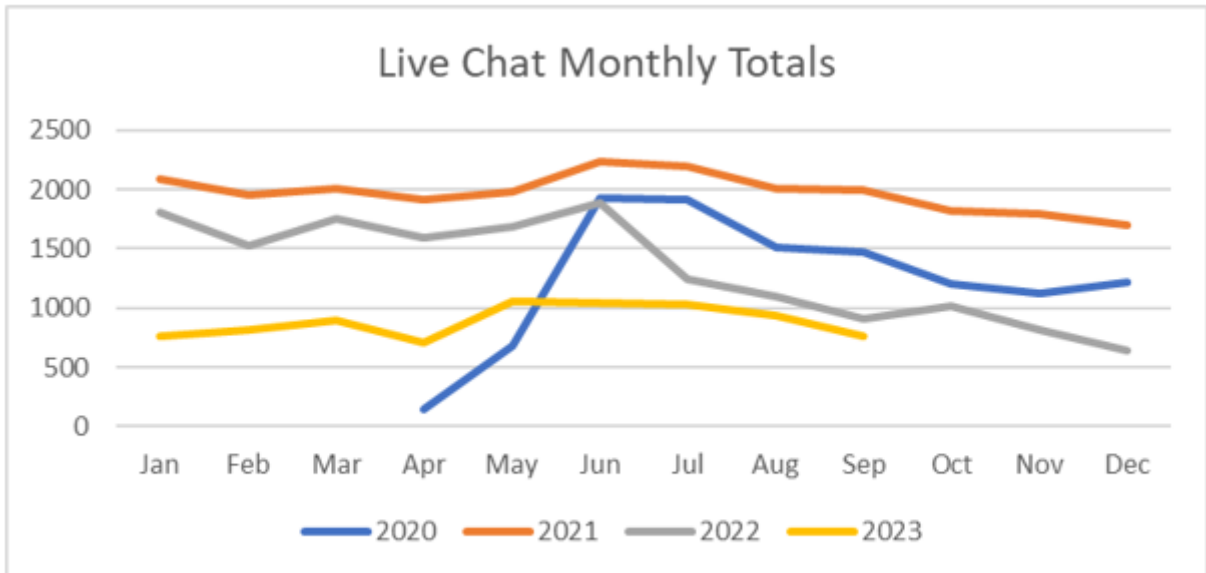


Figure 13 Live chat totals

The highest volume of chats came during the COVID-19 pandemic during which several call handlers worked from home on Live Chat as they could not answer calls. The peak within the 4 years was 2238 chats in June 2021.

The year 2023 has seen the lowest overall volume of chats, reaching only 711 in April. The decline started in June 2022 and has been declining since.

In July 2022, Essex Police reduced the hours from 0700 - 2300 Monday to Sunday (excluding bank holidays) down to Monday to Friday 1000-2100hrs (excluding bank holidays).

Top 10 chat reasons July 2021 - Sept 2023	
Contact - General Enquiry	3986
Contact - Incident Update Request	2635
Contact - OIC Update Request	2080
SusCircs - Other incident	1403
Other	1377
Incident - Drugs Related	1374
Incident - Domestic Abuse	1266
ASB - Nuisance Vehicle	1039
ASB - Nuisance	938
Incident - Concern for Welfare	875

These tables show that the most contacts relate to general enquiries or updates on existing reports.

Essex Police has committed to the option of the public contacting the force via the Essex Police website which uses the nationally enabled "Single Online Home" (SOH) format. It creates an option for the public to report crimes and other matters online. The service was introduced in September 2019 as an alternative for the public to calling either 101 or 999.

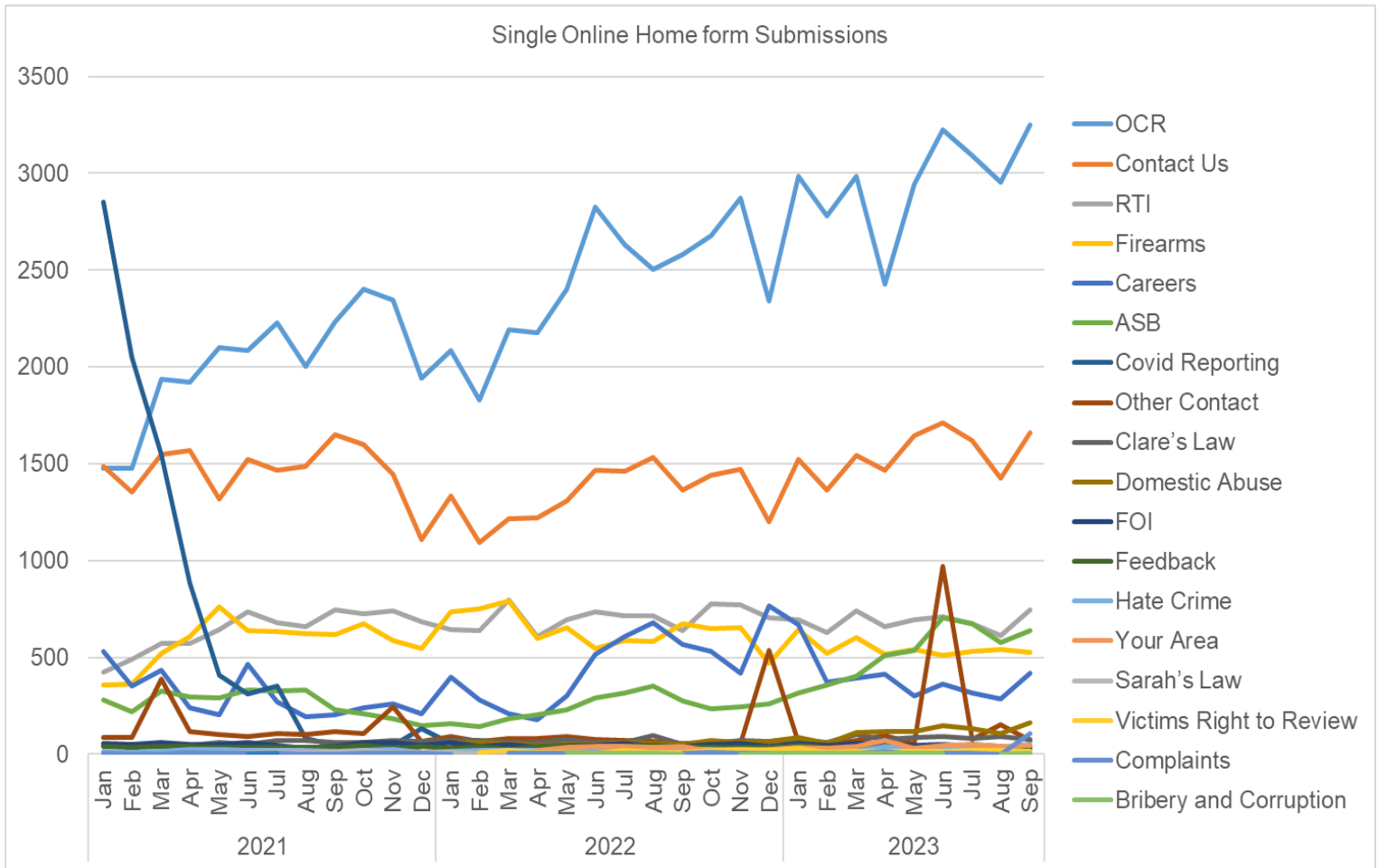


Figure 14 Single Online Home form submissions (SOH)

Public satisfaction

The Force Control Room has the capability to conduct direct SMS text surveys with recent callers. The FCR and the RC introduced this survey platform in March 2021 to better understand the service provided and how it can be improved. There are three questions asked as part of the survey. The results in March 2023 compared to September 2023 are shown below.

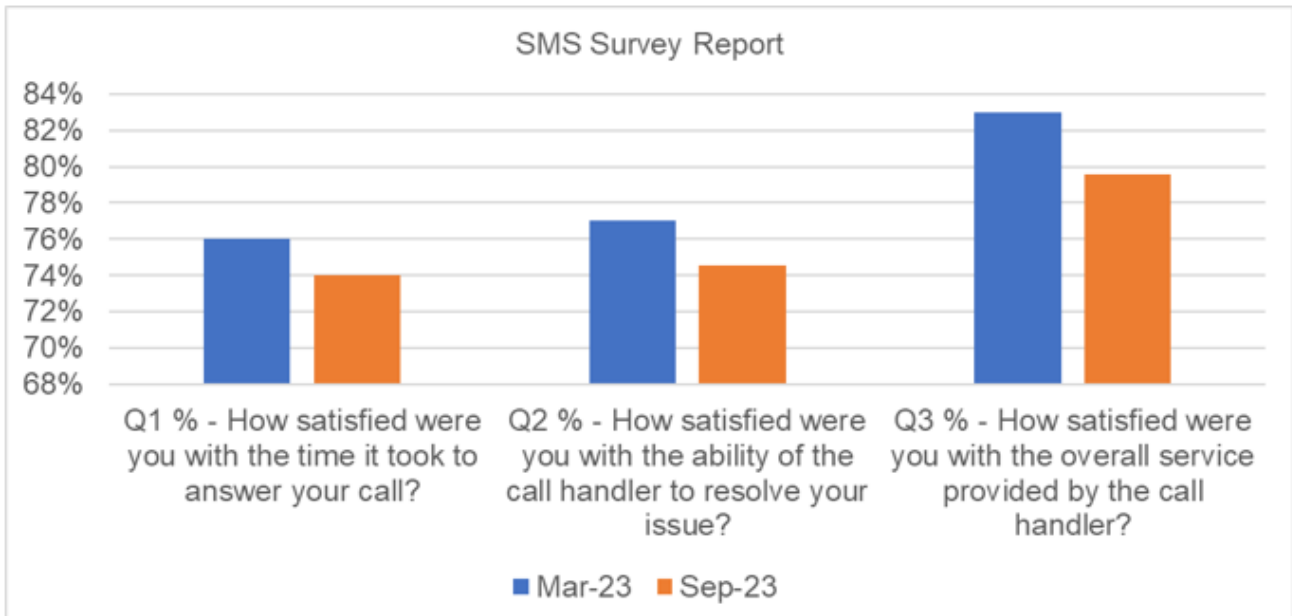
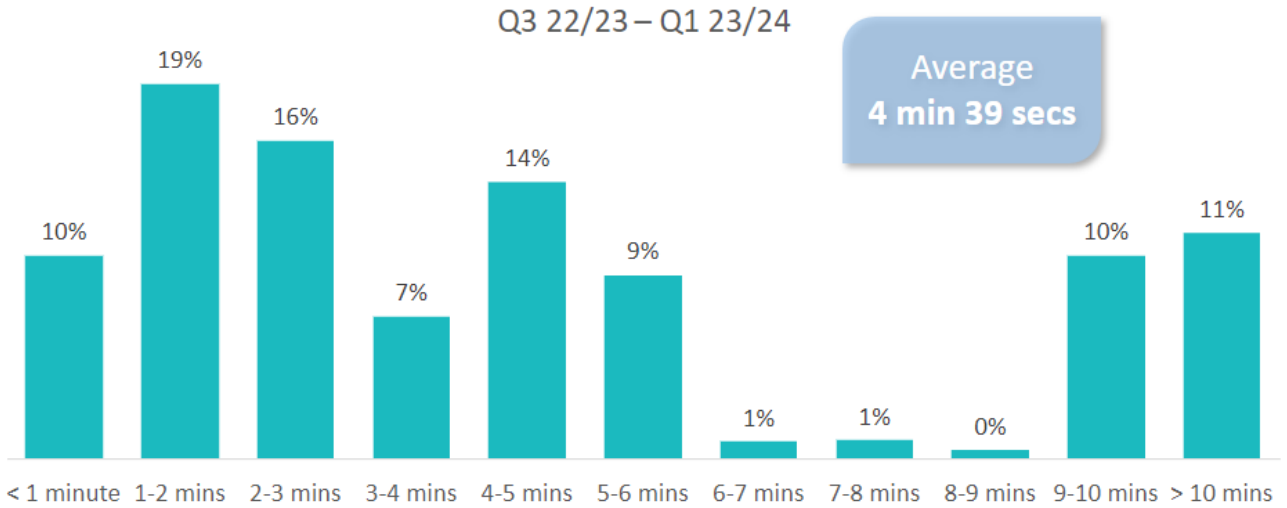


Figure 15 SMS survey report

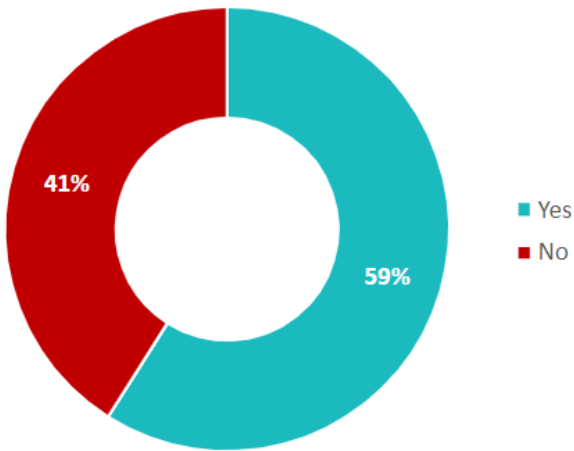
The above graph shows that there has been a small percentage point drop in satisfaction with the service provided by the staff in FCR compared to the last snapshot from March 2023. These responses from the public could be linked to the long wait time for 101 calls. Long wait times or a perceived lack of urgency can erode public trust.

The results from the independent survey conducted with members of the public on confidence and satisfaction with policing in Essex shows there is a wide range of views in what Essex residents think is an acceptable number of minutes to get through to a call handler when using the 101 non-emergency number.

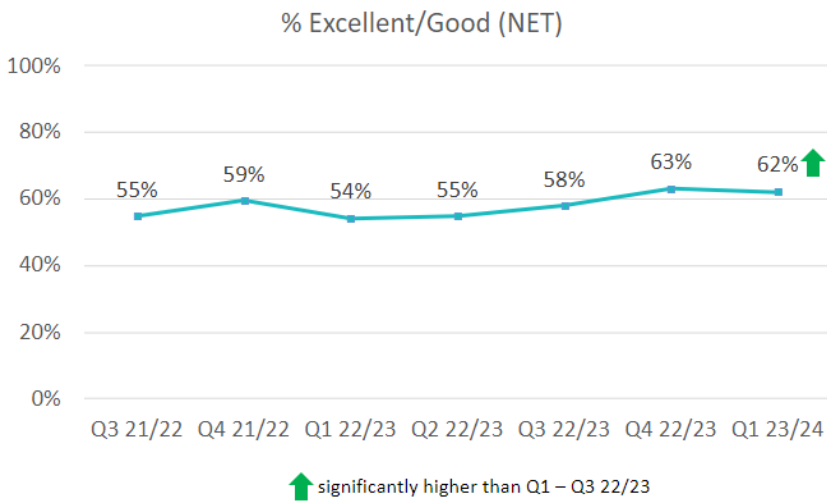


How long do you think is acceptable to get through to a call handler when using the 101 non-emergency number?

The survey also asks how aware the public are that they can access some of Essex Police’s services online; this shows that six out of ten people were aware of the availability of online services.



Quarterly Trend



There has been a gradual increase in awareness of this service since Quarter 3 21/22. Those aged over 55s are the least likely to be aware they can access some of Essex Police’s services online. Victims of crime are the most likely to be aware they can access some of Essex Police’s services online (73%).

Demographic Analysis (last 6 months)

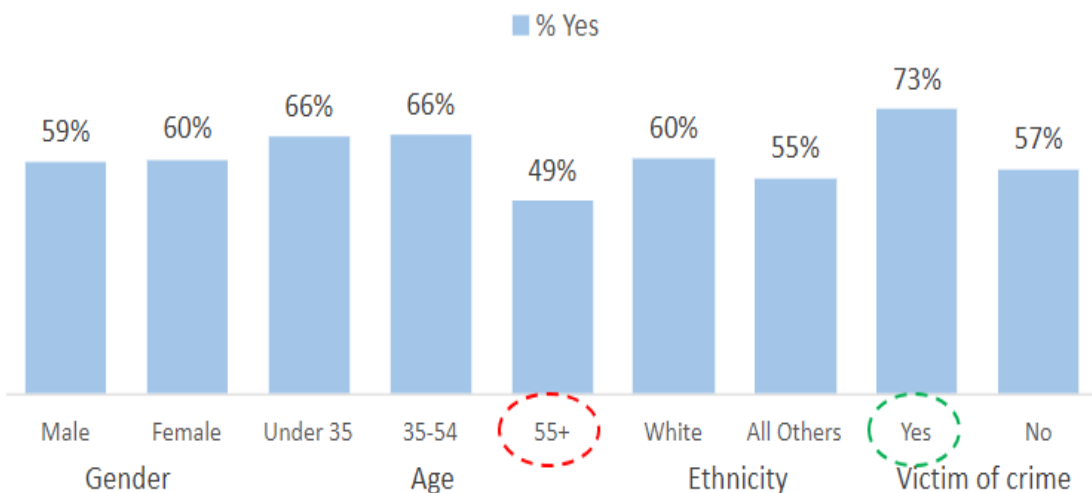


Figure 16 Awareness of Online Services - demographic breakdown

Increasing awareness of online services is important to provide the public with a range of contact options for non-urgent matters and to help reduce some demand on the call centres in Essex Police. Recent analysis tells us that the patience times of callers is on average over five minutes before they will abandon, which is positive insofar as it is outside the five-minute target time the force seeks to achieve.

Rapid Video Response (RVR) performance

Essex Police introduced Rapid Video Response in March 2023 as an alternative method for responding to domestic abuse incidents of a lower response priority. Evidence from other forces shows that RVR can provide a better experience for victims and a quicker response leading to greater victim support for the investigation.

The six months prior to the introduction of RVR were compared to the six months post implementation. The data showed a reduction in average time to attend Appointment, Priority and Scheduled Domestic Abuse incidents:

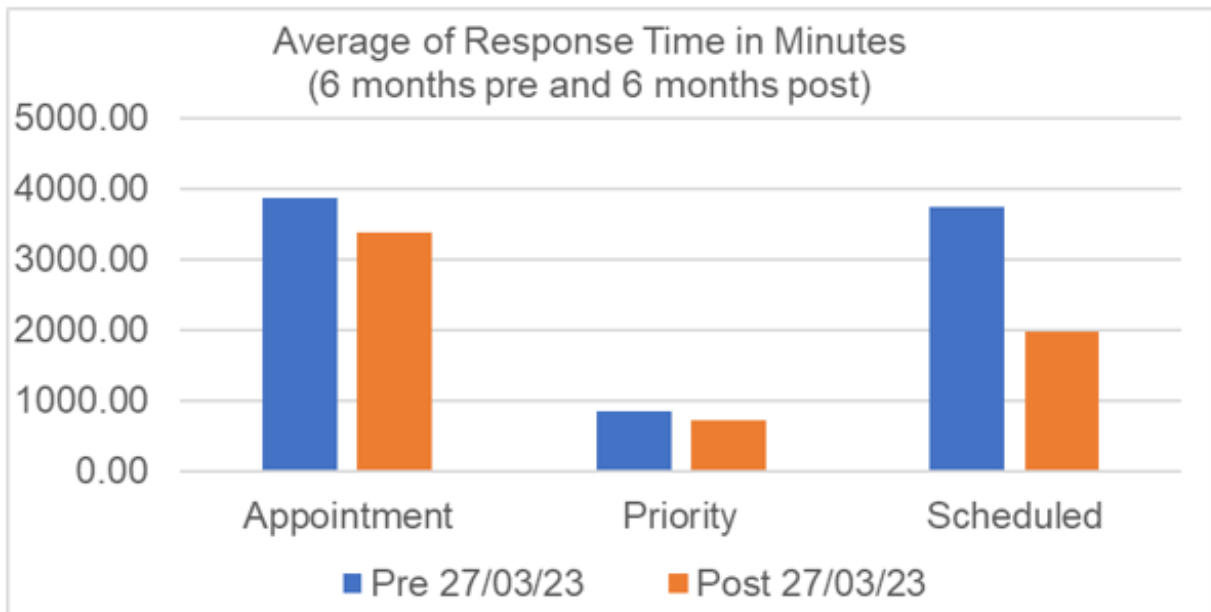


Figure 21 Average response to DA incidents

The average time spent dealing with an incident at scene (or via RVR) has also showed a decrease for Appointment, Priority and Scheduled incidents in the 6 months post the RVR implementation.

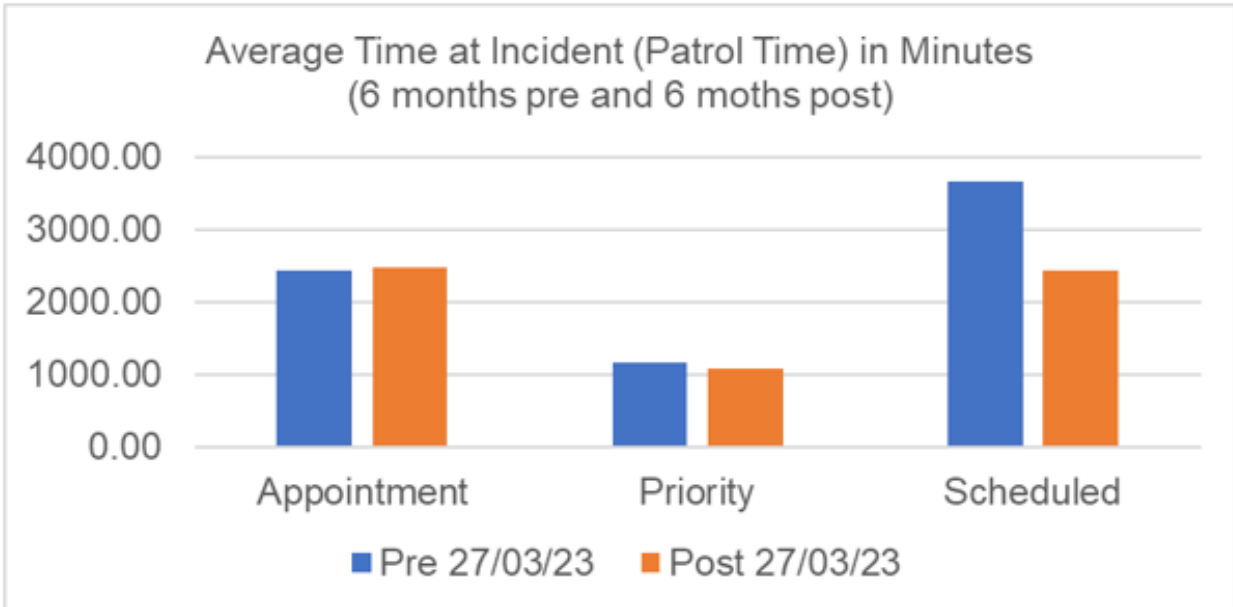


Figure 22 Average time at a DA incident

The average of time an incident is open (time active) decreased for Priority and Scheduled incidents since RVR implementation.

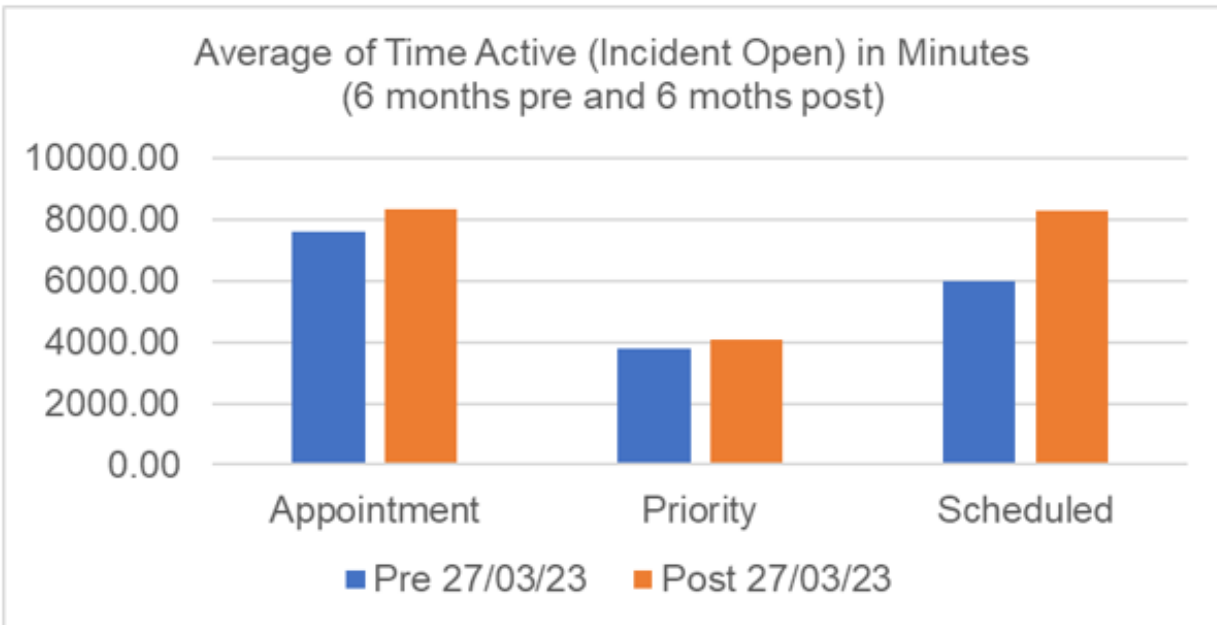


Figure 23 Average time DA incident open

This early trend data suggesting that RVR has been beneficial in terms of a reduction in time spent responding to lower priority DA incidents with the biggest improvement for Scheduled and Priority incidents overall.

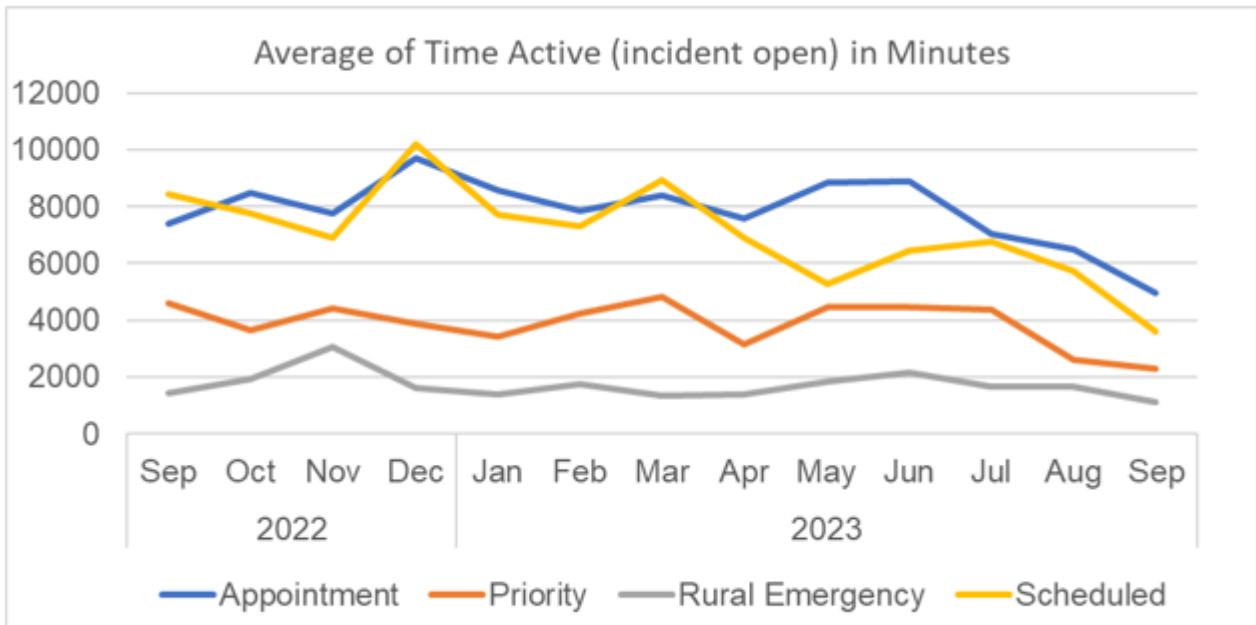


Figure 24 Comparison of time active for DA incidents

6.0 Implications (Issues)

Reflecting our own self-assessment, the HMICFRS PEEL 21/22 assessment identified the following Areas for Improvement:

AFI 3 - The Force needs to improve the time it takes to respond to non-emergency public calls for service and reduce the abandonment rate and wait times.

AFI 4 - The Force needs to make sure that repeat callers are routinely identified.

AFI 5 - The Force needs to make sure that call takers give appropriate advice on crime prevention *[Note: Following a visit from HMICFRS in October this has been closed]*.

AFI 6 - The Force needs to do more to ensure that routine calls for service are accurately assessed and prioritised and any delays in response are kept to acceptable levels.

Plans are in place to deliver the above AFIs. The impact of not delivering would result in further scrutiny by HMICFRS and more importantly, would negatively impact on the public and victims of crime. Progress needs to be demonstrated, or there is a risk of being placed into special measures. The AFI plan is under constant review to ensure that any further action is undertaken and driven through the command immediately. As noted in the previous section, progress is monitored through the Deputy Chief Constable's STAR Chamber, and we anticipate the AFIs being discharged at the point of the next full PEEL inspection in 2024/25.

The National Contact Management Strategy sets out several strategic assumptions which include:

- Contact will continue to rise
- Contact will continue to be complex and will increase in complexity
- Contact management staff will continue to spend increasing time resolving contact
- Resolving complex contact will require increasing emphasis on partnership working and skills mix
- Technology will continue to evolve and provide new means to contact the police service and the public will continue to expect a choice of contact channels for key services
- Resources for policing will continue to remain constrained
- Contact management will continue to be a key enabler for overall police service delivery

Contact Management Command (CMC) represents the gateway to policing services, whether that be on a phone, in a police station enquiry office or online; it is how members of the public seek policing services. Our vision is to ensure Contact Management Command is enabling Essex Police to manage all contact in a way that is consistent and that appropriately meets the needs of the individual.

If we do not deliver this, we lose the trust of the public and deliver a poor service. In turn, this would attract scrutiny from outside agencies and governing bodies of policing.

Our plan is to help people, keep them safe and catch criminals. To do this, we need to reflect on our processes and procedures to deliver the service expected of us by the public.

Budget management has become increasingly important for the command and the force and will continue to do so as it moves forward into the Target Operating Model. Ensuring effective resourcing within budget constraints can prove difficult given the experience of the workforce and the target answer times for both 999 and 101 calls.

6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

This has not changed from the previous report. The April update was reviewed. The nature of the work within the Force Control Room and the Resolution Centre touches upon all seven priorities within the Police and Crime Plan (Extension 2020-2021) but in particular:

Priority 1 – More local, visible, and accessible policing

We are striving to be more accessible, and to 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.

Priority 2 – Cracking down on anti-social behaviour

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 (Anti-Social Behaviour) so it can be thoroughly investigated. We also accept reports of ASB via our online reporting system on our website.

Underpinning all our public contact, we are putting the victims at 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.

Contact Management Command has set out their own Force Contact Strategy for 2023 – 2027; this has been written in conjunction with the Police and Crime Plan Priorities, The Essex Police Force Plan and the NPCC National Strategy. The Contact Management Strategy has been launched to deliver the force plan in areas of force culture; data; technology; training and tutoring; standards of service; supportive management; partnership; and community. All contact channels will be brought together in one place to professionalise and maximise the effectiveness of the service. The plan seeks to be data led, victim focussed and empowers staff to ensure a consistent, reassuring, personalised, effective response. This will ensure the victim's journey is explained, expectations are set, and appropriate contact is maintained.

6.2 Demand

The detail of demand and changes in the demand are shown in section 5. However, some highlights show that:

- From 1st January 2022, policing has received 17.2m 101 calls and 9.4m 999 calls
- 999 call volumes have been increasing at over 5% per annum since 2014
- 101 call volumes are stable
- For forces that are on Single Online Home (SOH), there have been 1.9m forms submitted, 198k of them with risk indication
- Demand is increasing across multiple channels
- Channel Shift has been minimal, more choice has created more and different demand

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

Currently there is a Strategic Risk, where various actions have been set to address and mitigate against the risk:

Reference- 2738 – Public Contact - CMC are the principle point of initial contact for Essex Police. If Essex Police is not able to manage calls for service appropriately, callers may seek contact through other channels or re-present their enquiry. Increasing demand for services, increasing failure demand, increasing public dissatisfaction, reducing policing performance and the ability to respond, and challenging public safety.

There are two Gold Groups which are running to support the command and achieve a reduction in risk.

- Call Handling Gold group chaired by ACC Nolan. This group currently meets bi – weekly. This sets short and longer-term actions across Contact Management Command and the force to support and ensure effective call handling.
- Public Contact Gold group chaired by DCC Prophet. This looks at wider issues such as the allocation of crime, information provided on our website provided about contact and internal culture.

6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

The journey of the victim is a focus point for the Force. The new Victim's Bill 2023 will govern the Force's delivery of the Victim's Code of Practice (VCOP), which highlights 12 victim rights. Contact Management Command translate victim letters into various languages to clearly indicate their rights under VCOP, Crime Allocation Rationale Assessment 500 (CARA 500) question set identifies victim vulnerability and their entitlement to enhanced rights, and victim letters signpost to victim support.

As a result of the Towards Excellence Conference, Contact Management Command are progressing the following actions:

- Conducting assessments of community groups on Essex to establish diverse contact requirements (co-creation solutions)
- Developing a community brief for contact – 5 Step appeal to distribute to KINs.

6.5 Health and Safety Implications

It is recognised within the command that repeated call types and particular incidents can cause trauma to the staff. This can be incredibly impactful to the staff member and their peers and may impact on performance and subsequent service delivery. The Trauma Tracker seeks to identify staff affected and ensure that provisions are put in place to support them and the wider command where necessary.

The current financial climate has significant health and safety implications particularly as staff seek additional overtime opportunities and secondary business interests. It is imperative that such activity is monitored for the wellbeing of the staff and to ensure they can provide a high level of service to the public.

The working environment of a call centre provides opportunity for rapid exposure to illnesses such as colds, flu and COVID. Vaccination clinics have been afforded to the staff with these taking place within the FCR. Other mitigation remains in place to prevent outbreaks. A deep clean of the FCR is planned for the winter.

7.0 Consultation/Engagement

C/Supt Stuart Hooper 42001564 – Head Contact Management
Supt Bonnie Moore 42001743 – Deputy Head of Contact Management

8.0 Actions for Improvement

Having received feedback from staff, an NPCC (National Police Chiefs Council) peer review and the HMICFRS inspection, the Contact Management operating model was reviewed, this resulted in the New Target Operating Model being devised by the appointed project team and the Command has been in consultation. Results of consultation are due to be published to allow for the movement of staff.

There has been an investment of 30 additional FCR staff to improve call taking resilience and deliver a high-quality service, and 15 PSSI (Performance Solving and Service Improvement) Sergeants who joined CMC in June 2022. This is a new role focusing on non-immediate DA (Domestic Abuse), high harm, concern for welfare incidents, and supporting staff development. The PSSI team are now well embedded and have been consistently working on the AFIs and supporting the FCR.

CMC has seen large scale recruitment and training, for both the 30 FCR staff and for significant vacancy gaps seen in both FCR and RC. FCR has met the resourcing numbers and internal selections have taken place for dispatchers to increase resilience and improve response allocation times which are at a two-year low.

In 2022 CMC successfully recruited 151 new members of staff, an increase of 81% from 2021. The impact is a prolonged period of experienced staff tutoring rather than contributing to business-as-usual tasks, in turn negatively impacting the grade of service (answer 90 percent off 999 calls in 10 seconds, and 90 percent of 101 calls in 5 minutes). Contact Management's percentage of establishment with less than one year's service is 19% in total. In FCR, this is 25%. By comparison, the overall percentage of the Force with less than 1 year's services is 9%.

A plan is in place to maintain staffing levels which is supported by the wider force and training to officers from the Operational Support Group (OSG) for resilience in both call taking and dispatch.

Operation Analogy has successfully diverted 101 demand from the FCR and RC Monday to Friday during office hours. This has resulted in less re-presenting and the public being able to access updates on their investigations.

Rapid Video Response (RVR) was soft launched in March 2023 and fully launched in August 2023. It has taken time to embed but has started to show the value in being able to offer the victim of DA a quicker service. Feedback from victim surveys has been excellent. Average wait time for attendance to scheduled DA incidents has significantly decreased.

There has been increased Blue Light Services engagement particularly between EEAST and ECFRS with a view to making improvements in the transfer of incidents between services.

Gold Groups run by ACC Nolan and DCC Prophet have provided a structured process to drive activity with regards to call handling and other issues that affect the command, ensuring a whole force response to the demand seen within the Contact environment.

There are now regular probationer training events to raise awareness of contact and failure demand.

Dedicated officers review repeat and persistent callers and work with partners to identify vulnerability and support opportunities and reduce the necessity for ongoing contact with the police throughout the command.

Call scripting for concern for welfare incidents has been added to STORM to support the call taker. A dip sampling process is in place to ensure this is embedded as practice.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

Performance is continuously under review to ensure that we deliver the best service we can to the public of Essex when they contact us. This includes learning from both poor and good performance.

We are working on the most efficient ways of working via innovative technology or workforce management to ensure gains are made with regards to performance.

- The delivery of the new Motorola Integrated Communications Control System (ICCS) for the command is underway with the system having been provided for testing. Training has been undertaken and most of the command have been trained. Full installation and roll out will be end of November/beginning of December when the system will go live.
- There is a continuous recruitment and training pipeline in CMC with vacancy gaps improving. Turnover will continue but there is a defined model with plans in place to maintain the establishment. There is a challenge providing consistent training and tutoring to cover both the recruitment uplift and normal movement, however, this is under review to ensure staff are supported. Plans have been progressed to provide Police Staff with a career pathway to support progression and development.
- Rapid Video Response will be reviewed to consider wider utilisation across a variety of crime types, rather than just DA.
- We are continuing the development of the use of BT SMS to update and support victims.
- Better multi-agency communication is being explored via Multi Agency Instant Transfer (MAIT), an alternative number is currently being used to reduce the need for 999 calls between police and other agencies. MAIT will provide instant transfer of an incident meaning less call demand between agencies and all information being provided to bridge an identified communication gap when updating via the phone.
- Procurement is in progress for the new Workforce Management Tool.

- Exploring a new and more effective and intelligent IVR (Interactive Voice Response) to help transfer the public to the relevant investigating officer or department more quickly rather than generating a 101 call.
- Work is being done across the force, to make more resources deployable through Op Clarity (Task not Ask) to improve response times. The CMC STRA (Strategic Risk Assessment) will deep dive into how to better manage incident response and set out what is required for the force capability to respond to incidents.
- The “Help us help you” media campaign will continue to educate the public on the best channels of communication to the police, and signpost to other agencies where necessary, but we know the media work has negligible impact on changing the citizen behaviour.
- National developments with SOH will see other aspects of policing brought online with Essex being asked to take on further areas such as Sexual Offences and Missing People.
- National work to assist with the development of the 999 and 101 system to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose and future proofed.
- Engagement with NCRS and the NSIR re-write. It is recognised that NSIR is outdated and does not incorporate the growing online methods of reporting. Supporting the re-write will help us to support our staff, the organisation and ultimately the public.
- Right Care Right Person – Essex police has now introduced some of the aspects of RCRP and will incorporate all in the coming months. Work will be completed to understand the impact this will have on the CMC and any efficiencies that can be shared with our staff. Perceived impact and results from other forces suggest that other agencies will absorb demand better suited to their skill sets to allow police to deal with crime and emergencies.
- The Target Operating Model (TOM)- there are significant milestones which need to be achieved- ‘Go live’ is planned for 2nd April 2024.