

Performance and Resources Scrutiny Programme 2024

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 the Contact Management Command. This includes call handling for emergency and non-emergency incidents, as well as the effectiveness of our response to high harm crime and compliance with corresponding policies.

2.0 Recommendations

This report is for noting, no decisions are sought.

3.0 Executive Summary

The report focuses on the performance and work in the period from April to June 2024. Where available, data is provided from 2016 to show trends over time, but it should be noted that this is not available for all metrics, and some of the national data is not available for the full period.

The performance indicators referenced in the previous report remain unchanged. There is a national target of 10 seconds to answer 999 calls. The grade of service (GOS) referenced in the report refers to the percentage of calls answered within the 10 seconds. Essex Police maintains an aspiration to answer 101 calls in 5 minutes or less and reduce the abandonment rate.

The performance section of this report details positive progress against key metrics; 999 call handling performance remains consistent despite an increase in call volume. The data details an increase in longest wait time, however, this can be attributed to a technical issue.

Whilst this reporting period shows an increase in average wait time and abandonment rate for 101 calls, this was expected due to removal of the triage process and implementation of the TOM. Work is being undertaken to improve call handling performance and reduce abandonment rates for 101.

The report details the formal areas for improvement as outlined by the HMICFRS, along with audited risks for the Command; this includes plans for mitigation and progress in terms of improvements in performance, and/or mitigation of risk.

4.0 Introduction/Background

This period reports on the first three months following the launch of the Contact Management Target Operating Model (TOM). All primary contact is now received into the Contact Centre, which will enhance the service to the public and our partners as the benefits of the model continue to be realised.

During a previous inspection by HMICFRS, the command was given four areas of improvement, of which two of these have since been discharged. The two remaining areas are as follows:

- Non-emergency call handling wait times and abandonment rates
- Our handling and response to emergency incidents

These AFIs continue to have an amber status which is governed through the DCC star chamber. The implementation of the TOM has seen a slight increase in wait times and abandonment rates for non-emergency calls, whilst not unexpected the force is keen to see a period of stability within these areas.

5.0 Current Work and Performance

The TOM launched on 2nd April 2024 and the command has been working on some key workstreams.

- The command has provided coaching for our switchboard team to support them in the transition to the TOM model and reduce the number of non-emergency calls into the contact centre where appropriate.
- Focussed work to review 101 call lengths and offer support and coaching to the teams and contact centre inbox management.
- ICCS (Incident Command and Control System) development is a key workstream being explored, including testing of additional benefits which can be implemented on the ICCS system, such as the call back function. This function should reduce 101 wait times and reduce the abandonment rate.
- Upskill training has been completed for all colleagues (currently in the workplace) who previously held a role in the resolution centre to provide them with the skill set to handle 999 emergency calls, increasing our pool of call takers.
- Upskill training has commenced and remains ongoing for officers who support the command under Op Ternary (business continuity) to strengthen the command’s resilience.
- The command is currently training a new intake of twenty contact centre officers and will be welcoming two further new intakes in August and September (anticipated as approximately sixty combined) which will enhance our resourcing position and provide additional staff members in the contact centre.

Call Handling

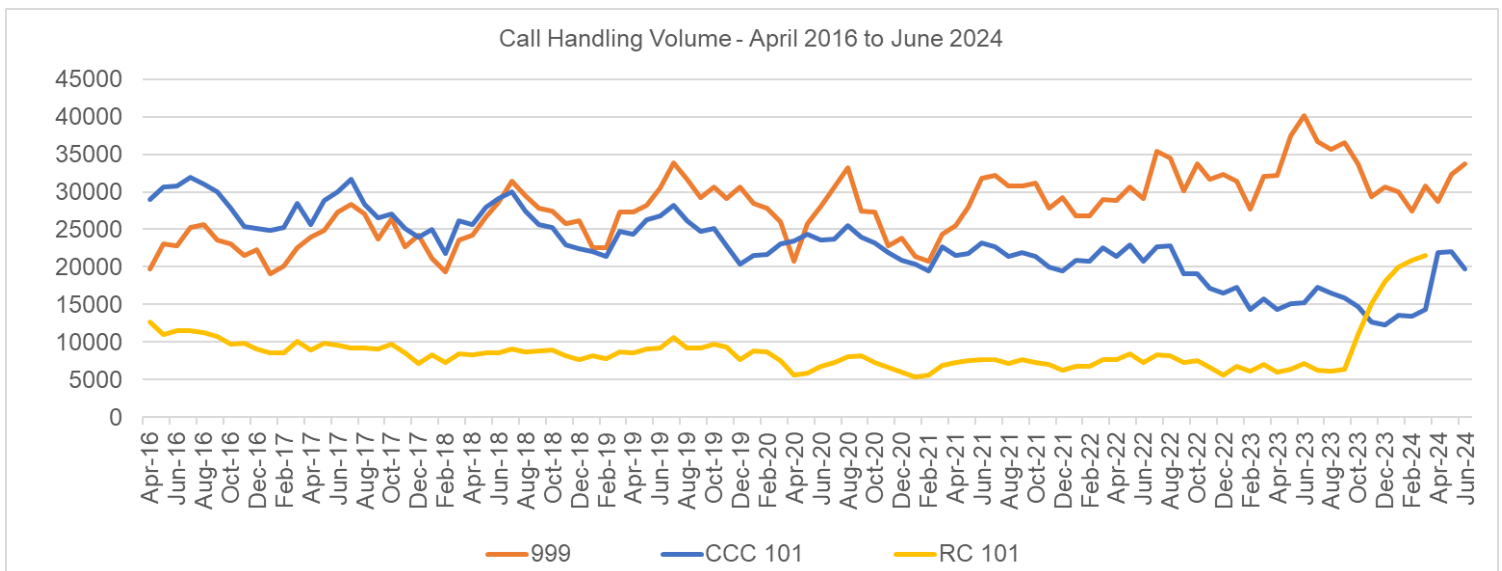


Figure 1 – Call Handling Volume

Figure 1 shows the calls taken in the Contact and Control Centre between April 2016 and June 2024. In line with the TOM implementation, the RC Triage line was removed as of 2nd April 2024, showing an increase in CCC 101 calls from April 2024 through to June 2024. 999 call volumes have seen an increase since the last quarter.

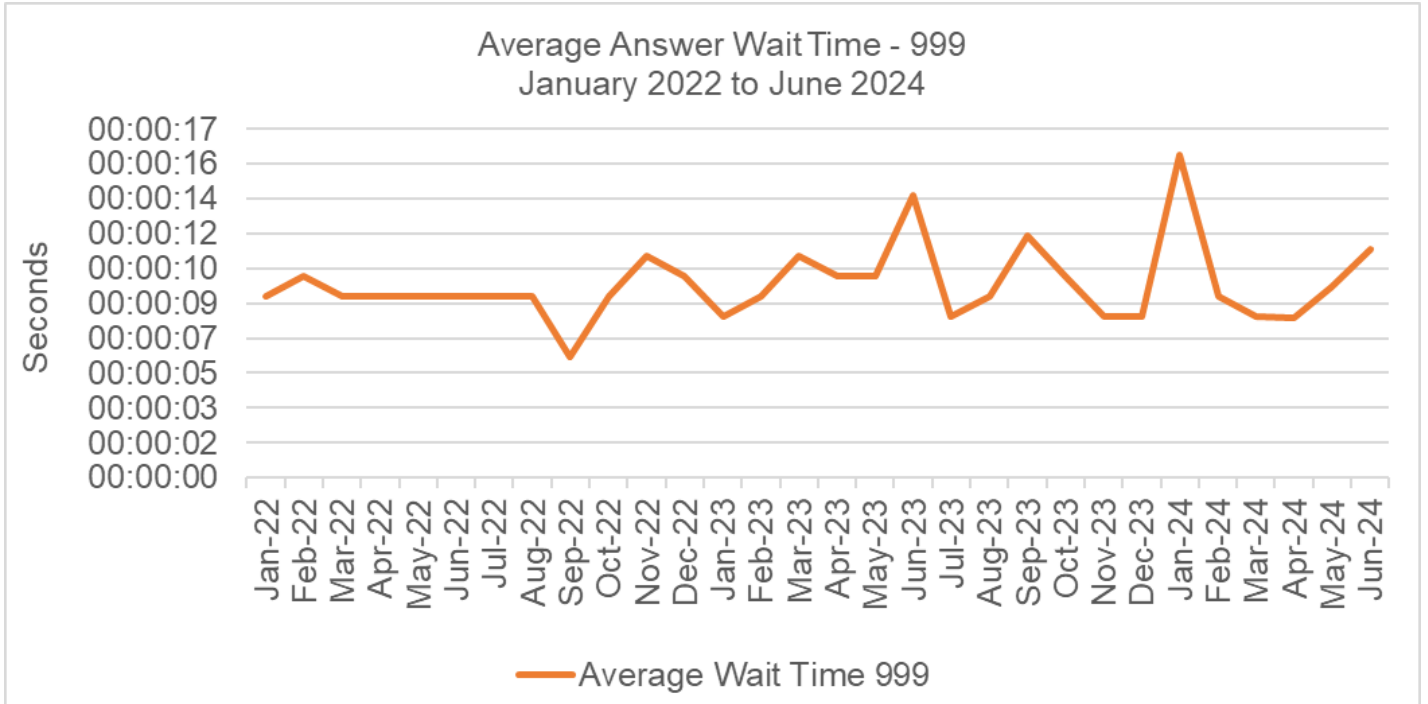


Figure 2 – Average answer wait time FCR 999

The average time to answer a call compared to the last quarter has seen a decrease in wait time, the longest average wait in this quarter being in June at 11 seconds. This remains within tolerance of the national service level agreement. The shortest average wait time remains in September 2022 at 6 seconds.

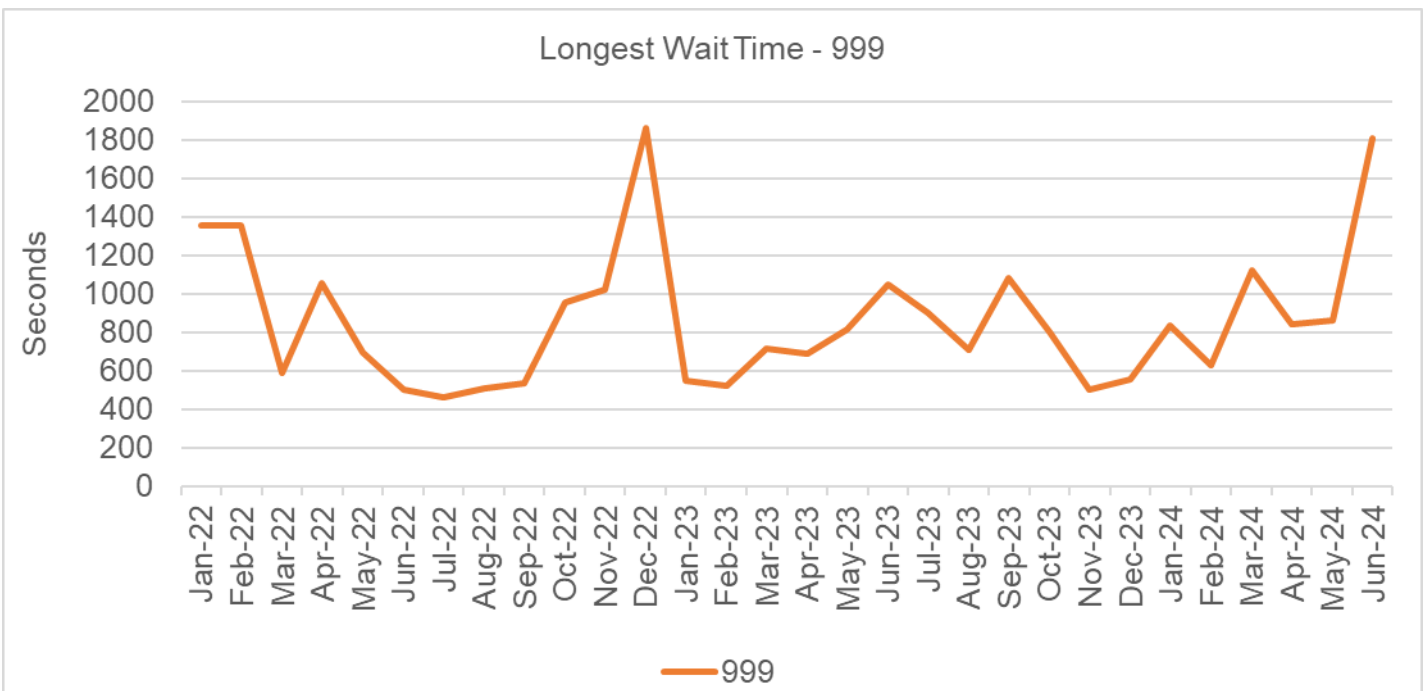


Figure 3 – Longest wait time 999

In the relevant quarter there has seen a moderate increase in the wait time for June 2024. This increase in longest wait time can be attributed to a significant ICCS telephony system outage on 26th June 2024 which caused a disruption in service. Therefore, it is expected this measure will show a decrease in the next reporting period.

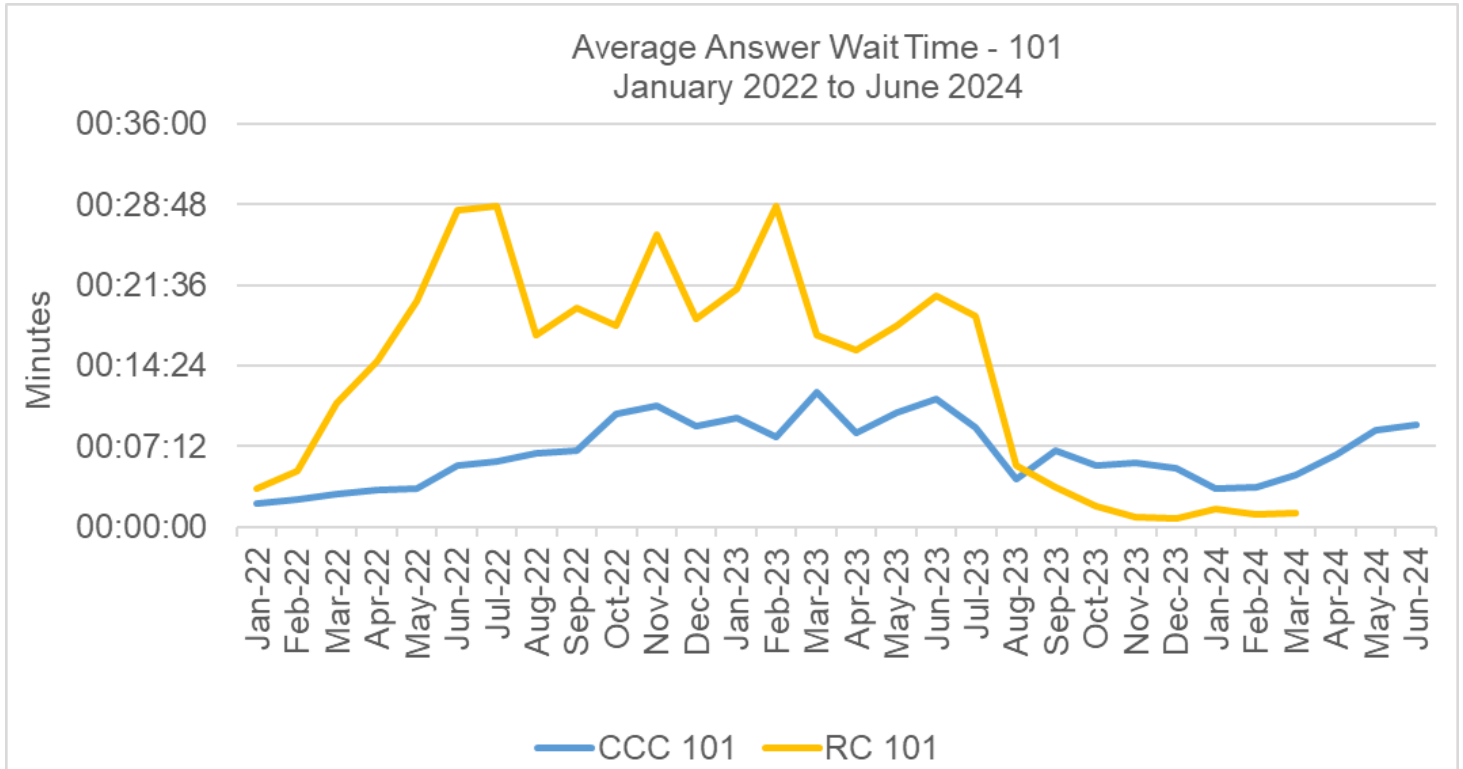


Figure 4 – Average answer wait time 101

The longest average wait time for CCC 101 calls between January 2022 and June 2024 was 12 minutes 4 seconds, which occurred in March 2023. The shortest average wait time in this period was 2 minutes 2 seconds in January 2022. There has been an increase in wait times for CCC 101 in this quarter. June 2024 has increased to 9 minutes 4 seconds. This increase is likely to be attributed to the removal of the RC triage line, implementation of the TOM and some technical issues experienced with the ICCS telephony system.

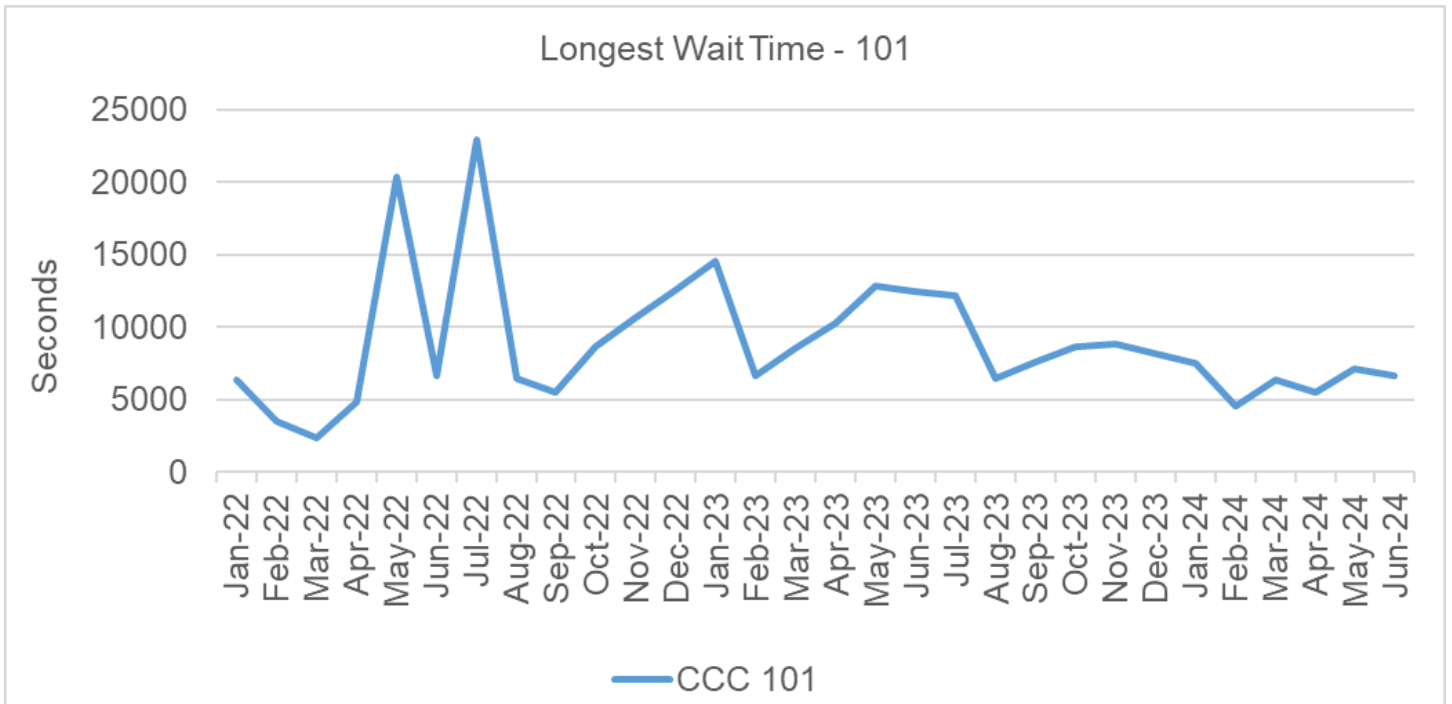


Figure 5 – Longest wait time 101

The longest wait time for CCC 101 calls between January 2022 and June 2024 was in July 2022 with 22,961 seconds (382 minutes). The lowest in this period was March 2022 with 2,386 seconds (39 minutes). May 2024 had the longest wait time in this quarter at 7,116 seconds (118 minutes).

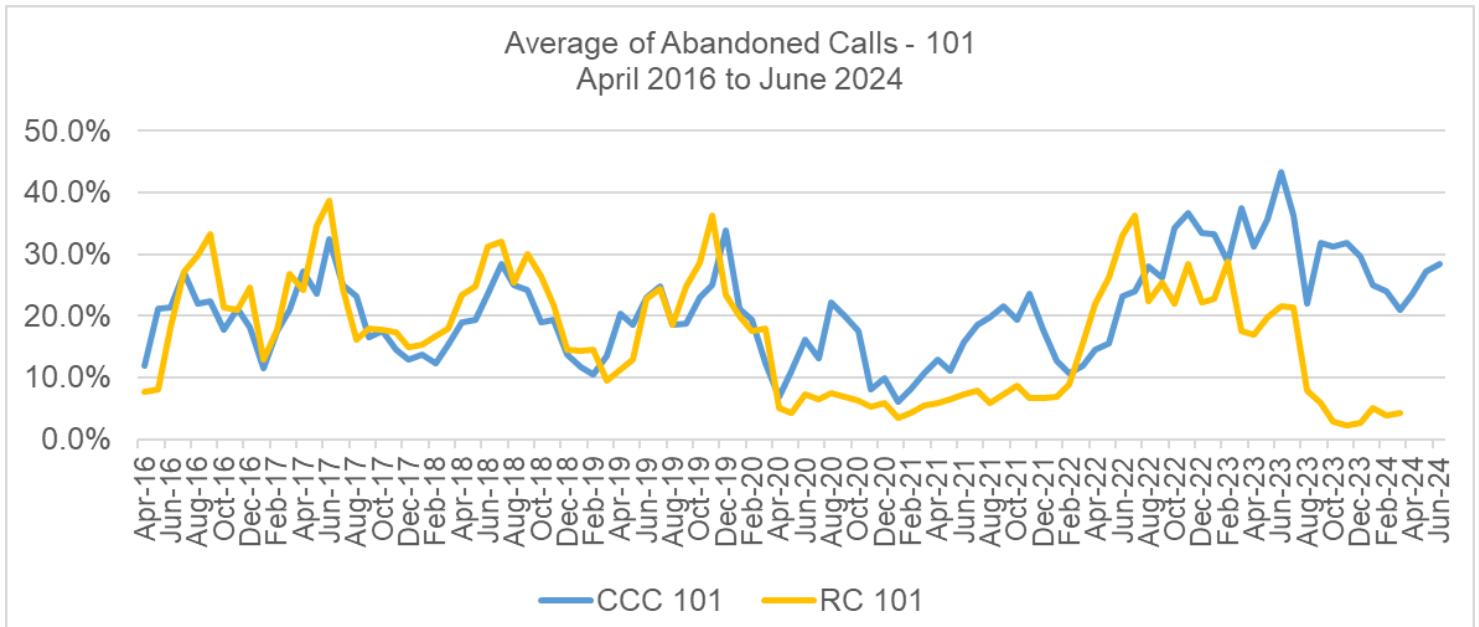


Figure 6 – Abandoned Calls 101

The above chart shows calls terminated after they have reached the CCC and previously RC. Contact Management Command 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. There is a clear correlation shown

between the 101 wait time and abandonment rate whilst the triage process was implemented. This quarter has seen an increase in CCC 101 abandoned calls.

The RC triage process which was removed as part of the TOM implementation was never intended to be a long-term solution to the 101 wait time due to the additional processes required for the victim. The command is proactively working to provide additional support and coaching to the switchboard team to reduce the number of non-emergency calls being transferred unnecessarily to the contact centre. The command continues to promote online reporting via our digital channels including single online home and live chat to support the public of Essex. Live chat became a 24 hour service on 1st July 2024.

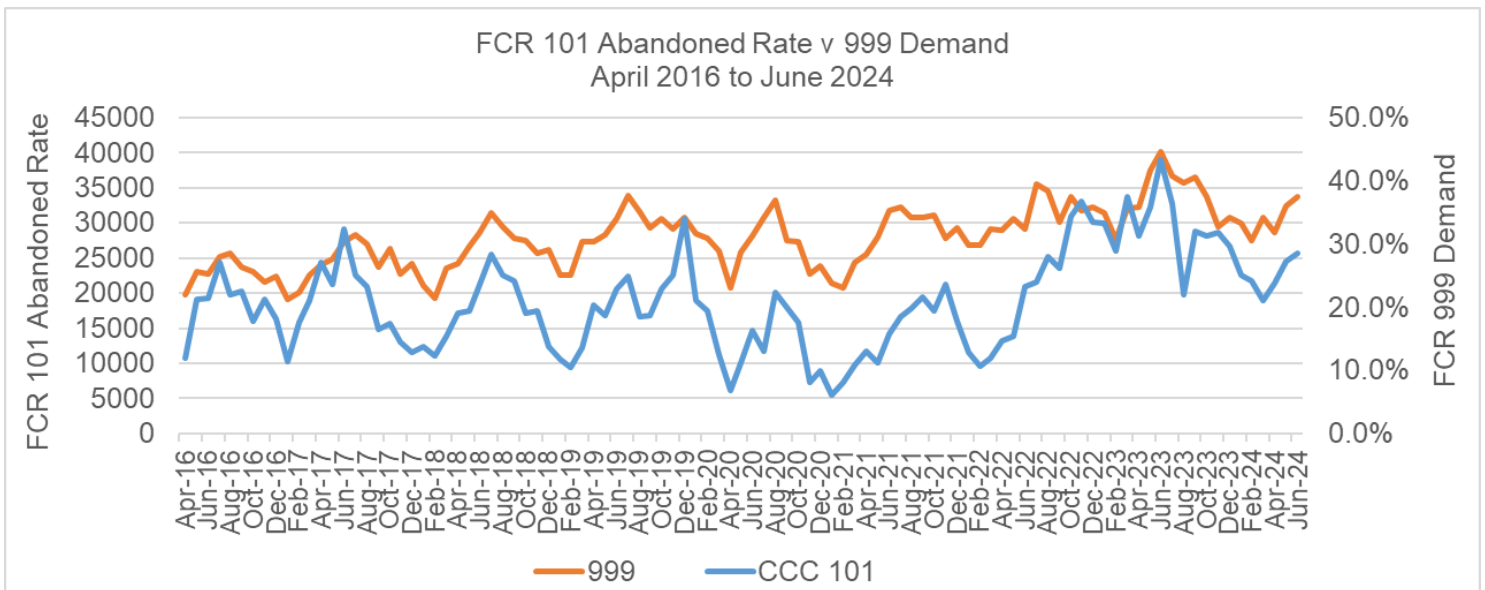


Figure 7 – FCR 101 abandoned rate v 999 demand

The above chart shows the 101 abandoned rates when compared to the 999 call demand from April 2016 to June 2024. This quarter has seen an increased abandoned rate for CCC 101 and 999 call demand. The increase in 999 call demand impacts on 101 performance.

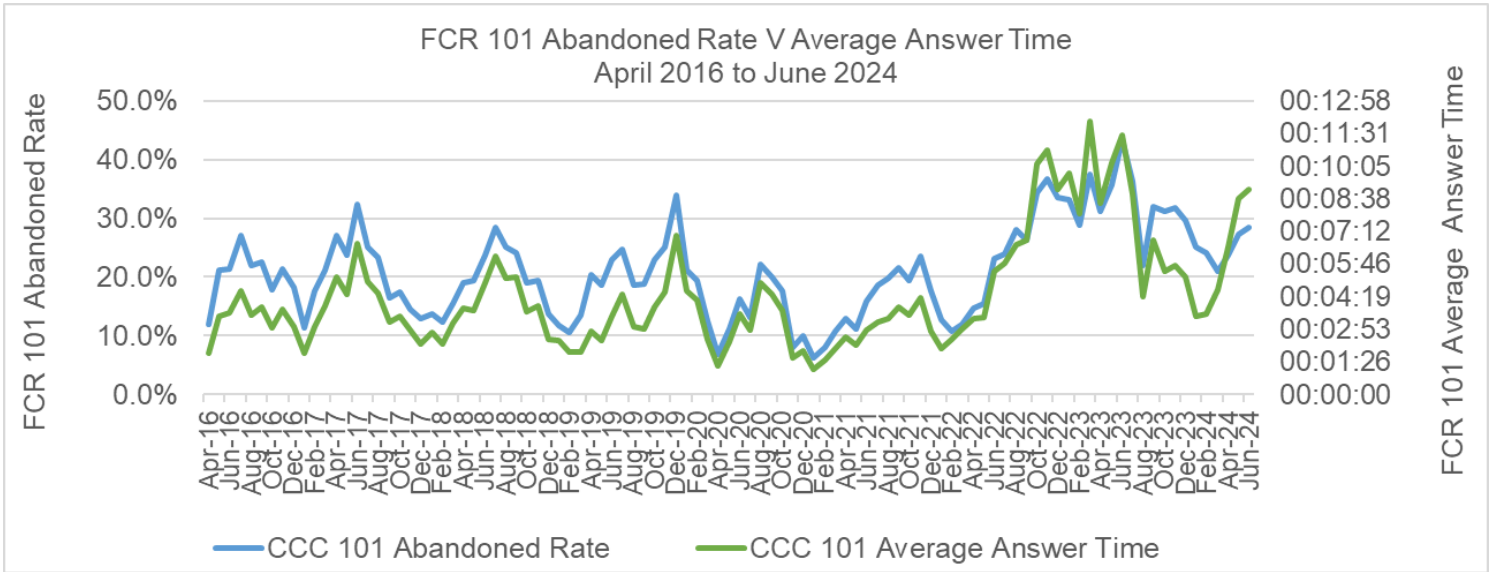


Figure 8 – FCR 101 abandoned rate compared to FCR 101 answer time

The above chart shows the CCC 101 abandoned rate compared to the average answer time. In March 2023, the average answer time and abandonment rate were the highest they have been in the last 7 years at 12 minutes 4 seconds wait time and 37.5% of calls abandoned. This significantly dropped in August 2023, continuing to drop through to March 2024. This quarter has seen an increase, May 2024 being the highest of the 3 months at 9 minutes 4 seconds, with an abandonment rate of 28.5%.

101 calls may be abandoned following the IVR message which provides information and advice in relation to reporting online which is a positive channel shift.

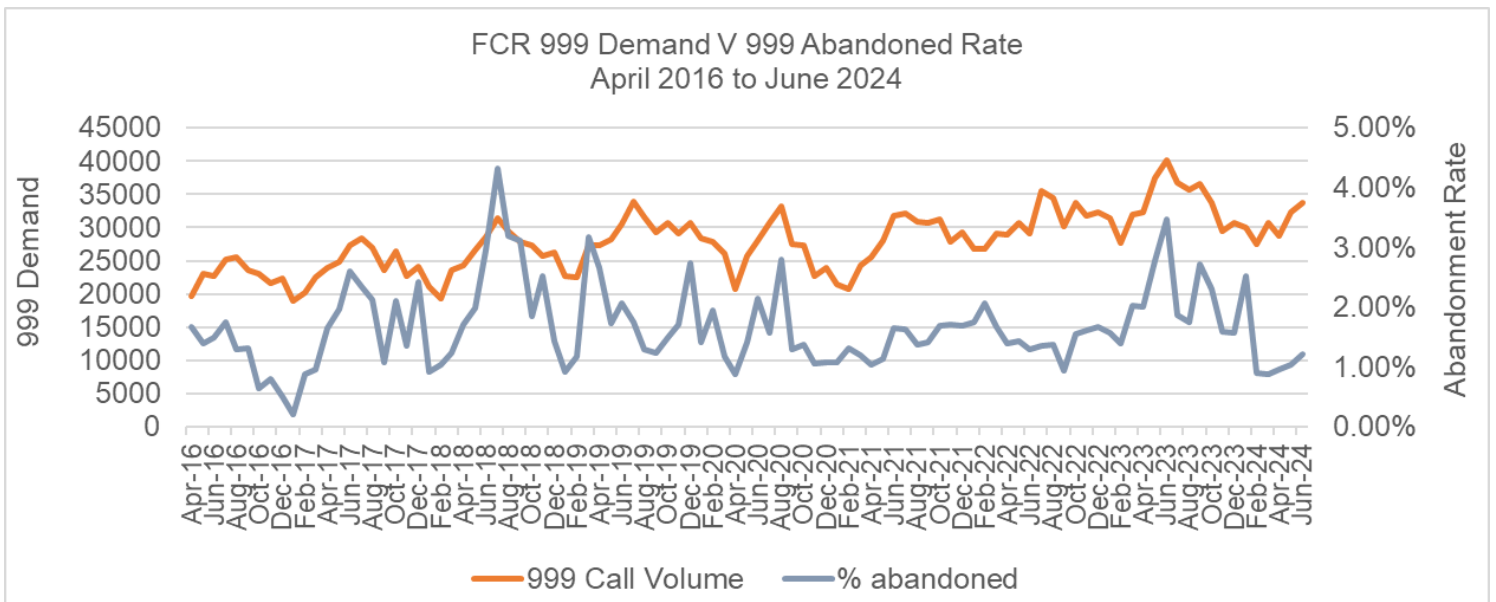


Figure 9 – FCR 999 demand v 999 abandoned rate

The above chart shows the 999 demand compared to the abandonment rate. The time to answer an emergency 999 call is less than 10 seconds, so abandoned calls

are rare. The chart shows an increase in 999 call volume and a slight increase in abandoned calls.

National Comparisons

| Median Answer Time | | | Mean Answer Time | | |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Month | Position | Median answer time | Month | Position | Mean answer time |
| Jan-22 | 18th/44 | 6 | Jan-22 | 25th/44 | 12.06 |
| Feb-22 | 18th/44 | 6 | Feb-22 | 12th/44 | 13.2 |
| Mar-22 | 16th/44 | 6 | Mar-22 | 17th/44 | 11.9 |
| Apr-22 | 16th/44 | 6 | Apr-22 | 19th/44 | 11.9 |
| May-22 | 16th/44 | 6 | May-22 | 18th/44 | 12.1 |
| Jun-22 | 19th/44 | 6 | Jun-22 | 17th/44 | 11.7 |
| Jul-22 | 18th/44 | 6 | Jul-22 | 11th/44 | 11.4 |
| Aug-22 | 21st/44 | 6 | Aug-22 | 16th/44 | 12 |
| Sep-22 | 21st/44 | 6 | Sep-22 | 11th/44 | 9.6 |
| Oct-22 | 22nd/44 | 6 | Oct-22 | 20th/44 | 11.7 |
| Nov-22 | 22nd/44 | 6 | Nov-22 | 28th/44 | 13.7 |
| Dec-22 | 23rd/44 | 6 | Dec-22 | 25th/44 | 11.9 |
| Jan-23 | 25th/44 | 6 | Jan-23 | 28th/44 | 11.08 |
| Feb-23 | 26th/44 | 6 | Feb-23 | 26th/444 | 11.79 |
| Mar-23 | 24th/44 | 6 | Mar-23 | 28th/44 | 14.26 |
| Apr-23 | 24th/44 | 6 | Apr-23 | 29th/44 | 13.23 |
| May-23 | 25th/44 | 6 | May-23 | 28th/44 | 13.54 |
| Jun-23 | 22nd/44 | 6 | Jun-23 | 32nd/44 | 16.54 |
| Jul-23 | 22nd/44 | 6 | Jul-23 | 18th/44 | 11.67 |
| Aug-23 | 23rd/44 | 6 | Aug-23 | 25th/44 | 12.06 |
| Sep-23 | 23rd/44 | 6 | Sep-23 | 32nd/44 | 11.11 |
| Oct-23 | 26th/44 | 6 | Oct-23 | 31st/44 | 13.03 |
| Nov-23 | 29th/44 | 6 | Nov-23 | 32nd/44 | 11.11 |
| Dec-23 | 30th/44 | 6 | Dec-23 | 41st/44 | 12.85 |
| Jan-24 | 16th/44 | 5 | Jan-24 | 42nd/44 | 14.14 |
| Feb-24 | 5th/44 | 4 | Feb-24 | 41st/44 | 12.85 |
| Mar-24 | 5th/44 | 4 | Mar-24 | 41st/44 | 11.89 |
| Apr-24 | 5th/44 | 4 | Apr-24 | 38th/44 | 11.35 |
| May-24 | 6th/44 | 4 | May-24 | 40th/44 | 12.67 |
| Jun-24 | Not available | | Jun-24 | Not available | |

Figure 10 – 999 performance data, national position

Essex answering time, based on median, has been 6 seconds in every month until January 2024 where it has decreased to 5 seconds, and February to June even lower at 4 seconds.

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).

Technical challenges from the ICCS telephony system will have impacted on mean answer time.

Live Chat and Single Online Home

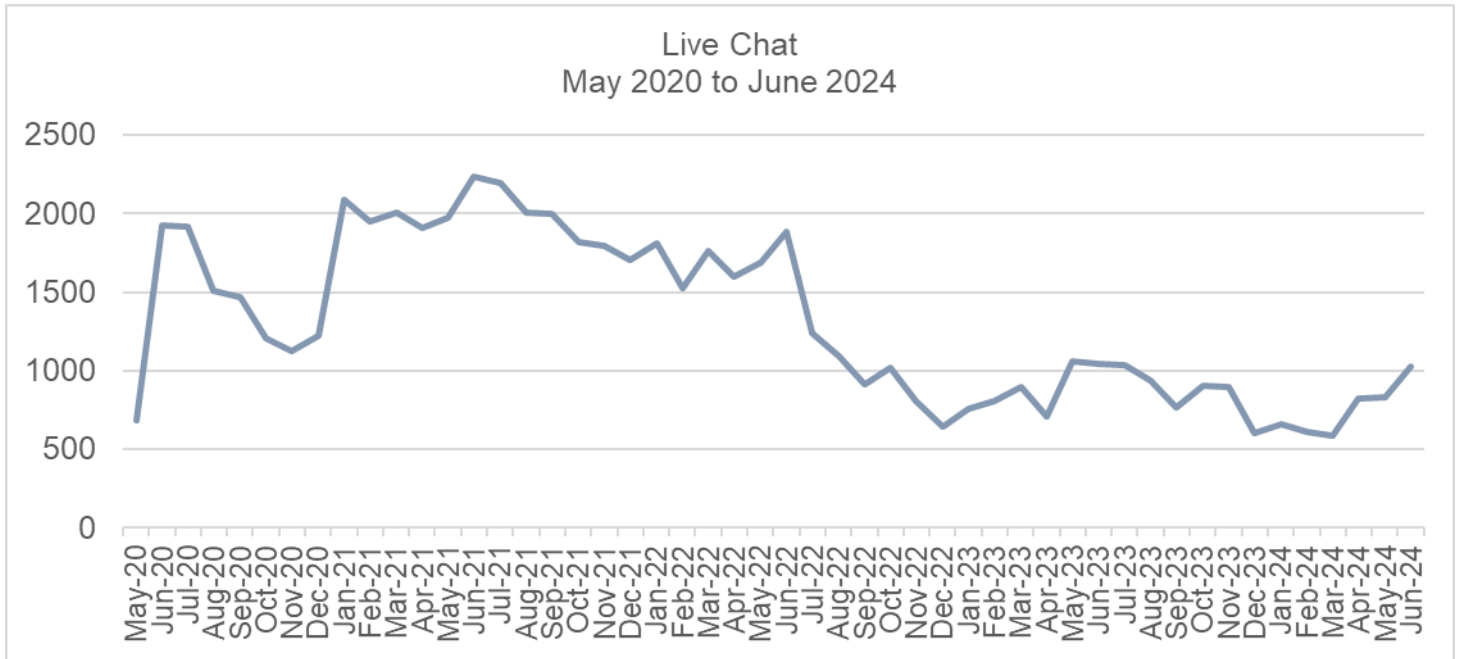


Figure 11 – Live chat volumes

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. This quarter has seen an increase month on month, June 2024 reaching 1,026, the highest volume since July 2023.

As part of the TOM model, on 1st July 2024 live chat availability was extended to 24/7 enabling the public to contact the police via the live chat facility at the time convenient to them, following a review of the provision.

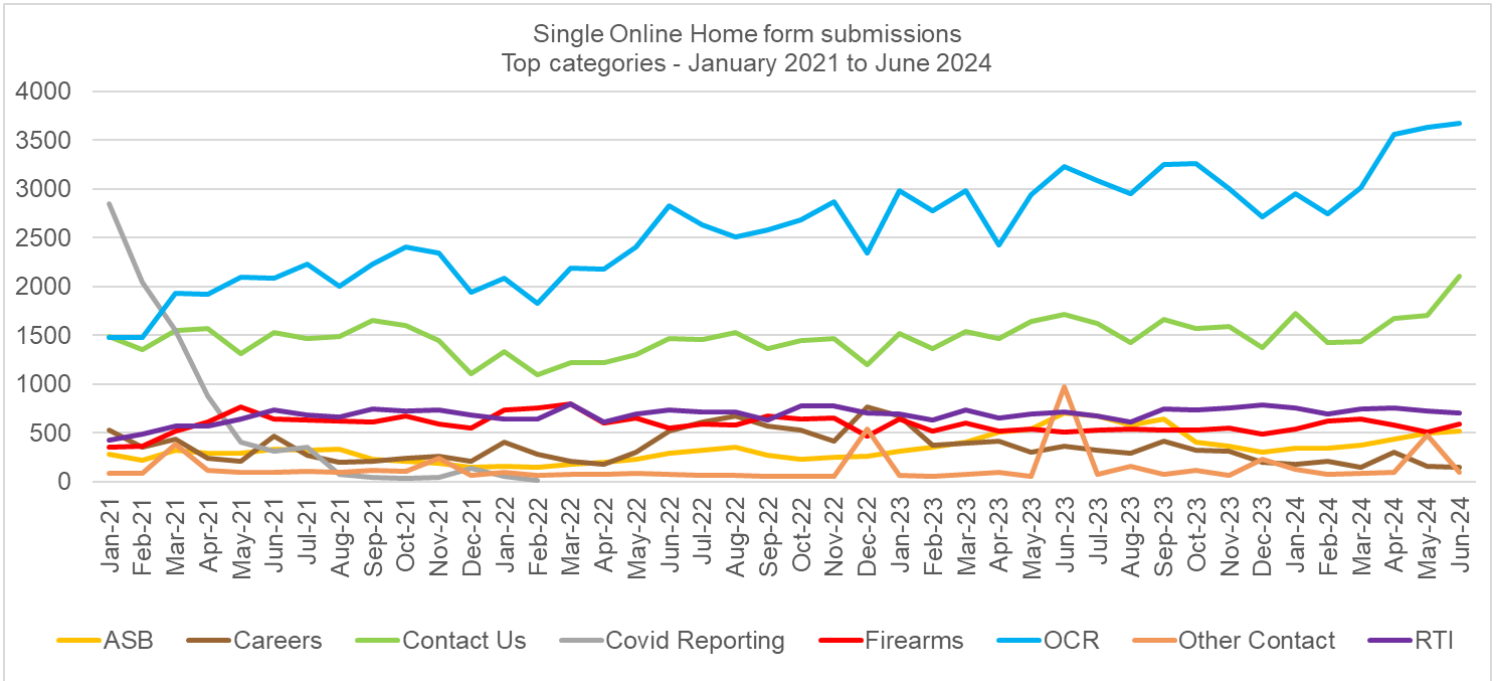


Figure 12 – Single Online Home form submission

Essex Police encourages the use of online contact channels. The above chart shows the number of Single Online Home submissions increasing, demonstrating the public are using the channel to contact us and report crime.

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.

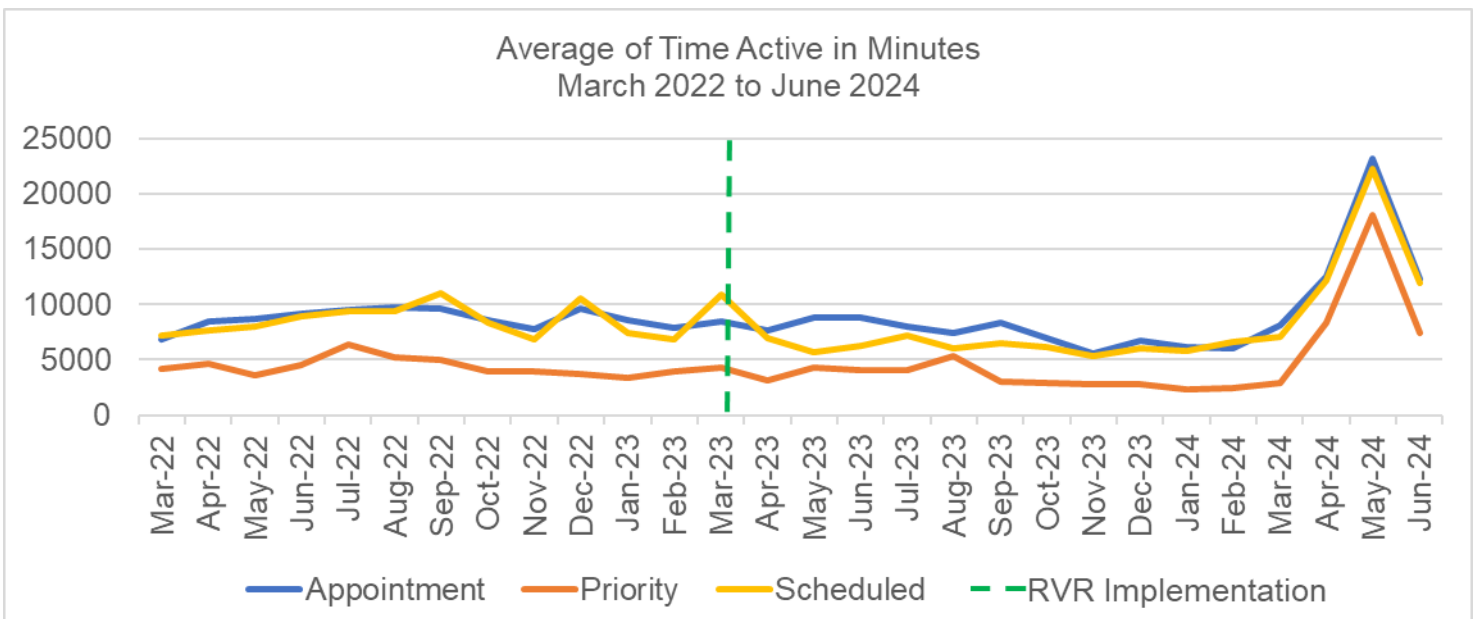


Figure 13 – Average time active in minutes

The average time an incident is open (time active) has shown a decreasing trend since the start of RVR on 27th March 2023. The last quarter has seen a significant increase in the time active. During the transition to the TOM model and the embedding of new processes the average age of incidents increased across all crime types. However, this has since returned to normal levels.

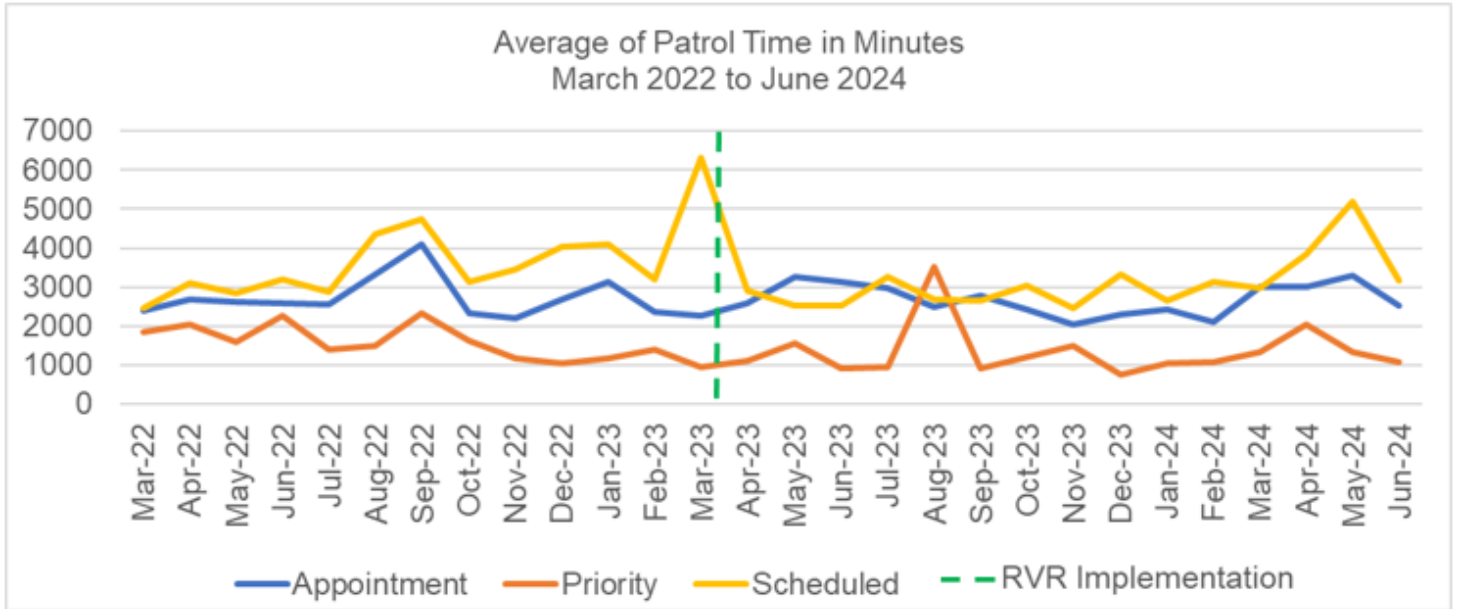


Figure 14 – Average of patrol time in minutes

The average patrol time has shown a decreasing trend over the last 2 years; scheduled showing the most change after the implementation of RVR. This quarter has seen an increase in all three priorities; however this is now decreasing.

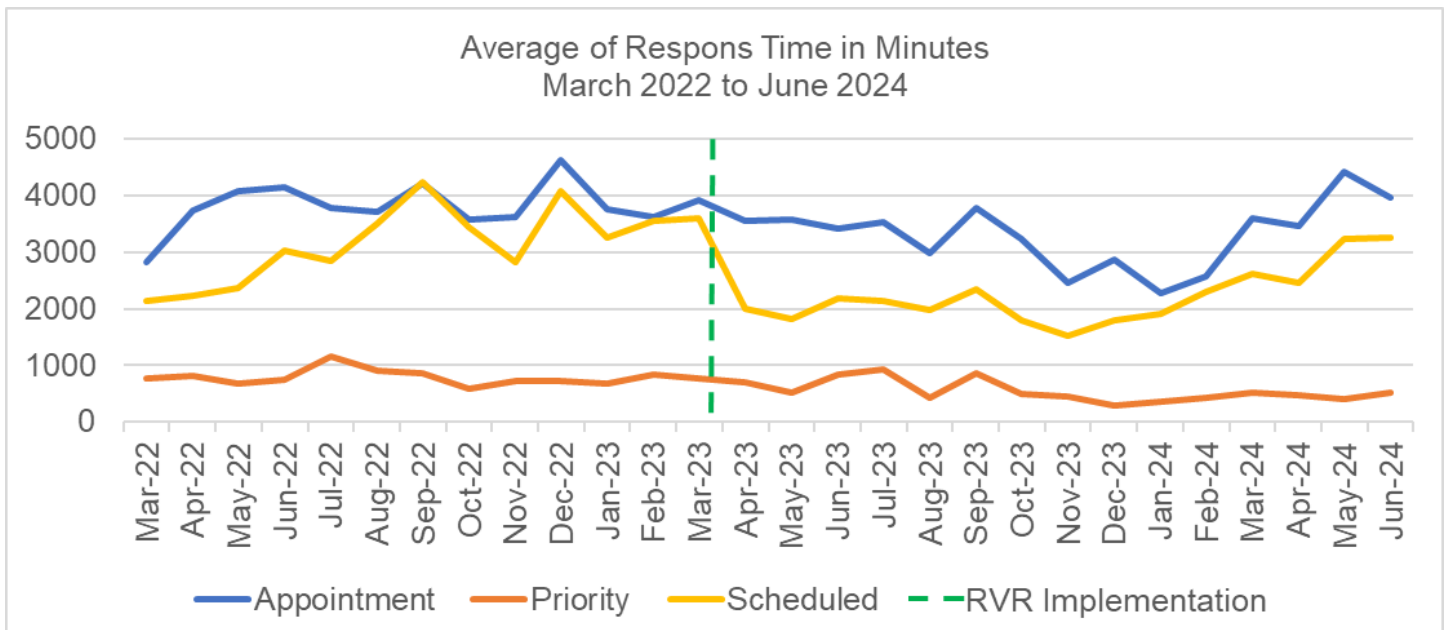


Figure 15 – Average response time in minutes

The average response times have seen a decreasing trend over the 2 years shown above with the most change showing after the implementation of RVR in March

2023. This quarter has seen an increase in response times which may be attributed to the TOM implementation. However, it is important to note the RVR team has taken on additional responsibilities in this quarter including disclosures under the domestic violence disclosure scheme, resilience support for call handling and quality assurance of investigations.

Response to High Harm Incidents

There are no changes in terms of attendance times or SLA in relation to high harm incidents.

Policy on High Harm Attendance

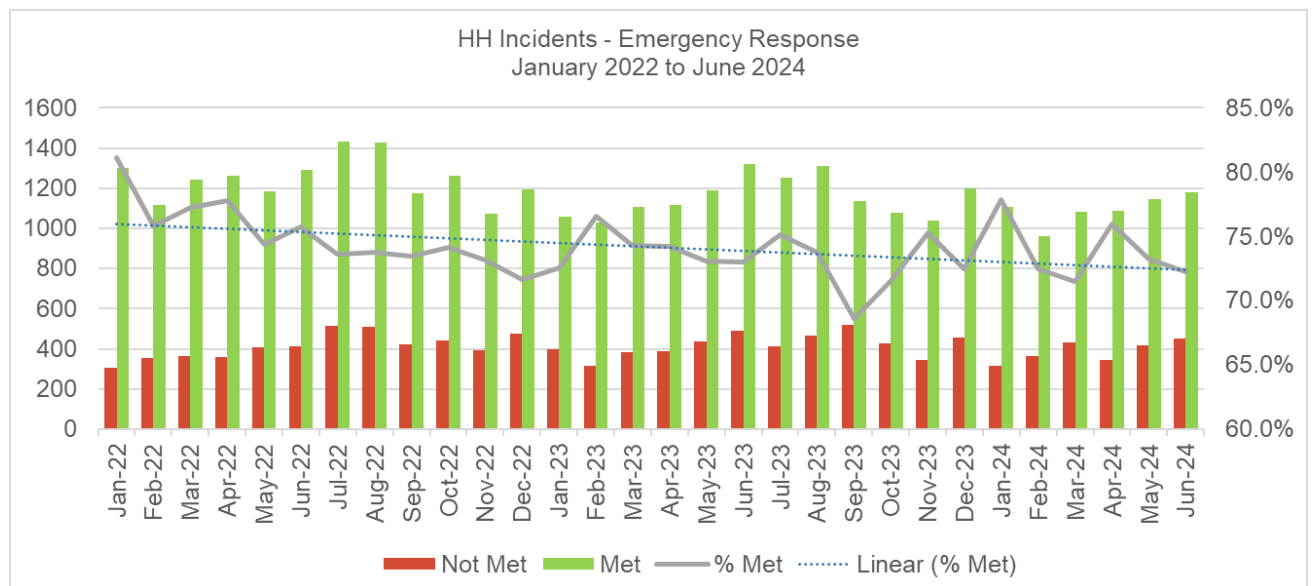


Figure 16 – High Harm incidents Emergency response

The proportion of emergency high harm incidents for which the response target was met reflects the overall emergency response rate. There is a gradual fall over time with a larger decrease at the start of 2024. In this quarter has seen a decrease from 77.9% met in January 2024 to 72.3% met in June 2024. Comparing June 2023 (73% met) and June 2024 (72.3% met) there has been a decrease of less than 1%pt.

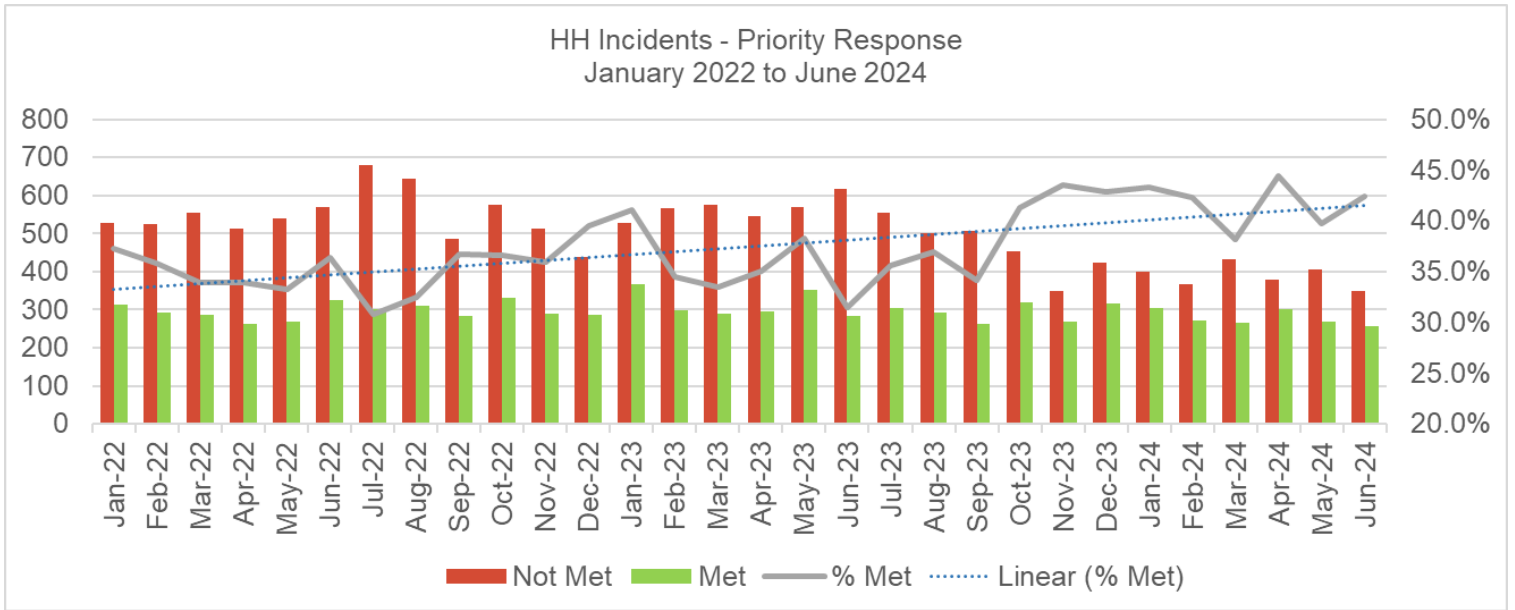


Figure 17 – High Harm incidents Priority response

June 2023 to June 2024 has seen a decrease in priority incidents. The overall percentage met has been increasing in line with the decrease in incidents. This quarter has seen an increase from 38.1% met in March 2024 to 44.4% met in April 2024, which is the highest we have seen over this period.

High harm response continues to be a focus for the force and Contact Management continues to ensure a collaborative problem solving approach with the Local Policing Areas and other commands. The command continues to robustly monitor availability of daily resources and the Learning and Development department have increased provision of response driver courses to enable an increase in response drivers across the county.

6.0 Implications (Issues)

The command has a savings target of £759,000 for 2025/26 following the ToM implementation and this is over seen through the ToM Change board. 999 call handling and the progression of crime investigations will be protected from savings requirement impact.

6.1 Links to Police and Crime Plan Priorities

The service provided by the Contact Management Command has not altered in the reporting period. The Command is the first point of contact for the public and partners in most circumstances and as such, has influence across all elements of the plan. In particular:

- **Investment in crime prevention-** the command previously had an AFI in relation to offering crime prevention advice, which has now been discharged. This has been achieved by bulk text messaging in addition to verbal advice, which is

monitored through performance data, to ensure a consistent service in all relevant cases.

- **Protecting vulnerable people and breaking the cycle of domestic abuse** - the command continues to upskill our staff to provide a better service to victims. The command has reviewed the training course material ahead of the launch of the TOM.
- **Improving support for victims of crime** - the command completes various surveys and undertakes quality assurance checks to ensure a quality service is provided. There is a Learning the Lessons board to ensure we capture learning and best practice for the command.
- **Protecting rural and isolated areas** - the command continues to work closely with Local policing commands to improve response times to emergency and non-emergency incidents.
- **Supporting officers and staff** - the command is proactive in progressing activity to support staff, including reward and recognition processes with the next event being held in August. The command has a robust attendance management process and is currently supporting supervisors and managers with additional training in relation to the attendance management process, to enable them to support their staff. The command supports development opportunities via Develop You and there remains an ongoing consideration of staff parity.

6.2 Demand

A detailed analysis of demand and performance is documented in section 5. Key points are summarised below:

- There has been a steady increase in 999 calls over time, but Essex is not an outlier in this increase when compared with other forces nationally.
- There has been a slight increase in 101 wait times and abandonment rate. This increase is likely to be attributed to the removal of the RC triage line, implementation of the TOM and some technical issues experienced with the ICCS telephony system.
- The volume of live chats has increased each month during this reporting period. As detailed, the provision of this service was extended to 24/7 in July 2024.
- The volume of SOH reports is increasing demonstrating a positive shift to online reporting.
- There are clear correlations between the volume of demand and performance.

6.3 Risks/Mitigation

The command currently has two strategic risks and three management risks; all have mitigating actions in place.

Strategic risk 2738 - Managing public contact and calls for service effectively to maintain public confidence in policing. There is good progress against all mitigating actions. Cross command work is supported through the Deputy Chief Constable's Public Contact Gold Group and ACC Nolan's Call Handling Gold Group.

Strategic risk 2790 - ICCS Instability. A taskforce is in place to provide further assurances to the current and future stability of the force's ICCS technology covering

incident/defect, rectification, technical design review, service management and commercial response.

The force recognises the current performance for 101 and 999 call handling is not consistently at the level we need it to be. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Residual training of about 200 call handlers to allow them to record crime at the point of call taking. This will be complete by the end of September and will result in a faster and more efficient call handling service.
- There is a shortfall in resourcing against the full establishment of 272 police staff and 38 officers within the contact centre. The command has an urgent recruitment and training plan which will mean 100% resourcing by December. An intake of 20 is about to finish their initial training and move onto the phones and a further 60 staff will commence their initial training by mid-September.
- The ability of the command to deliver good, consistent performance is further hampered by IT stability challenges primarily associated with the new version of Athena and the new ICCS system. Athena is a force critical issue and adversely affecting all 9 forces in the consortium. The 9 Chief Constables are being personally kept up to speed with the priority work (led by ACO Medhurst) across a range of partners (NEC, Home Office and others) to urgently diagnose and address the issues. This is critical risk for the force as currently the reason for the performance instability is unknown.
- The command is currently dealing with a significant spike in absence driven by covid / summer bugs and other matters. A Gold Group is running to address the underlying issues.

The force is seeking to improve the telephony performance whilst stabilising the assessment and allocation of crime investigations. The QA and linking (processing and allocation of crime) has been a whole force effort under Op Recover; this has seen a reduction in the backlog from 4500 to 800. The operation moves into Phase 2 on 12th August 2024.

6.4 Equality and/or Human Rights Implications

There are no identified concerns. The command is cognisant of the responsibilities under the Victim's Bill 2023 which governs the force's delivery under the Victim's Code of Practice. The command proactively seeks opportunities to ensure we are accessible to all communities. A recent example includes increase in the accessibility of live chat by moving to a 24/7 provision. There is an ongoing technology review for the command which will continue to assess onward opportunities for improvement.

6.5 Health and Safety Implications

As detailed within previous iterations of this report, the staff in contact management are regularly exposed to trauma which can impact on wellbeing and subsequent performance and the command continues to utilise a trauma tracker to minimise this risk. The command ensures staff needs are supported through reasonable adjustments and access to the comprehensive wellbeing support and resources available within the force for all staff.

The command proactively monitors the working environment of the staff and addresses issues where required.

7.0 Consultation/Engagement

Chief Superintendent Stuart Hooper - Head of Contact Management
Superintendent John Hallworth – Deputy Head of Contact Management
Alice Lockwood - Performance Analysis Unit

8.0 Actions for Improvement

Reference is made within the report to the two remaining AFIs. The remaining two (detailed below) are currently assessed as amber and being monitored through the relevant governance procedures.

- Non- emergency call handling wait times and abandonment rates
- Our handling and response to non-emergency incidents

The early implementation stage of the TOM has seen an increase in wait times and abandonment rates for non-emergency calls as well as an increase in emergency calls; whilst not unexpected, the force is keen to see a period of stability within these areas.

As at 6.0, the force improvement plan for contact focusses on upskill training, critical incident response to attendance management, recruitment, performance management and leadership and is governed through the contact management programme board.

9.0 Future Work/Development and Expected Outcome

The TOM was launched on 2nd April 2024 and there are a number of programmes of work in progress. The shift pattern review is progressing, and the proposed pattern has been approved by Chief Officers and the consultation process will start imminently. The revised shift pattern will enable the contact centre to have the correct resources in line with demand.

The command is continuing to work with partners in relation to the technology review which will enable automation of processes; this is progressing and will see significant benefits.

Installation of the Workforce Management Solution is anticipated early autumn which will provide enhance the command's ability to plan resources to meet demand as well as enable staff a more efficient method of accessing and managing duties.

As previously referenced in the report, ICCS development is a key workstream, the command is exploring and undertaking testing of additional benefits which can be implemented on the ICCS system.