



PCC's 101 Scrutiny Panel

A deep dive scrutiny exercise into the 101 service within Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to consider:

“How does the force’s approach to the delivery of 101 services meet the needs of the public? With specific reference to the Interactive Voice Recognition and their Communications strategy.”

Findings and Recommendations Report

January 2021

Police and Crime Commissioner's Foreword

This 101 Thematic Scrutiny Deep Dive has been an important piece of work to explore a service that is of considerable importance and interest to the public. We have the second lowest crime area in the country and this is largely thanks to the proactive reporting and support of our law abiding community.

The Police and Crime Panel have previously carried out a deep dive into 101 in October 2020 with both the Chief Constable and myself. I have therefore also considered the Police and Crime Panel's recommendations from their deep dive to inform our line of questioning.

Our approach to this scrutiny has represented a new way of working for my office. The Panel brought together members of the existing lay scrutiny panel, councillor advocates and the voluntary sector via Victim Support who joined with me in carrying out this scrutiny review. These Panel members have given considerable time and commitment over November and December 2020 to support this scrutiny process and to ensure that the perspective of the public is reflected. My considerable thanks go to all members of the Panel for their commitment to researching other forces and the dedication and insight into the questioning. Along with the wider network of PCC Councillor Advocates supported by my office for taking the time to participate in the feedback survey conducted as part of this process.

I would also like to recognise the Chief Constable's commitment to drive improvements on public contact forward and both the police officers and police staff from Devon and Cornwall Police who have supported this process. Their frank and positive engagement in the evidence sessions and in the provision of information has been outstanding.

The level of investment has been considerable over the past four years, at £1.3 million, but this has mainly focused on achieving efficiencies through the use of technology. While new reporting channels have been opened up via email, webchat and online reporting and their use has grown dramatically over the past few years, staffing at the right times now becomes an ever-greater challenge. The role that partners play is important in ensuring they are also accessible so people can contact the right organisation and not assume it is a police responsibility because they are the only ones available 24/7.

This report highlights the importance of the investment in police staff who we have evidence give a high quality service when witnesses or victims of crime make contact. While I know the public will always want 999 to be prioritised and a police response available, there is considerable evidence that we need to improve the answering times of non-emergency contact.

The findings of this scrutiny will be shared with the Chief Constable who will consider and respond to the recommendations. We will continue to work closely with Devon and Cornwall Police as ongoing, new improvements and investments are taken forward to strengthen the service provided to the public through 101 and the other non-emergency contact services.

Alison Hernandez

Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

1. Key findings and Recommendations

Key findings

- 1.1 The Panel recognised the primacy of 999 calls and the need to prioritise the answering of emergency calls within the control room. The Panel further recognised the continued increase in calls to 999 and of the number of contacts being made across the 101 contact channels (which included email, online reporting and webchat), how average call handling times have increased reflecting both the growing complexity of calls received by Contact Officers and the need for enhanced risk assessments and safeguarding procedures to be carried out.
- 1.2 The Panel's overall conclusion is that the existing 101 telephone service provides a good quality of response to members of the public and to other callers when they get through to the service. Contact Officers are well trained and provide good customer service and advice to the caller in line with the expectations set out in Devon and Cornwall Police's published service standards.
- 1.3 However, the Panel is not assured that the current 101 service arrangements are meeting the needs of those members of the public who call 101 about matters which do not fall into the P1 category (i.e. all calls which do not relate to missing persons, domestic abuse, harassment, stalking, sexual offences, hate crime, concern for welfare or incidents on the road). The introduction of the new Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) system to 101 has provided a stronger service for certain callers to 101 and has helped the police to identify and prioritise crime types where they consider vulnerability is higher. The Panel was concerned that too many callers to 101 about other matters were having to wait a considerable period of time before being able to speak to someone. The Panel recognised that many of these calls may be for non-police matters but there is limited data available to understand the subject matter of the calls being made and thus to determine alternative pathways.
- 1.4 It is the Panel's view that the police service is responsible for the experience of the member of the public who has chosen to contact them. This responsibility should be front, and centre of the strategic approach taken to all methods of contact that the public may experience, both in terms of initial contact and any subsequent interactions. For example, introducing a clear timeframe in service standards for the provision of updates to victims would provide a better service to the public and help to alleviate pressure on the 101 telephone service.
- 1.5 The Panel recognised that a series of steps were already underway to seek to deliver improvements in the service that is provided to callers to 101. These were welcomed and were likely to be already contributing to the improved waiting times in the final months of 2020. The Panel considered that a significant, sustained and whole force approach to public contact was required to ensure that the 101 service is better able to meet the needs and expectations of the public and to support resilience in the service. Whilst longer term technological advancements may have a significant impact on these issues it is the Panel's conclusion that additional action to increase staffing levels should be considered in the short to medium term to improve the service that is provided on the 101 service.

Recommendations

The public's experience of the 101 telephone service
1. The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable reviews the existing service standard of 20 minutes for P2 calls by 31 st March 2021 and considers setting a revised service standard of 10 minutes or less for all call types and a clear, costed plan of action to support its delivery of service standards. Service standards on waiting times should be focussed on the percentage of callers answered in that time period not the average waiting time.
2. The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31 st March 2021 whether the IVR is adding value in its current format and whether changes should be made to the IVR system to re-introduce a triage assessment at the start of the call, in particular for the P2 line.
3. The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable consider by 31 st March 2021 revising Devon and Cornwall Police's service standards for victims to include a clear time period within which victims can expect to receive an update after initial contact with the police and that this expectation is communicated to the public and performance against it is measured and published.
Understanding and managing demand for the 101 Service and Wider Public Contact
4. The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police build a clear evidence base on the nature of calls to 101 and that this information is used to inform discussions with partners to seek to reduce the volume of unnecessary calls coming into the system and with the public to help direct them to the right services.
5. The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police develop a force-wide, community orientated and evidence informed Public Contact Strategy which brings together all aspects of its public contact, including the role of corporate communications, victim care, investigating officers, local policing and front desks in providing contact services to the public.
6. That Devon and Cornwall Police should ensure it fully explores the potential that public enquiry offices and their staff can play in providing 101 services to the public.
Investment: staffing, skill retention and technology
7. The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31 st March 2021 re-prioritising work under the PRISM programme to speed up the introduction of the upcoming service improvements which have the biggest potential to improve the public's experience (the Call Back Service, in call messaging and the Voice Activated Directory).
8. While longer term technological changes may reduce levels of demand for 101 the Panel recommends that interim solutions, including an increase in staffing, should be considered by the Chief Constable and, if budgetary pressures allow, be included within the 21/22 budget.
9. The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police consider what options might exist to reduce turnover within the 101 contact centre, including the opportunity provided by remote sites to cover a wider labour market.
Public information and communications
10. The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police gives much greater priority to communicating regularly with the public about 101, using traditional media, advertising campaigns and community networks and local publications. The focus of engagement should be: to improve awareness about what can be dealt with by 101 and what should be 999 or another agency, to inform them of the levels of service they should expect to receive (including waiting times) and performance against these standards: and to guide them towards alternative contact channels.
11. The Panel recommends that a formal assessment is carried out by 30 th June 2021 to compare the relative costs, benefits and merits for the public and for policing, of the existing Devon and Cornwall website and the new national policing single online home platform.
12. The Panel recommend that a survey and assessment of Ask NED is carried out by 30 th June 2021 to understand how the system is being used by the public and whether it is meeting their needs.

2. Background and scope of the review

- 2.1 The 101 non emergency telephone service continues to be the primary route by which the public seek to interact with the police about matters that are not considered by the caller to be an issue requiring a 999 emergency response. The delivery of the 101 service is a matter of interest to the public, local elected representatives, the Police and Crime Panel and the Commissioner. It is a matter that is raised regularly with the Commissioner, in particular the length of time that callers might have to wait to have their call answered.
- 2.2 The service provided to the public through 999 and 101 is also a topic of interest nationally with the publication, in July 2020, of a thematic report by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 'A Call for Help' which looked nationally at concerns regarding the operation of 101 and 999 call handling services. That report did not make specific recommendations for Chief Constables but set out a series of expected next steps to ensure that the police service deals with contact from the public effectively. The latest HMICFRS PEEL inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police also highlighted the length of waiting times on lower priority calls waiting times.
- 2.3 In July 2019 significant changes were made to the 101 service in Devon and Cornwall through the introduction of a new IVR system. Under the IVR system some callers to 101 (for example those seeking to report lost property or parking) are directed to a recorded message which directs them to another agency or site for reporting. Other callers are routed depending on the priority of the call, for example missing persons, sexual assault victims or people seeking to report a road traffic collision (these lines are referred to in this report as P1 lines). These calls accounted for 87,846 calls in the 12 months to 31st July 2020.
- 2.4 Over two thirds of the calls made to the 101 service in Devon and Cornwall are routed under the IVR into general lines for updates and new reports. Those lines are referred to in this report as P2 lines. In September 2020, Devon and Cornwall Police increased their service standard answering time for calls routed to the P2 line to 20 minutes. This was an increase from the previous service standard answering time of 15 minutes.
- 2.5 Since the introduction of the IVR the Commissioner has had concerns about the extent to which the service is meeting the needs of all members of the public who seek to call 101. £50,000 of funding was provided to the Chief Constable in the 2021/22 budget to carry out a review to determine whether existing capacity within the two contact centres was sufficient which is expected to report in Spring 2021
- 2.6 In July 2020 the Commissioner announced that she would be carrying out a thematic scrutiny review of the 101 non-emergency telephone service in the second half of 2020, looking in particular at the extent to which the service is meeting the needs of the public. In September 2020 the Commissioner presented the outline terms of reference for that scrutiny exercise to the Police and Crime Panel who were carrying out their own deep dive of the 101 service and sought the views of the Panel on the scope of the scrutiny exercise.
- 2.7 In November 2020 the Commissioner convened a bespoke 101 scrutiny panel which brought together members of the PCC's Independent Community Scrutiny

Panel, Victim Support and members of the PCC's Councillor Advocate Scheme. The Panel met on four occasions and considered a broad range of evidence prepared and provided by the OPCC and Devon and Cornwall Police. This included the results of surveys, listening exercises and focus groups carried out with Contact Officers already working in the 101 service. The Panel also received presentations from senior policing leads, corporate communications and performance specialists within Devon and Cornwall Police and received an input from the National Digital Public Contact Programme. Our sincere thanks go to the members of the Panel members and witnesses who have given up their time to be part of this important scrutiny process.

- 2.8 The Scrutiny Review focused on four key themes:
- defining and setting customer service standards;
 - delivering services to the public;
 - providing information, advice and education; and
 - service development and investment.
- 2.9 Within these broad headings the 101 Scrutiny process considered a range of questions, including: exploring the quality of the service; the service standards that Devon and Cornwall Police commit to providing; the experience that the public and other callers to 101 receive; current plans for development of the 101 service; and how Devon and Cornwall Police understand, assess and measure the service that they provide. Included within the review were two specific questions raised by the Police and Crime Panel at its deep dive in September 2020:
- a) what additional measures and/or investment is necessary to restore the effectiveness of the 101 system to acceptable levels?
 - b) the viability of non-emergency calls being transferred to an answering machine or call back service.

3. *The 101 non emergency service*

- 3.1 The 101 non emergency telephone service continues to be the primary route by which the public seek to interact with the police about matters that are not considered by the caller to be an issue requiring a 999 emergency response.
- 3.2 The 101 service is provided by Contact Officers working in two operational control rooms within Devon and Cornwall Police. Multi skilled officers answer 999 and 101 calls as well as providing online webchat and dealing with online reports submitted via the Devon and Cornwall Police website and the 101 email system.
- 3.3 Devon and Cornwall Police received over 1 million contacts in the 12 months to 31st July 2020. The number of calls being made to the 999-emergency line has continued to rise over the 4-year period. The trend for 101 non-emergency calls has also been on an upward trend and the use of alternative contact channels such as webchat has also grown considerably over this period.

999 services

- 3.4 In the 12 months to July 2020 there were 261,483 calls to the emergency 999 service for Devon and Cornwall Police. Over the last four years emergency calls for service have increased by 33.4% which is equivalent to 65,499 additional calls. The growth in 999 calls received is most evident between 2018-19 and 2019-20.

- 3.5 Average call handling times for 999 has increased over recent years reflecting both the growing complexity of the calls received by the call handlers and the need for enhanced risk assessments and safeguarding procedures to be carried out. In the last year the average call handling time for 999 calls which includes the average talk time and the average post call processing time was 8 minutes and 41 seconds – which saw the average time taken to deal with a 999 call increase by 1 minute 32 seconds compared with a year earlier.

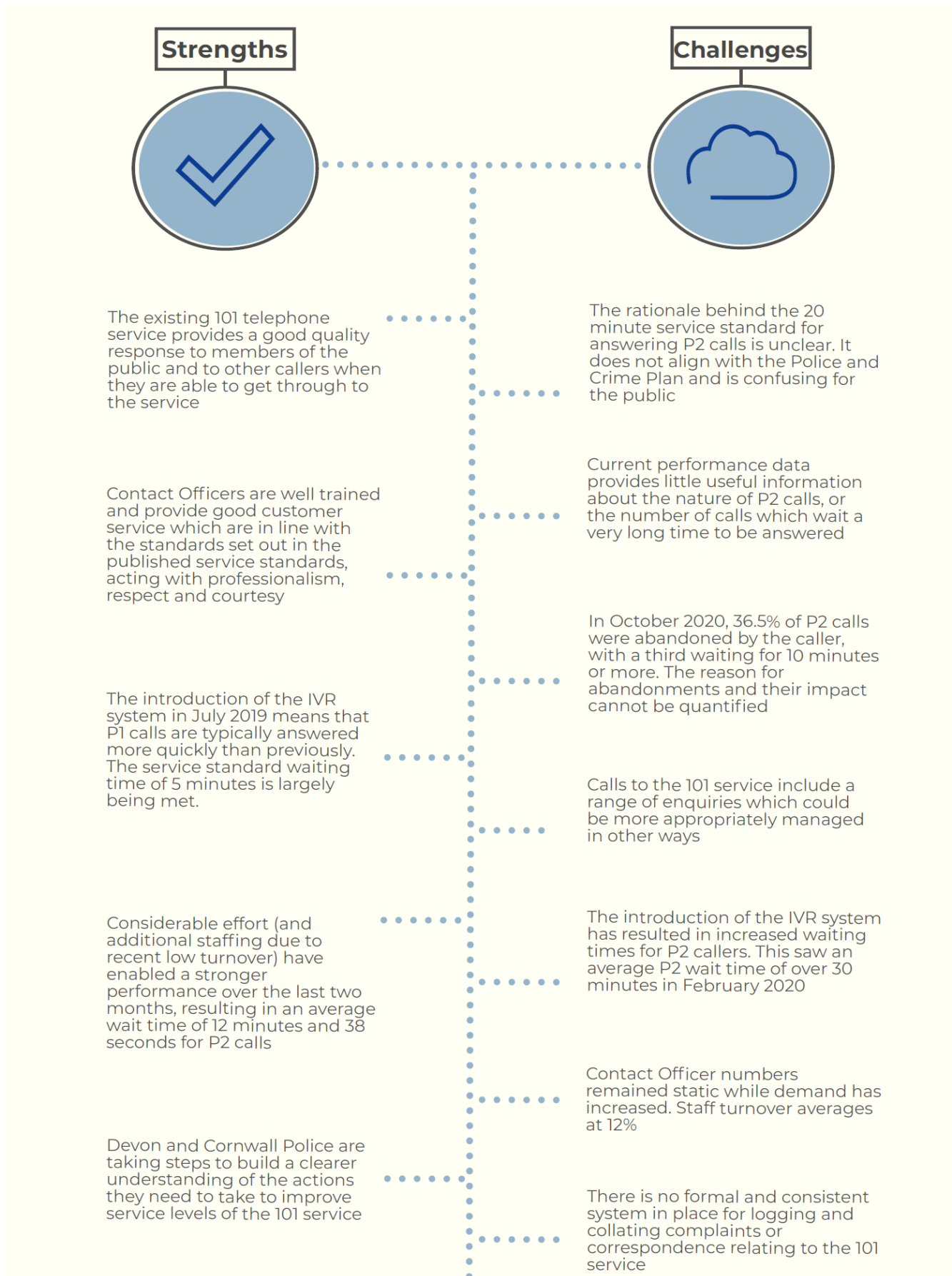
101 services

- 3.6 In the 12 months to July 2020 101 call demand on the 101 telephone service reached just over 581,000. Alongside this demand there has been a 50% increase in contacts to 101 alternative methods (emails/online reports, texts and webchats) which is equivalent to 53,235 more contacts. These services are also provided by the 101 call handlers, although recent initiatives to provide additional support to the call handlers by enabling staff within the IRC and police office front desk staff to deal with 101 emails and online crime reports is providing additional resilience and support. If the demand picture for 101 calls and alternative 101 contact methods is combined there has been a 5% increase in the number of non-emergency contacts received since 2017.
- 3.7 The average duration of a 101 call has seen a notable increase over the past 12 months; increasing from 2 minutes 57 seconds in the 12 months to July 2019 to 5 minutes and 31 seconds in the year to July 2020. This increase will have been a result of a number of factors, including the need for additional risk assessments carried out by the call handler but also is likely to reflect the effective operation of the new IVR system which will have directed calls that may have been shorter to the website or to recorded messages, such as lost property.
- 3.8 Use of alternative 101 contact methods (including Webchat) has more than doubled over the last 4 years from 79,565 in 2017 to 159,643 in the 12 months to July 2020.

Investments

- 3.9 The Commissioner has supported the Chief Constable to make a number of investments in contact services over the past four years, recognising the importance of the service to the public. These investments and improvements have taken place against the backdrop highlighted above of continued increases in demand for both 999 and 101 services and a growing complexity in the nature and duration of calls into the service. The programme for improvement continues to operate, adjusting to take account of emerging best practice, innovation and demand forecasts.

4. Strengths and Challenges for the 101 service



5. *The public's experience of the 101 service*

Quality of service

- 5.1 The existing 101 telephone service provides a good quality response to members of the public and to other callers when they are able to get through to the service.
- 5.2 The Service Standards published by Devon and Cornwall Police set out the expectations that callers can expect when phoning 101 or contacting the police by its other 101 contact routes, including online reporting, 101 and webchat. The standards were found to be clear and to align well with the key issues identified in the HMICFRS inspection and in the NPCC Contract Strategy. The Panel recognised the primacy of 999 calls and the need to prioritise the answering of emergency calls within the control room.
- 5.3 The Panel found that Contact Officers provide good levels of customer service which are in line with the standards set out in the published service standards, acting with professionalism, respect and courtesy. The Panel welcomed the recent 101 caller survey which had been instigated in November 2020 which had high levels of caller satisfaction at over 95%.
- 5.4 The Panel considered that such surveys should be carried out regularly with callers to 101 to help build a picture of the public's views on 101. Opportunities to add this directly into the IVR system to encourage greater response and to ensure that all callers are provided with the opportunity to respond at the time of the call should also be progressed and to develop the survey further to able to identify whether the survey respondent waited in a P1 or P2 line.
- 5.5 The OPCC provided analysis on the correspondence and complaints received into the Commissioner's office on 101. The Panel observed that Devon and Cornwall Police do not have a formal system in place for logging and collating all complaints or correspondence relating to service on the 101 system received by Devon and Cornwall Police. Such a system would ensure that all 101 service related feedback is identified and can inform service assessment and development and should be considered.

Service standard waiting times

- 5.6 The September 2020 standards refers to two time periods, with P1 calls being answered within 5 minutes and P2 calls to be answered in 20 minutes. In October 2020 that 20 minute standard was met in 79.6% of calls for P2 calls.
- 5.7 The Panel recognised that callers to 101 who are categorised as P1, i.e. those relating to domestic abuse, sexual offences, missing persons, road traffic collisions and hate crime are typically being answered more quickly than they were under the previous system. The service standard waiting time for these calls is 5 minutes and this appears to be largely met since the introduction of IVR in July 2019.
- 5.8 The Panel was not assured that the current service standard waiting time of 20 minutes for P2 calls is appropriate. Given the inability of the IVR system to ascertain the nature of calls within the P2 line, which could include callers who have had a difficult and traumatic experience, such as a burglary of their property or a violent altercation, a service standard of 20 minutes did not appear to the Panel to

be appropriate. The Panel was not provided with a rationale to support a 20 minute service standard. Devon and Cornwall Police had not carried out public engagement on setting this service standard and the standard does not align with the Police and Crime Plan measure for 101 which relates to the percentage of calls answered within 10 minutes. The Panel considered that this creates confusion for the public and has led to a mismatch in expectation between Devon and Cornwall Police on one side and on the other side the Commissioner, the Police and Crime Panel and the public.

- 5.9 The Panel's view was that all callers to 101 should be able to expect that their calls would be answered within a 10 minute window, while recognising this was unlikely to be the case in 100% of calls due to nature of fluctuating demand with both the 999 and 101. The Panel further considered that it was important for service standards to consider both the average waiting time and the percentage of calls answered within the time period, recognising that some calls are answered quickly.
- 5.10 In the Panel's view the public call the police primarily for three reasons: because they need the help of the police (due to a crime or an incident), because they have previously been the victim of a crime and require further information/ support or because they have information that they believe will be of assistance to the police. While in some instances, the public may be mistaken in their belief that it is a police matter these calls need to be re-directed efficiently and effectively recognising that the underlying intent of most callers is one that policing wishes to support and encourage – community and public safety. The public need to be confident that they will be able to make contact with 101 within a reasonable time period or it may deter them or others from future contact.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable reviews the existing service standard of 20 minutes for P2 calls by 31st March 2021 and considers setting a revised service standard of 10 minutes or less for all call types and a clear, costed plan of action to support its delivery of service standards. Service standards on waiting times should be focussed on the percentage of callers answered in that time period not the average waiting time.

Waiting times and triage on the 101 service

- 5.11 Prior to the introduction of IVR all callers to the 101 service would have spoken to an initial contact at switchboard who would have triaged their call: diverting inappropriate calls, resolving some calls and placing others in a queue for a substantive response. Where a call did need to be transferred to a secondary line for resolution under the previous triage system the average waiting time on that line in October 2018 was 6 minutes and 39 seconds (6 minutes average wait in the secondary line queue and 39 minutes average in switchboard queue). The Panel observed that the IVR menu was quite complex with up to 12 second level options for the caller and the potential scope to review and simplify the system.
- 5.12 Under the IVR these callers are now automatically routed to a lower priority queue before they are able to speak to a Contact Officer. In October 2020 the average wait time on P2 was 12 minutes 38 seconds with 79.6% answered within 20 minutes and in September 2020 was 14 minutes 41 seconds. For comparison this figure was 24 minutes and 10 seconds in October 2019 and in February 2020 was over

30 minutes. The Panel recognised that considerable effort (and additional staffing due to recent low turnover) have enabled a strong performance over the last two months. Initial lockdown in March 2020 and additional summer policing investments in staffing from the Commissioner's £400,000 summer policing fund had also seen higher performance in the months from February 2020.

- 5.13 The waiting time for many P2 callers will be longer than the average waiting time due to fluctuations in demand and capacity. The Panel noted that waiting times are now published on the Devon and Cornwall Police website and that easy access and signposting to online alternatives from this display were important. The Panel was concerned at the volume of calls which are abandoned by callers on the P2 line after waiting for more than 10 minutes. The volume of P2 calls which were abandoned following a 10 minute wait in October 2020 was 3868, representing 33% of all abandoned P2 calls that month. The reason for abandonment or the impact of each abandonment cannot be evidenced. The Panel recognise that it may be that the caller chose another contact pathway (which are offered regularly on the recorded message) or that the issue resolved itself. However it may also be the case that the caller was repeatedly unable to get through or gave up trying to contact the police and that either of these scenarios could have a lasting impact and affect the likelihood that they will choose to contact the police in future.
- 5.14 While long term technological changes and a continued shift to online channels will help to address pressures and reduce waiting times in the medium to long term there is a need to take further action to ensure that the service is meeting the needs of the public in the short term. This should include exploring the reintroduction of a triage function on the P2 call line and the need to increase staffing levels within the Contact Centre to better match the predicted demand.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31st March 2021 whether the IVR is adding value in its current format and whether changes should be made to the IVR system to re-introduce a triage assessment at the start of the call, in particular for the P2 line.

The use of the 101 service by victims of crime

- 5.15 One of the main identified reasons for calling 101 is for a victim to receive an update on matter that they have already reported to the police. Consistent, proactive communications by Contact Officers at the first point of report and by investigating officers to victims which explain when they will provide the next update on a case could deliver a better service to that victim and also free up vital capacity on the 101 telephone line.
- 5.16 With the introduction of the new statutory Victims Code of Practice in April 2021 the Panel considered that there is an opportunity for Devon and Cornwall Police to support victims by setting out a clear service standard in terms of the when they should expect to receive an update from Devon and Cornwall Police, both in terms of the initial contact after a report and regular updates as the case is progressed. This approach would also offer the opportunity to direct victims to Victim Support and other victim care providers for additional help and assistance during that initial timeframe.

Recommendation 3

The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable consider by 31st March 2021 revising Devon and Cornwall Police's service standards for victims to include a clear time period within which victims can expect to receive an update after initial contact with the police and that this expectation is communicated to the public and performance against it is measured and published.

6. *Understanding and Managing Calls for service and wider Public Contact*

- 6.1 The Panel recognised the significant pressures that 101 call systems are placed under due to the increasing volume and complexity of calls received.
- 6.2 The introduction of IVR has enabled Devon and Cornwall Police to have a better understanding of the volume of calls that are received in the areas of missing persons, domestic abuse, sexual assault, road traffic collisions and hate crime. All calls that do not fall into these categories are routed into 'new reports' and 'updates' and there is no automated analysis of those calls nor any regular manual analysis.
- 6.3 The Panel recognised that a significant volume of calls to 101 are likely to be for other agencies and that this is placing further strain on the 101 call service. Information on other agencies is available on the Devon and Cornwall Police website but is not always easy to locate.
- 6.4 The Panel also observed that the 101 telephone service continues to be the standard route by which people are advised to contact police officers, including through corporate letterheads, social media posts and media messages. 42% of calls to 101 in the 2018 call demand survey exercise related to contacting a named officer or department which it is recognised places a considerable additional strain on the 101 telephone service.
- 6.5 The current performance data collected and considered by Devon and Cornwall Police regarding the 101 service is not able to provide sufficient insight into the true scale of demand or the actual experience of callers to the 101 service. Devon and Cornwall Police are commencing regular surveying to improve understanding of the nature of calls from the start of 2021 and this is welcomed.
- 6.6 Performance data collected in Devon and Cornwall Police is focused on measuring and reporting on internal business not on understanding the public's need or their experience. Accurate and regular data on the nature of calls being made to P2 lines will better enable the police to understand the risk related to those calls and to make management and investment decisions. The Panel considered that clearer evidence on the nature of calls would also support the Chief Constable in pushing back to other agencies who do not have 24/7 call handling and in devising new organisational approaches to direct some of the 101 traffic.

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police build a clear evidence base on the nature of calls to 101 and that this information is used to inform discussions with partners to seek to reduce the volume of unnecessary calls coming into the system and with the public to help direct them to the right services.

- 6.7 It was the Panel's view that the police service is responsible for the experience of the member of the public who has chosen to contact them and that this responsibility should be front and centre of the strategic approach taken to all methods of contact that the public may experience, both in terms of initial contact and any subsequent interactions.
- 6.8 While 101 is the primary route for the public to make contact with the police regarding a non-emergency matter the public's interaction with the police is much more varied and complex. It was the Panel's view that a broader strategic approach should be adopted to public contact in all its forms which covers digital, telephony and face to face contact. This should be a whole force approach which recognises 'public contact' in its broader context and encapsulates not just the 101 and 999 services but also public enquiry offices, victim contact, local policing team engagement and connectivity as well as corporate messaging and communications.
- 6.9 The Panel received evidence during its review regarding the changing role of Public Enquiry Officers and the role that these important public contact officers have been playing during 2020 in supporting the 101 service through their handling of 101 emails and online crime reports. The scope to utilise front office spaces in police stations to host Contact Officers or to directly manage 101 telephone calls should be explored in the Panel's view.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police develop a force-wide, community orientated and evidence informed Public Contact Strategy which brings together all aspects of its public contact, including the role of corporate communications, victim care, investigating officers, local policing and front desks in providing contact services to the public.

Recommendation 6

That Devon and Cornwall Police should ensure it fully explores the potential that public enquiry offices and their staff can play in providing 101 services to the public.

7. Investment: staffing, skill retention and technology

Investment in technology

- 7.1 Technological investments which came into effect in 2018 and 2019 were expected to deliver some performance improvements for the 101 service but these have been largely outweighed by the increase in 999 demand.
- 7.2 The Panel was assured that Devon and Cornwall Police has been taking further steps through 2020 to build a clearer understanding of the actions they need to take to improve service levels on the 101 service. This work, which is being led by the new Contact and Resolution Commander, includes an examination of staffing levels, performance management and technology and has been supported by an external peer review. A number of changes were already being implemented at the time that the Panel conducted its work, including more dynamic management of

resources across 999 and 101 rooms on a daily basis and an upcoming shift review to help ensure resourcing levels can better match predicted demand at peak times.

- 7.3 The Panel welcomed the series of planned technological improvements in the next 18 months which will deliver direct benefits to the public in improving their experience when calling the 101 service. The implementation of a Call Back Service and in call messaging to advise on waiting times will be of direct assistance to people calling 101 and provide them with greater information and an alternative to waiting on the line. The upcoming introduction of a new Voice Activated Directory should reduce the volume of unnecessary traffic into the 101 service where a person wishes to speak with a named officer by allowing the caller to be automatically routed to the required officer or department.
- 7.4 However, while these developments will play an important role in improving the service they are not currently expected to be delivered until 2022 following implementation of a new telephony system in September 2021¹.

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommends that the Chief Constable considers by 31st March 2021 re-prioritising work under the PRISM programme to speed up the introduction of the upcoming service improvements which have the biggest potential to improve the public's experience (the Call Back Service, in call messaging and the Voice Activated Directory).

Staffing of the 101 and 999 service

- 7.5 Contact Officer staffing levels have remained largely static since 2016 while 999 demand and the average call length and post-call processing times have increased due to the complexity of issues that Contact Officers have to face. The Commissioner has not received any budget requests from the Chief Constable in previous years to increase the baseline of Contact Officers, although increases to support summer demand and COVID 19 have been made and accepted.
- 7.6 There are currently 174 FTE Contact Officers against an organisational staffing profile of 164 FTE which has resulted from slower turnover due to the pandemic and in October 2020 the average waiting time on P2 was 12 minutes 38 seconds. Whilst still considerably higher than pre IVR waiting periods it is a significant reduction from previous time periods, for example in February 2020 it was 33 minutes 48 seconds.
- 7.7 Devon and Cornwall Police were unable to provide detailed modelling to identify staffing levels that are required to meet a specific service standard of 10 minutes but detailed demand modelling will be taking place in the first three months of 2021 as part of Devon and Cornwall Police's two year 101 plan.

Recommendation 8

While longer term technological changes may reduce levels of demand for 101 the Panel recommends that interim solutions, including an increase in

¹ The existing AACC6 Call Platform telephony system was introduced in 2018 and enabled the introduction of multi stream call handling via webchat and the new IVR system. Planned changes in 2021 will provide a system upgrade to the telephony service and enable the future introduction of a Voice Activated Directory.

staffing, should be considered by the Chief Constable and, if budgetary pressures allow, be included within the 21/22 budget.

- 7.8 Staff turnover, which averages at 12% is a significant factor in efficiency within 101 with new Contact Officers requiring significant training and mentoring which can reduce the capacity within the contact centre to take calls. This training and recruitment also represents a significant cost which could be better invested in additional staffing or other measures if staff turnover could be reduced. The Panel considered that options for reducing the level of staff turnover need to be considered, including maximising the potential for remote sites which could take advantage of wider labour markets within the force area. Devon and Cornwall Police already have a two year tenure requirement in place for new Contact Officers and the Panel considered that tenure arrangements might be appropriate for police officer leadership roles within the contact environment to support stability and development within the service and to reflect the highly specialised nature of the service.

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police consider what options might exist to reduce turnover within the 101 contact centre, including the opportunity provided by remote sites to cover a wider labour market.

8. Public information and communications

- 8.1 A considerable volume of work already takes place within Devon and Cornwall Police to advise and inform the public about the best ways to contact the police in non emergency situations, including a specific campaign in summer 2020 targeting visitors. However levels of awareness of alternative ways to contact the police are considered to be low in many communities and campaigns need to be regular, consistent and targeted at key audiences to reinforce understanding.
- 8.2 The Panel considered that greater focus could be given to utilising opportunities afforded by community messaging systems (including the Devon & Cornwall Alert system), councillor advocate networks, council websites, community/parish newsletters and community based organisations such as housing associations to maximise the reach of campaigns.
- 8.3 The Panel also considered that police officers and staff within Devon and Cornwall Police could play a greater signposting role through their contact with the public and partners to seek to reduce the volume of unnecessary calls coming into the 101 system.

Recommendation 10

The Panel recommends that Devon and Cornwall Police gives much greater priority to communicating regularly with the public about 101, using traditional media, advertising campaigns and community networks and local publications. The focus of engagement should be: to improve awareness about what can be dealt with by 101 and what should be 999 or another agency, to inform them of the levels of service they should expect to receive (including waiting times) and performance against these standards: and to guide them towards alternative contact channels.

Online services and the Devon and Cornwall Police website

- 8.4 The development of 101 online channels provides greater choice to the public. To encourage regular and sustained usage by the public it is important in the Panel's view that these services offer the public what they need in ways which are easier for them to use than their previous routes of contact. There is also a need, in developing services to ensure that the ability of the public in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to access these channels is fully understood as the level of connectivity within communities will vary depending on age, circumstance and location and to engage the public directly in their development.
- 8.5 The Panel considered that the existing Devon and Cornwall Police website is not user friendly for members of the public seeking to contact 101. The Panel were able to view planned changes to the homepage of the website and considered that these would be an improvement on the current approach.
- 8.6 The Panel also considered the new single online home web platform which is being developed for use by all police forces in England and Wales. The Panel also observed that clearer pathways on the Devon and Cornwall Police website would help the public to access the correct agency or use online services. The Panel considered that those forces whose websites were on the single online home platform provided a more intuitive pathway for the public to reach the correct agency – through direct transfers to the appropriate site. The Panel further observed that the single online home system is able to quantify channel shift from the phone line to help explain abandoned calls.
- 8.7 The Panel explored with Devon and Cornwall Police their reasons for not seeking to move forward with the national platform at this stage, in particular the loss of certain functionality such as integrated webchat (which would only be available as a stand-alone system under the national platform) and innovation opportunities. The Panel considered that it was important to bring the current uncertainty around future website provision to a close and for an assessment of the relative merits of the two systems to be carried out by Devon and Cornwall Police.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommends that a formal assessment is carried out by 30th June 2021 to compare the relative costs, benefits and merits for the public and for policing, of the existing Devon and Cornwall website and the new national policing single online home platform.

- 8.8 The Ask NED search facility on the Devon and Cornwall Police website provides a Q&A facility for users of the website to help them resolve queries and questions regarding policing and non-policing matters which might otherwise result in a call to the 101 service. The Panel were concerned about the reliability and usability of the Ask NED database in terms of providing different or irrelevant answers to searches carried out. The Panel considers that Devon and Cornwall Police should conduct a survey of Ask NED users to understand whether it is the public, agencies or internal staff who are utilising the database and to understand their views on its usefulness before making any decisions regarding its continuation.

Recommendation 12

The Panel recommend that a survey and assessment of Ask NED is carried out by 30th June 2021 to understand how the system is being used by the public and whether it is meeting their needs.

9. Conclusion and Next steps

- 9.1 The Panel's findings and recommendations will be submitted by the Commissioner to the Chief Constable for his consideration. The Panel's review will be published on the OPCC website and an update will be presented to the Police and Crime Panel at its meeting in February 2021.
- 9.2 The Chief Constable will consider the findings and recommendations made by the 101 Scrutiny Panel and will provide a written response to the Commissioner by the end of February 2021. In that response the Chief Constable will set out what, if any action, he intends to take in respect of the recommendations. A summary of the proposed activity will be published on the OPCC website.
- 9.3 The OPCC will support the Commissioner in monitoring progress through 2021, with regular reporting on recommendations into the Joint Leadership Board. The OPCC intends to reconvene the 101 Scrutiny Panel in June 2021 to hear an update on progress against the recommendations.

To find out more about the Commissioner's scrutiny activities please visit the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner website at www.devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/about-us/scrutiny/scrutiny-meetings-and-documents/.