



**PCC**

Office of the Police and  
Crime Commissioner

Devon and Cornwall

# **Report on response times for immediate incidents by Devon and Cornwall Police**

**June 2018**

## **1. Introduction**

The Local Policing Promise in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan 2017-2020 'safe, resilient and connected communities' states that policing in a local area will be 'Responsive' – that they will be there when needed and responsive to the matter at hand.

To support this the Police and Crime Plan 2017-2020 included a commitment to carry out a review of immediate response times to understand where challenges exist and what, if any, action might be needed.

In parallel to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's work to consider immediate response times, Devon and Cornwall Police have carried out their own internal review to better understand performance in this area and to identify areas for possible improvement. The OPCC's review has taken account of that internal work.

This review has focused on a particular point in time – the year 2017/18. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) intends to examine response times on a regular basis going forward and to provide greater public transparency on performance levels – with data being published every 6 months for each police sector on the level of immediate incidents which are responded to within clear time bands – including those which are within 30 minutes and those which take more than 50 minutes.

## **2. Context of the review**

When people contact the Police in an emergency situation they expect a swift and timely response. This can be challenging in a large and diverse geographic area like Devon and Cornwall – particularly during the summer months where there is greater pressure on the road network.

Devon and Cornwall Police operate in the largest geographic force area in England – covering over 4000 square miles. The area is geographically complex – with 3 national parks, over 22,000 km of road and over 500 miles of coastline.

Devon and Cornwall Police receive around 1 million calls for service each year, with around one fifth of these being 999 calls. When Devon and Cornwall Police receive a call for assistance, and it is assessed that a police response should be provided, a record of the incident is created, and deployment is managed through the two Devon and Cornwall Police control rooms.

Each incident is allocated a grading, which allows the control room dispatchers to monitor how quickly a response needs to be provided, and helps them to prioritise demand against finite resourcing levels. Dispatchers are likely to be managing a number of incidents simultaneously, since each of them is responsible for one of the ten radio channels that make up the force's entire geography.

- Immediate incidents – subject of a 20 minute response time, in both urban and rural locations under Devon and Cornwall police's published policy. This could include for example a violent domestic incident, or a burglary in progress.
- Prompt incidents – subject of a 60 minute response time. This might include for example a missing person report or a non-critical road traffic collision.
- Routine – where the incident is suitable to be resolved within 48 hours. This might be something like, for example, a report of theft which we need to attend.

In some instances a call will be graded as vulnerable – this will occur in instances where the assessment of the situation would have normally graded it as ‘routine’ but where the subject is vulnerable. This grading permits further internal checks to take place to assist them in determining whether a higher priority needs to be given to the call.

Within the Force contact centre, incidents are assessed for grading in accordance with the THRIVE acronym, a risk assessment tool widely adopted by forces across the country. The essential component parts of this are consideration of the threat, harm, and risk associated with the incident: allied to the available investigation opportunities, vulnerability of those involved, and particular engagement needs which would facilitate further communication with them. This means that in practice, gradings are a subjective matter of professional discretion and judgement, which are made by highly trained staff.

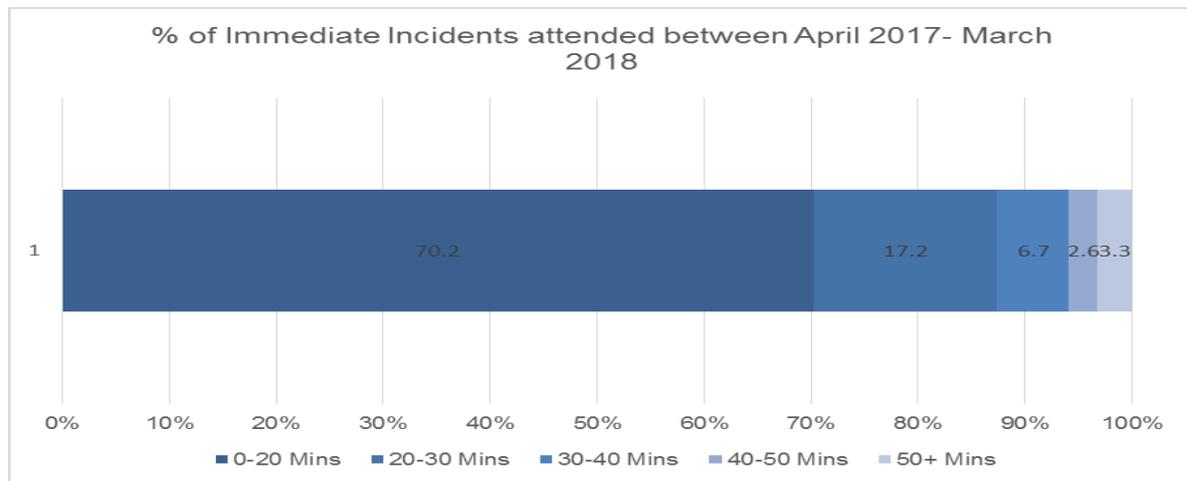
Immediate incidents are likely to be those where there is likely to be a risk of violence, danger to life, serious damage, crimes in progress or offenders detained, or where there are road traffic collisions with road blockages or dangerous traffic build up.

There is no national mandatory requirement for attendance times on calls which are graded as immediate. Devon and Cornwall Police currently has an internal policy to attend emergency incidents graded as Immediate within 20 minutes of the call being taken. There is no specific service standard in place regarding what percentage of immediate calls are expected to be attended within this 20 minute timeframe and no distinction is made between urban and rural locations.

### 3. Devon and Cornwall Police Immediate incident performance

In 2017/18 nearly 79,000 calls for service were graded as Immediate in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Generally the speed of response across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to Immediate calls for service is good, with 70.2% responded within 20 minutes and 87.2% within 30 minutes for the year 2017/18.

There has been no change in the proportion of immediate incidents attended within 20 minutes compared with 2016/17. In fact over the last 4 years the performance of this measure has remained relatively stable ranging from 72.5% to 70.2%.



The highest volume of immediate incidents are consistently recorded in July and August with December also showing high volumes. Month on month increases are seen from March onwards, reflecting the seasonal demand from Easter into the peak in the

summer months with increased visitors to the force area. All parts of the geography follow a similar pattern of demand, as the force, across the months.

The percentage of immediate incidents attended with 20 minutes falls in the summer months, and improves again into the autumn. When overlaid with the volume of immediate incidents, there appears to be a correlation with the increase in demand.

#### **4. Devon & Cornwall Police's 2017 internal review**

In 2017 Devon and Cornwall Police conducted an internal review of immediate incidents to develop a greater understanding of the issues that influence the time taken to attend. That internal review focused on opportunities for improvement, based on extensive staff consultation and data analysis as well as an examination of 'what works' in this and other forces.

This work included:

- A check on double crewing practices, to ensure that the number of cars available to respond is being maximised.
- A sample of status code usage, to ensure that the status of all units was accurately visible to dispatchers and thus available for response.
- A review of control room practice to ensure that incidents were being rapidly and correctly recorded and resourced.
- A review of internally available data, to ensure that local managers could access and interrogate figures in order to understand their own teams' performance.

The key findings from that review were:

- Immediate incidents were attended within 20 minutes in approximately 70% of cases across the force area.
- Particular challenges exist around some rural areas and generally in all locations at shift changeover times.
- Performance levels are relatively consistent across the year – although there is a reduction in immediate calls attended within 20 minutes over the summer months.
- The number of officers assigned to response teams was a key factor that could increase attendance times but that a number of other changes could also be considered to make the best use of resources.

Following the review a number of changes have been instigated to support improvement and are being led by the Force Immediate Incidents Response Times Group. Specific actions being taken include:

- Changes to IT operating practices to provide automatic alarms when available responders in a geographic area become low and to increase the ability for the IT system to automatically suggest available units to the operator.
- Improving the timeliness of training that needs to be completed by a police officer before they can drive at excess speed under blue lights.
- Finding new ways to reduce the wider demands placed on response officer units, e.g. using alternative methods to return detainees to a home address following release from custody as well as use of minor injuries units to avoid undue delays in Accident & Emergency Departments.
- Drawing on wider police resource within the local area through tasking to make use of available resources to support attendance at prompt incidents (which require attendance within 48 hours)

- The creation of a forcewide group to review outliers to identify ways in which performance can be improved.
- Looking at ways to use technology better so that officers can stay out of police stations, including a new pilot in West Cornwall.
- Continued monitoring of local performance to identify and share improvements and good practice across the force

Going forward through 2018/19 the Immediate Incident Response Time Group will continue and expand this work.

The Police and Crime Commissioner recognises the positive steps that Devon and Cornwall Police have been taking over the past 8 months to ensure that they have a strong understanding of performance in this area and to examine ways to further improve. The OPCC sits on that review group on behalf of the PCC to engage further in this work.

## **5. OPCC Review**

The OPCC appreciates the multiple factors and complexities that can influence response times on any given day, and the additional challenges that come with policing the largest geographic force in England.

The OPCC is reassured that Devon and Cornwall Police have started to examine the performance of immediate response times in more detail, demonstrating their commitment to the local policing promise and ensuring local policing is responsive to the matter at hand.

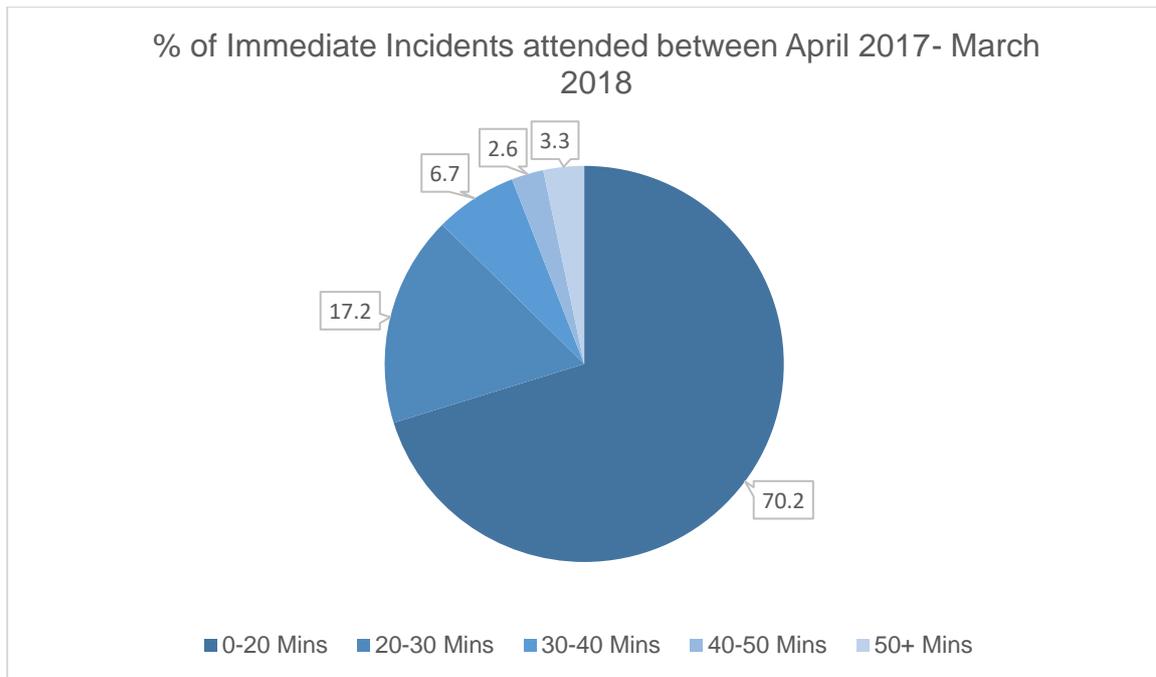
It is vital that going forward performance monitoring in this area is regular and robust and that the data is used in a timely way to inform local and organisational leaders on resourcing matters.

In response to the force's review and action, the OPCC's review is seeking to understand the numbers and proportion of immediate incidents that are not attended within the 20 minute timeframe. It has focused on incidents which were attended close to 20 minutes (i.e. within 30 minutes) and the volume and percentage of incidents across the geography where response time was in excess of 50 minutes.

## **6. OPCC Findings**

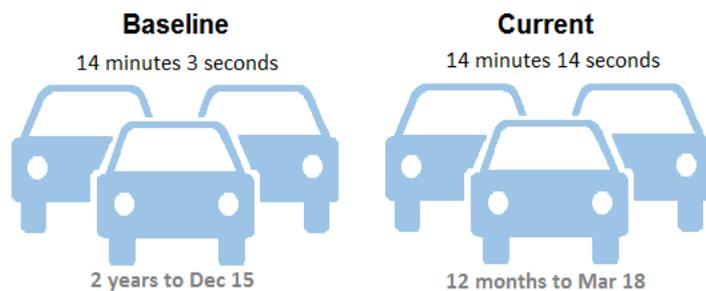
Encouragingly the majority of immediate incidents are attended within 20 minutes (70.2%) and just over 87% were attended within 30 minutes.

There has been no change in the proportion of immediate incidents attended within 20 minutes compared with 2016/17. In fact over the last 4 years the performance of this measure has remained relatively stable ranging from 72.5% to 70.2%.



In the performance year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018:

- 61,825 immediate incidents were attended within 30 minutes across the force area, which equates to 87% of total immediate incidents.
- 2,309 immediate incidents were attended after 50 minutes across the force geography. This equates to 3% of total immediate incidents.
- The median (average) response time across Devon and Cornwall has consistently been around 14 minutes and for the 12 months to end of March 2018 was 14 minutes and 14 seconds. This figure has been consistently within 14 minutes since the start of the PCC's term



Detailed examination of performance for each of the 27 police sectors within Devon and Cornwall Police for the year 2017/18 does identify some geographical variances in performance times. However in every police sector over 69% of Immediate incidents were responded to within 30 minutes.

The below table shows the breakdown for immediate incidents attendance times for the 27 police sectors within Devon and Cornwall.

By Sector*	Volume of immediates	% within 30 minutes	% that exceed 50 minutes
Barnstaple Sector	2303	92%	2%
Bodmin Sector	1933	82%	4%
Camborne Sector	2934	92%	2%
Coastal & Rural Teignbridge Sector	2978	82%	4%
Exeter Sector	5884	93%	2%
Exmouth Sector	2285	89%	2%
Falmouth & Helston Sector	2083	87%	3%
Ivybridge & Kingsbridge Sector	1231	84%	3%
Launceston Sector	2001	69%	8%
Liskeard Sector	2472	82%	4%
Mid Devon Sector	2268	81%	4%
Newquay Sector	1831	92%	2%
Newton Abbot Sector	2181	91%	2%
North Devon Sector	1503	82%	5%
Paignton & Brixham Sector	2676	87%	4%
Penzance & St Ives Sector	2704	90%	3%
Plymouth Central & Plymstock Sector	3768	93%	2%
Plymouth North & Plympton Sector	3758	92%	3%
Plymouth South Sector	3357	95%	2%
Plymouth West & Devonport Sector	4184	92%	2%
Rural East Devon Sector	1679	78%	4%
St Austell Sector	2726	88%	3%
Torquay Sector	4409	87%	4%
Torrige Sector	1912	81%	4%
Totnes & Dartmouth Sector	1143	83%	4%
Truro Sector	2637	88%	3%
West Devon Sector	1829	76%	7%

\* Sector boundaries can be viewed at <https://www.devon-cornwall.police.uk/your-area/local-policing-team-map/>

All 27 police sectors have a percentage of immediate incidents where the response time was in excess of 50 minutes – including the densely populated urban areas of Plymouth, Exeter and Torbay.

The cause of long response time for a particular incident will vary. It may relate to a single factor or a combination of factors, which might include the geographic distance that a response unit needs to travel but also the volume of such calls received into the force within that timeframe and the impact of shift changeovers, in particular the transfer of vehicles between outgoing and incoming shifts.

The two areas which have the highest proportion of immediate calls which are over 50 minutes are Launceston sector (155 incidents (8%)) and West Devon sector (123 incidents (7%)). These are predominantly rural areas which include a significant volume of moorland and have a limited road network.

The OPCC recognises that the number of immediate incidents are low in these areas but notes that the percentage of incidents attended after 50 minutes is consistently high across the year. This requires additional exploration to understand what factors are driving this consistent level and what action can be taken to address it.

While busy urban areas experience a lower percentage of calls which take longer than 50 minutes – the actual numbers of such incidents within those areas across the year are not insignificant and also need to be better understood in terms of causality and potential for improvement. For example, there were 186 such incidents in Torquay over the year 2017/18.

The PCC recognises that the force currently work to a 20 minute response time for immediate calls across the whole force area which they typically meet around 70% of the time but are seeking to further improve that performance.

The PCC considers that a 30 minute response time could be a more appropriate service standard for the large urban, rural and coastal geography of Devon and Cornwall. However consideration of any such change would need to be supported by clear feedback to callers regarding expected attendance times, continued strong performance on average response times and action to tackle the volume and proportion of calls which wait longer than 50 minutes at sector level.

The resources available to policing are finite and the importance of officer numbers in delivering immediate response time improvements is noted. The PCC is continuing to work with the Chief Constable to make a strong case to central government to ensure that Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly have sufficient funding to meet the challenges we face and to minimise the impact that abstraction of local officers for national duties under mutual aid and the Strategic Policing Requirement can have on service levels for our communities. In particular the upcoming review of the police funding formula and the Comprehensive Spending Review need to recognise our diverse geography as a large urban, rural and coastal police area with a small land border and the significant tourism influx with over 10 million visits each year.

## **7. OPCC Recommendations**

The OPCC recognise that Devon and Cornwall Police has been making improvements through their own review of Immediate Response Times and that over 87% of immediate incidents are attended within 30 minutes. Taken together with the findings of the Devon and Cornwall Police internal review the OPCC's additional examination of immediate response times has identified a number of additional actions that should be taken by Devon and Cornwall Police.

- 1) Carry out within the next 3 months a detailed examination of the immediate incidents that have taken over 50 minutes to attend in the 2017/18 year to better understand the reasons for delay. In particular to consider:
  - a) the frequency of occurrence within the geographic area (in volume and percentage terms) and common factors within that area as to the cause of a 50+ response time
  - b) the demographics of callers waiting in excess of 50 minutes,
  - c) the impact that such delays may have on the vulnerability of the victim
  - d) any common themes across the force area

- 2) Provide details to the PCC of what additional steps could be taken to reduce response times that exceed 50 minutes - particularly in the areas that consistently experience this issue and have median (average) response times which are notably higher than the Force average.
- 3) Continue to improve performance management of response times, utilising the Immediate Incidents Response Time Group, to ensure that a consistent approach to monitoring this information is adopted across the force and cascaded to assist organisational learning and drive improvement.
- 4) To ensure that callers whose call is graded as immediate are consistently advised of the response time they can expect and are contacted again if it subsequently alters.
- 5) Report publicly on a six month basis on performance in responding to immediate incidents within 30 minutes and 50+ minutes for the 27 police sectors in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly starting in October 2018.



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