

Police & Crime Commissioner's Review of the 101 Service Provision in Devon & Cornwall

1. Executive Summary

1.1. The Police & Crime Plan published in April 2014 contained a commitment to review the 101 non-emergency police contact service in response to concerns raised by the public. Over the last 6 months the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner has undertaken this review in conjunction with Devon & Cornwall Police, the public and elected representatives. The review has included public consultation, listening to calls received in the call centre and logging the nature and outcome for a significant sample of calls.

1.2. The results and recommendations focus on a number of key issues; policy and procedure, the nature of the demand into the call centre, staff and supervision issues and calls into question the justification for a 24 hour service provision

1.3. The review sought to answer one key question: are Devon and Cornwall Police providing an effective non-emergency service to those members of the public that ring 101?

1.4. In coming to a view on that question the review sought to find out the following things

1.4.1. What factual information can be found that would demonstrate whether the length of time the public need to wait is acceptable when calling 101?

1.4.2. What quality of response is provided to the public through the 101 service?

1.4.3. How efficiently and effectively is the current service being operated?

1.4.4. What, if any, barriers exist to providing a good service to the public?

1.4.5. To what extent is the 101 service being used to handle calls that should be handled by other bodies, particularly other statutory agencies such as local authorities?

1.5. It is sensible to consider the subsidiary questions first before coming to a view on the main issue.

1.5.1. What factual information can be found that would demonstrate whether the length of time the public need to wait when calling 101 is acceptable? Calls to the 101 service are picked up by switchboard within a reasonably quick timescale. 86% of calls are answered within 30 seconds. However very few calls are resolved at the point of first contact. The majority of calls are transferred from the initial switchboard operator through to the Force Enquiry Centre. The average waiting time for this transfer is 6 minutes and 50% of callers wait for 10 minutes or more, with 20% waiting for longer than 20 minutes. These times do not include the additional time taken to speak to switchboard.

1.5.2. What quality of response is provided to the public through the 101 service? In general, call handlers are professional and well trained. They are focused on providing an effective outcome to the caller but are often frustrated by physical and ICT systems in place within the control room and elsewhere in the force.

1.5.3. How efficiently and effectively is the current service being operated? The service is inefficient as all calls are triaged by switchboard operators who when surveyed only resolved between 6% and 8% of callers queries. The majority of callers needed to be transferred onto to other places in particular the Force Enquiry Centre. This often led to the caller not only usually waiting for a considerable period to be transferred but then also having to re-explain to a second operator the nature of their issue. This is not only frustrating for callers but also extremely wasteful of resources.

1.5.4. What, if any, barriers exist to providing a good service to the public? The technology in use within the control room does not allow for the most effective deployment of staff. Technology also does not enable effective monitoring of staff for individual and corporate management purposes. In addition, the lack of corporate rules for email and answerphone responses make it difficult for the Switchboard and FEC staff to transfer messages to the 5000 officers and staff throughout the organisation with any certainty of when or if that message might be picked up.

1.5.5. To what extent is the 101 service being used to handle calls that should be handled by other bodies, particularly other statutory agencies such as local authorities? The review shows that the 101 service is used to handle calls that should be handled by other agencies relatively infrequently with only 2% of calls signposted to other agencies. Furthermore the impact of demand from other partner agencies on the 101 service is relatively small with only 4% of calls received from partners such as local authorities, health or education.

1.6. It is clear that the length of time that callers wait to get through to someone who can help them with their call is much longer than the public would expect. It is also longer than any service standards in place with other comparable

public services. This delay has significantly increased since April 2014. A number of potential explanations for this increase are highlighted including changes in shift patterns, and the introduction of a new crime recording system and vulnerability screening process. Other factors however continue to present barriers to providing a more effective service. The quality of the service received once callers reach someone who can help them is assessed to be high.

1.7. This report contains a number of recommendations that focus on 3 key areas.

1.7.1. Improving the efficiency of the process by which calls are categorised and passed to someone who can help.

1.7.2. Consideration of the principle of providing a 24 hour service to support non-emergency calls.

1.7.3. Clearer definition of the role that call handlers are required to perform and more active supervision.

1.8. In addition a number of wider organisational issues are identified that would improve the operating environment, provide greater clarity of purpose and reduce demand on the 101 system.

2. Introduction

2.1. Since Tony Hogg's election a regular message of concern from the public, local councillors, MPs and the Police and Crime Panel has been a perception that callers are left waiting for long periods of time when calling the 101 service.

2.2. In his 2014 Police and Crime Plan Tony Hogg commissioned a detailed review. This report outlines the current service provision, summarises the key findings from the review and notes where work is ongoing to address some of the issues raised. It also highlights additional areas where further improvement could be made.

3. Methodology

3.1. The following activities were undertaken to inform this review

3.1.1. **Public consultation.** A formal public consultation was conducted which focused on both the experience and the expectation of the public when they call 101. This was gathered through face-to-face consultation at public meetings and events through the summer and via an on-line consultation on the PCC website. 730 responses were received.

3.1.2. 24 hours in the switchboard. On 5th September a 24 hour listening exercise was conducted during which every call received by the 101 switchboard was listened to and logged. This exercise focused on the nature of the demand into the switchboard and the onward internal demand placed on other areas of call handling and other internal departments. There were 2226 calls logged during this exercise. There were some obvious caveats to the findings most notably that the data capture occurred over a single 24 hour period which may not be representative of wider experience.

3.1.3. Logging of call types. For a two week period between Monday 6th October and Monday 20th October the switchboard function conducted a 'quick capture' exercise was undertaken and aimed to replicate key elements of the 24-hour listening exercise over a longer period of time in order to validate some of the key findings. This involved a tally exercise recording who was calling 101 and what action resulted from the call. More than 20,000 calls were received through the 101 switchboard during this period with an average of 2820 calls to 101 per day.

3.1.4. Live reviews of FEC calls. A two week qualitative listening exercise focused on calls that were routed through the switchboard to the Force Enquiry Centre. This involved listening to more than 70 hours of non-emergency calls taken by the Force Enquiry Centre and focused on identifying any barriers to the call handling process. Again this exercise was used to validate many of the findings from the 24 hour listening exercise and also to explore issues that have emerged from other areas of the analysis. In total 224 calls were surveyed during this exercise.

3.1.5. Review of data. Data was provided from police systems about call volume, waiting times and the number of abandoned calls for the switchboard and FEC. In addition more detailed data was provided that described the average waiting time in 15 minute windows throughout the month of October 2014. Finally data showing the number of calls that received the busy tone at the switchboard for the most recent 12 month period was provided.

3.1.6. Feedback from control room staff. The control room staff including both call handlers and their supervisors provided considerable insight and feedback to the review during the listening exercises. In addition they were invited to provide additional comment and feedback at several stages throughout the review period.

3.1.7. Feedback from control room management. Control room management were also consulted at key points during the exercise and updated about significant results as they arose. This allowed the review the opportunity to reality check the early findings.

4. The current operation

4.1. Members of the public telephoning the Force on 101 are answered by call handlers stationed in either of two call handling facilities, part of Call Management and Communications Unit at Exeter (CM&CU[E]) and Plymouth (CM&CU[W]).

4.2. *Force Control Rooms*

The Force control rooms are situated at Exeter and Plymouth and are continuously staffed to receive calls from members of the public. The Force control rooms are primarily engaged in the receipt of Emergency 999 calls, and calls from other emergency services and key stakeholders such as Monitoring Alarm Companies. The Exeter control room is located within a single large room within force headquarters whereas the Plymouth operation is split between two rooms on different floors of the Crownhill police station. The Plymouth control room was undergoing refurbishment for the duration of the exercise.

4.3. *Internal set up*

The Force control rooms are divided into a number of sections. Many staff are multi-skilled and can be transferred between operating units as required.

4.4. The sections are Switchboard which answers all non-emergency calls. Force Enquiry Centre (FEC) that deals with more involved queries and also takes details of crime from members of the public. 999 operations, dispatch of force resources and input of police officer crime reports are also located within these functions but for the purpose of this report have been excluded from detailed analysis.

4.5. There are 9 teams of call handlers working 24 hour shifts spread across the two sites. Each team has at least 2 supervisors. Each site has a call centre manager who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the call centres.

4.6. Dependent on the level of training received the call handlers may be capable of performing more than one function including:

- 4.6.1. Switchboard
- 4.6.2. Force enquiry centre
- 4.6.3. 999 or priority line calls
- 4.6.4. Crime data input bureau
- 4.6.5. Missing persons
- 4.6.6. Lost & found property

4.7. In practice a call handler may perform a number of functions during a single shift for example a call handler tasked to take FEC calls may be allocated to take 999 calls as well if demand on the emergency lines exceeds the allocated resources. They might also be allocated to take missing persons or lost and found property calls. This purpose of this multifunctional profile of the staff in the call centre is to allow the resource profile to flex dynamically according to demand. Decisions about dynamic changes to the functions that an individual call handler is allocated to are the responsibility of the team supervisor.

4.8. *Contacting the Force*

Members of the public wishing to contact the Devon and Cornwall Police by telephone may do so via one of five main routes, each of which must be actively promoted:

4.8.1. Emergency Calls – 999

Life is threatened, Persons are injured, Offenders are nearby, or immediate action is needed.

4.8.2. Central Switchboard –101

Non emergency calls, 24 Hour service.

4.8.3. Textphone central switchboard (18001 101) alternative method for contacting 101.

4.8.4. Dedicated Dialing Inward

Where numbers are published, to contact a specific department direct.

4.8.5. Minicom (for deaf and hearing impaired callers) – 01392 452935

4.8.6. The above numbers are published in all BT telephone books throughout the Devon and Cornwall and in various marketing material.

4.9. *Emergency/999 Calls*

999 calls are the first priority for control room staff.

4.10. 999 calls come into the control room through the dedicated national 999 service. This is routinely answered by call handlers that are dedicated to responding to 999 calls. Where capacity to deal with 999 calls is at risk non-emergency call handlers within the control room can be switched to receive 999 calls. Where capacity is seriously stretched and waiting time thresholds are compromised, 999 calls for Devon & Cornwall will be routed to the control room in Dorset as part of a reciprocal arrangement to ensure that emergencies are responded to as priorities. Over the past 12 months 86% of 999 calls have been answered within 10 seconds. This performance is in line with the majority of other police forces.

4.11. 999 calls result in the creation of an incident log where necessary or have the details entered on an existing log relating to the same subject or incident. This information is then used to determine whether an officer attends the incident.

4.12. *Non-emergency/101 Calls*

Calls to the 101 service are initially routed through the national 101 system. This determines the likely location of the caller and routes the call to the local police force. The caller is given the option to specify a different police force if required.

4.13. 101 can be accessed via telephone (either landline or mobile) or from the blue telephone units attached to the wall outside police stations. Non-emergency enquiries and reports can also be made by e-mail and these are sent direct to the Force Enquiry Centre.

4.14. *Force Telephone Switchboard*

The Force telephone switchboard is staffed 24 hours per day every day of the year to receive non-emergency calls from members of the public. This is the first point of contact with the force for callers who dial 101.

4.15. The switchboard call handlers provide a standard greeting to the caller and take brief details of the reason for calling. The call handler uses their judgement to determine whether the call is suitable for immediate resolution at the switchboard, usually by providing advice or information to the caller. Where a call cannot be resolved immediately the switchboard call handler transfers the call. This can be to another function within the control room or to another department, individual or location in Devon & Cornwall Police, for example:

4.15.1. Occasionally a call comes through to the 101 non-emergency switchboard that in the assessment of the call handler requires a more urgent response. These calls are redirected to the priority call line (accessed by dialling 999 from outside the organisation).

4.15.2. Some callers know who they want to speak to or are asking to speak to a specific department (custody for example) and in these cases the calls are transferred.

4.15.3. Callers using 101 to provide an update to an existing crime record may be transferred to the Crime Data Input Bureau (CDIB).

4.15.4. Lost and found property can be transferred to a dedicated line that is specific to that purpose. With effect from November 2014 Devon & Cornwall Police are introducing the national lost property database with an online reporting facility called 'Report My Loss'.

4.15.5. General calls that cannot be immediately resolved and that may relate to reports of incidents, intelligence or crimes are transferred to the Force Enquiry Centre (FEC).

4.16. Between 28% and 33% of calls received at the switchboard are transferred to the Force Enquiry Centre.

4.17. *Force Enquiry Centres*

The Force Enquiry Centres are staffed 24 hours per day every day of the year to receive calls from members of the public, connected via the switchboard.

4.18. Call Handlers have the discretion to make an immediate decision as to whether a police resource will attend. Judgement must be used, balancing the needs, expectation and vulnerability of the caller against any operational requirement.

4.19. The Force Enquiry Centre functions are:

4.19.1. To deal with non-emergency enquiries from the public which, it is to be hoped will be resolved over the telephone using either a call handler or desktop resolution constable without the necessity of committing a police resource to attend in person.

4.19.2. To directly record crime where appropriate, in accordance with Force Policy

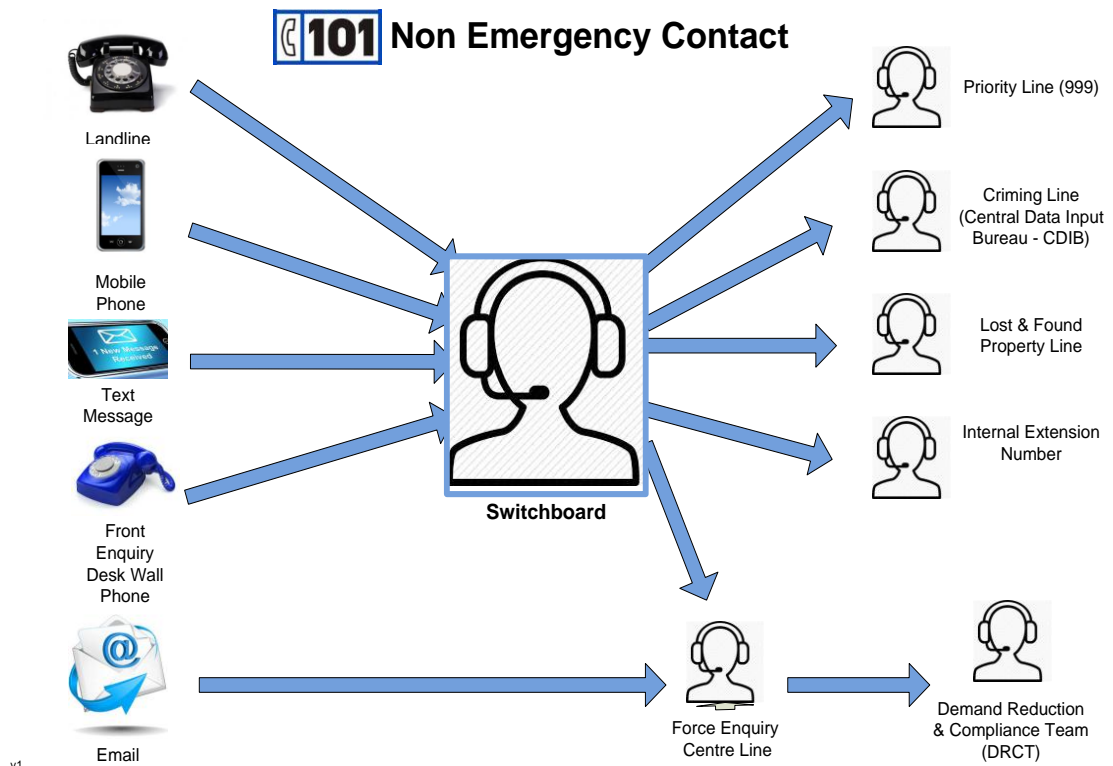


Figure 1. Summary of 101 Call routes

5. Findings

5.1. Is the length of time taken to get through to the 101 service acceptable?

5.1.1. During the summer this year a consultation exercise was conducted and one issue that this focused on was the service that the public expect to receive when they are calling the police in relation to a non-urgent matter. The consultation took two forms: public engagement at local events and an open survey with the link provided on the PCC website which was forwarded to public representatives and interest groups as well as being open to the public to complete.

5.1.2. In total 730 people completed the survey, 218 through the online survey and 512 through face-to-face consultation at public events.

5.1.3. 84% of respondents were aware of the 101 number. More than half of the survey respondents would use 101 to make a complaint, to request information from the police, to report a crime or to report an incident. The most popular reason to use 101 was to provide information to the police (70%, n=518). Less than half of survey respondents would use 101 to make an

appointment with an officer or to speak to an officer, although the proportions for both remain above 40%.

5.1.4. When asked how long they would be prepared to wait in order to speak to someone who could help them 48% (n=349) indicated between 1-2 minutes, 30% (n=217) indicated less than one minute and 16% (n=115) indicated that they would be prepared to wait for up to 5 minutes. Only 6% (n=44) were prepared to wait longer than 5 minutes to get through.

5.1.5. Over the last 3 years there have been more than 2 million calls received by the 101 non-emergency service in Devon & Cornwall. That is an average of more than 1,800 calls per day or more than one call per minute.

5.1.6. Despite this volume of demand average switchboard response times are on average remarkably prompt; 5 seconds for the 12 months ended 30th September 2012 and 2013 rising to 9 seconds for the equivalent period in 2014.

5.1.7. There is a target to answer more than 90% of all calls to 101 within 30 seconds. Data provided to 6th October suggests that this target was not being achieved for the rolling twelve months with 86% of calls answered within 30 seconds. Less than 1% of calls to the 101 switchboard are abandoned.

5.1.8. From police systems data over 60% of calls made to the 101 non-emergency number in Devon & Cornwall are transferred to the Force Enquiry Centre, which includes non-urgent and urgent Force Enquiries and the Crime Data Input Bureau. Our research found that the proportion of calls transferred to non-urgent Force Enquiry Centre was in the range of 28-33%. The average answer delay for calls transferred to the Force Enquiry Centre during the 12 months to end of September 2014 was 5 minutes 57 seconds. More than 25% of calls transferred to FEC were abandoned in the 12 months to end of September 2014.

5.1.9. However the average daily waiting time for FEC has increased significantly in the last 6 months. The chart below shows the average daily waiting times for FEC over three six month periods; to end of September 2014, to end of March 2014 and to the end of September 2013. From this it is apparent that the two earlier periods had much shorter average daily waiting times than the latest period to the end of September 2014. Indeed the average daily waiting time has increased in this period to between 5 and 20 minutes.

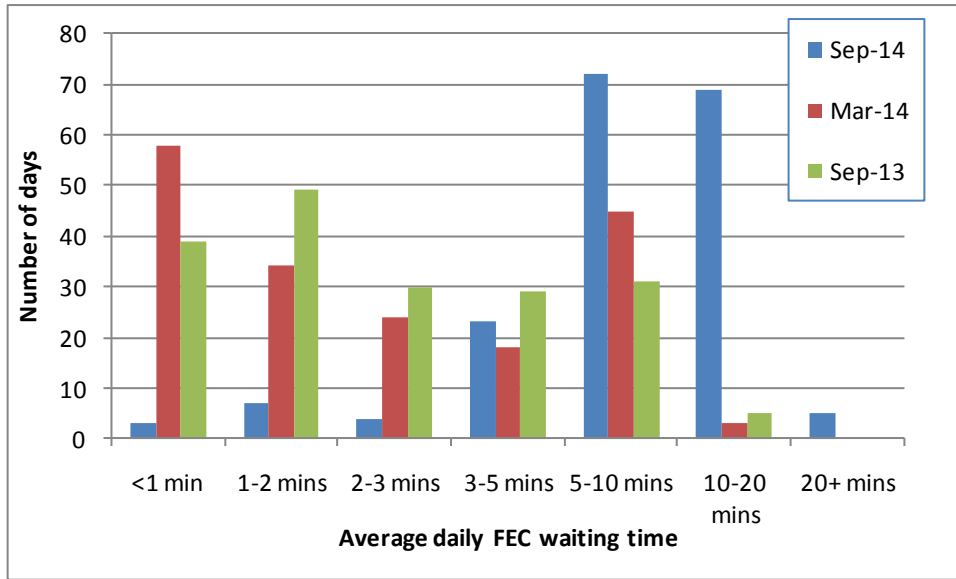


Figure 2. Chart showing recorded average daily FEC waiting times over the six months to end of September 2014 compared to the equivalent periods to end of March 2014 and September 2013.

5.1.10. When all incoming lines to the 101 switchboard are busy the caller receives an engaged tone and reviewing the number of such calls suggests a dramatic shift in performance since April 2014. The number of calls greeted by the engaged tone per month between January and March did not exceed 200. For the months between June and October this increased at least 10 fold and did not fall below 2000 in any month. A similar increase is apparent in the number of calls that are unanswered i.e. where the caller hangs up before the call is answered. The period between June and August was affected by an increased demand due to the volume of summer visitors. However the extent of the increase shown and it's persistence since the end of the summer period suggests that this increase was driven by more than summer demand.

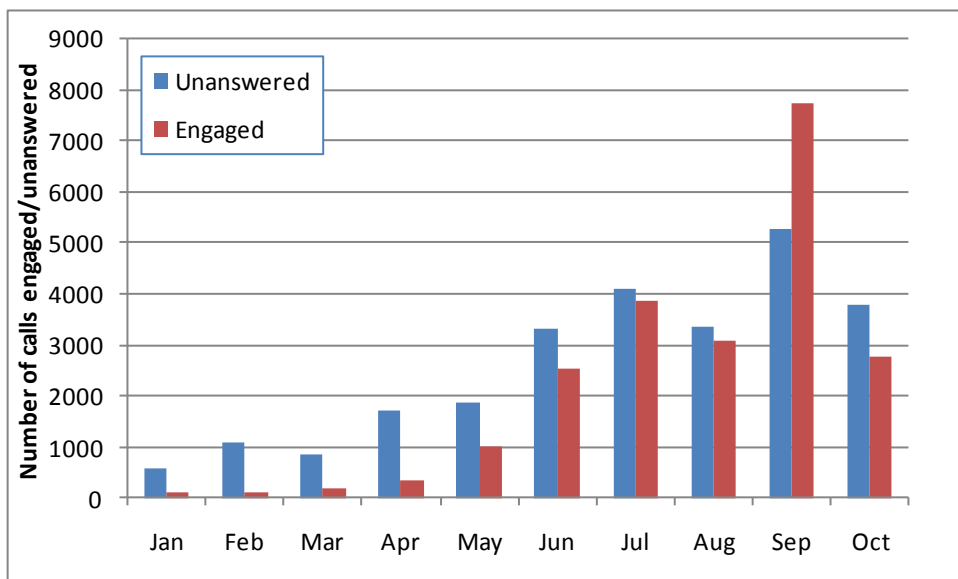


Figure 3. Number of engaged and unanswered calls per month between January and October 2014.

5.1.11. The data provided by the review suggested that waiting times for the switchboard were very short and the average length of time that calls are with switchboard was 1 minute, 35 seconds. However the time that transferred callers had to wait in order to speak to someone who could help them exceeded the 2 minute expectation highlighted above. Data from the 24 hour listening exercise suggested that for 74% of calls transferred to the Force Enquiry Centre the waiting time at the point of transfer was greater than 5 minutes.

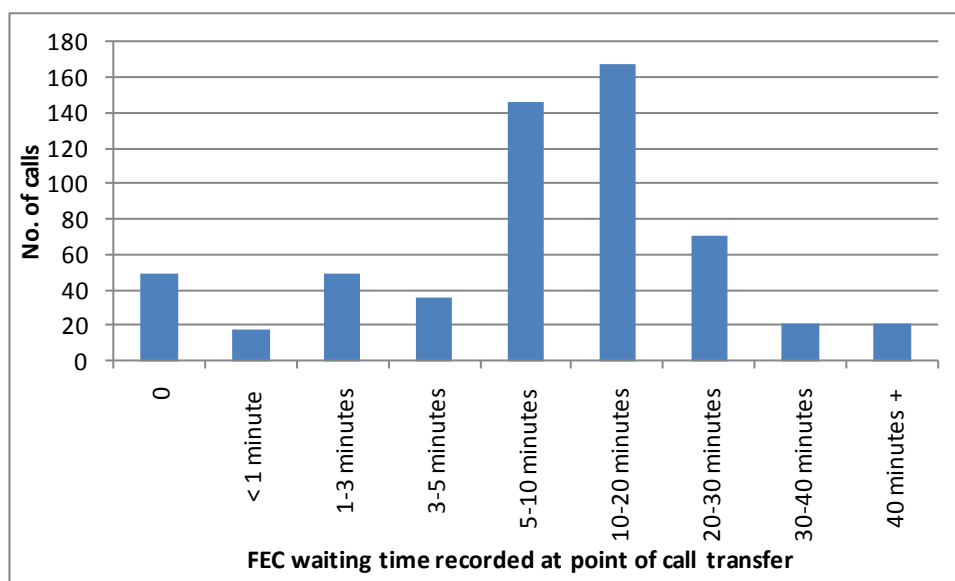


Figure 4. Chart showing recorded FEC waiting times at point of transfer from switchboard to FEC during the 24 hour listening exercise.

5.1.12. The conclusion of the review was that although calls are answered promptly at the switchboard the time that most callers to the 101 number have to wait in order to speak to someone who can help them is on the whole unacceptable. The review also concluded that the waiting time for callers to 101 has become significantly longer since April 2014. There is some evidence that this pressure point in the system is having an impact on the time taken to answer calls at the switchboard.

5.2. What is the quality of the service provided to callers once they do get through to 101?

5.2.1. Devon & Cornwall Police regularly monitor the experience of callers to the 101 service using a telephone survey. This survey asks callers "Taking everything into account are you satisfied, dissatisfied or neither with the service provided by the police in this case?" Results from the survey have consistently suggested that more than 80% of callers are satisfied with their experience. However the sample of callers that are contacted to take part in this survey is taken from those callers whose calls results in an incident log being created or a crime recorded. This represents less than a third of all

callers. The remaining calls do not generate a record on police systems and so cannot be sampled readily.

5.2.2. In addition Devon & Cornwall Police regularly surveys the experiences of victims of crime. One of the questions used relates to how easy it was for the victim to contact the police. This measure again indicates satisfaction rates of over 95%. However the sample of callers contacted only relates to victims of burglary, vehicle crime and violence and is therefore representative of a very small proportion of the overall number of callers.

5.2.3. All of the data analysed suggested that the issues that concern the public relate to the time taken to get through to someone who can help them and not the service that is received once the call is answered. A frequent observation throughout both of the listening exercises was the high standard of service provided by the call handlers.

5.2.4. This observation was supported by the FEC listening exercise which found that in 97% of cases the surveyor believed that the caller was satisfied with the outcome to their call and in all cases the surveyor felt that they would have been satisfied by the service provided had they received the same response.

5.2.5. The responses provided by the public in the consultation exercise were rather different. Although overall the main point of dissatisfaction was the waiting time, other issues identified included a lack of police response, failure of officers to attend an incident and a lack of knowledge by the call handler. In almost all cases where these views were expressed the caller had waited some considerable time to get through. It is possible that a long wait increases the expectation for delivery once the caller does manage to get through, a possibility that increases the importance of ensuring that realistic expectations are set. However, our observation was that call handlers did well but were often frustrated by systems and processes beyond their control.

5.2.6. Overall the evidence suggests that although callers have to wait longer than acceptable to reach someone who could help them with their call, the quality of service received once they do get through is generally to a high standard.

5.3. **How efficient or effective is the current service?**

5.3.1. The current procedure of receiving calls at the switchboard before passing them on to another team to resolve potentially involves a significant amount of duplication both for the caller in reciting the information that they need to pass to the police and then to repeat it when the call is passed on, as well as for the police who record the information at the first point of contact. This arrangement would only have some benefit if a significant proportion of calls were resolved at the first point of contact at the switchboard stage.

5.3.2. The review has provided conflicting evidence on this point. The 24 hour listening exercise suggested that only 7% of calls were resolved at the first

point of contact while the quick capture tally exercise suggested that 28% of all calls taken were resolved at first point of contact. This apparent difference was explained by examining the proportion of calls resolved at first point of contact during the quick capture tally exercise by time of the day. Between 09:00 am and midnight the proportion of calls resolved at first point of contact ranged between 6% and 8%. However overnight the proportion of calls resolved at first point of contact increased to between 13% and 31%. This difference is explained by the merging of the switchboard and Force Enquiry Centre functions during the overnight hours with switchboard call handlers undertaking the Force Enquiry Centre function.

5.3.3. It is reasonable to conclude that fewer than 10% of calls are resolved at the first point of contact. Significant resource is devoted to the switchboard function which appears to provide poor value for money.

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the call centre consider amalgamating the switchboard and Force Enquiry Centre functions with all calls dealt with by all call handlers as they are during the overnight periods.

5.3.4. For a two week period between Monday 6th October and Monday 20th October the switchboard function conducted a tally exercise recording who was calling 101 and what action resulted from the call. More than 20,000 calls were received through the 101 switchboard during this period.

5.3.5. On average there were 2820 101 calls per day. The profile of calls by day of the week suggests that Monday is the busiest, with 553 extra calls compared to the daily average. The weekends are quietest with more than 500 fewer calls each day compared to the daily average.

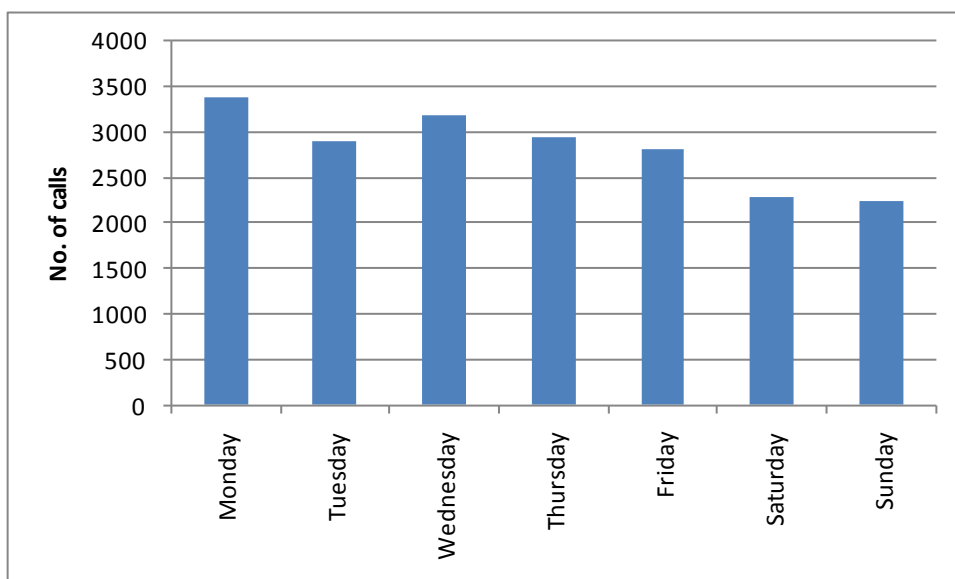


Figure 5. Chart showing the temporal distribution of calls per day.

5.3.6. The profile of times of calls supports the observations made during the 24 hours listening exercise. 77% (n=15579) of calls were received between 09:00 and 18:59. Only 1% of calls (n=231) were received between 02:00 and 06:59 with an average call rate during this period of 4 per hour. Of these calls 18 should have been 999 calls. Looking at the spread of calls during this period across the week there was no obvious increase at this time associated with the early hours of either Saturday or Sunday morning. In fact on the two Saturday mornings covered by the exercise no calls were received between 05:00 and 06:59.

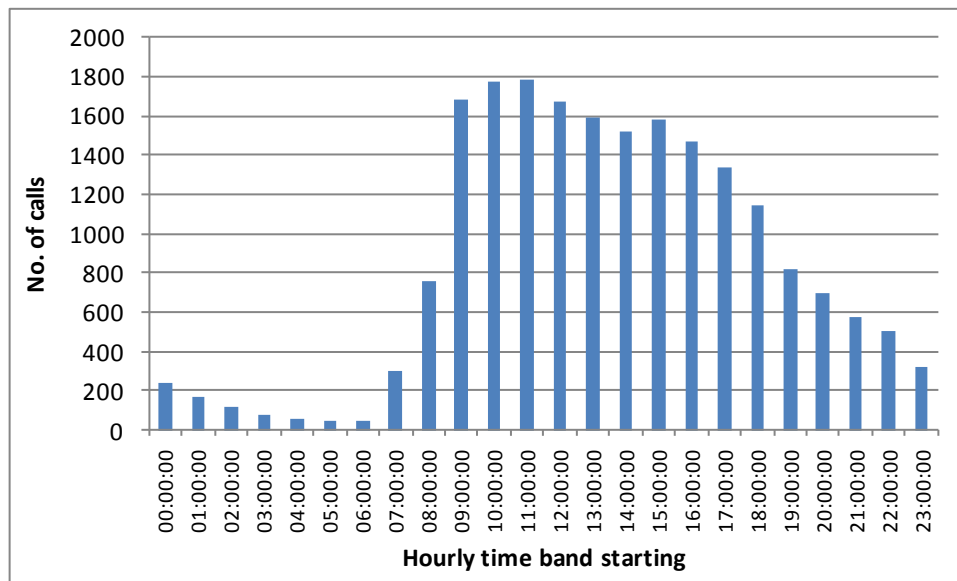


Figure 6. Chart showing the temporal distribution of calls per hour.

5.3.7. Call demand profiles are used to determine the best match between available resources and expected demand. Nonetheless the data suggests that resources remain stretched and that at peak times demand exceeds resource capacity. This situation is exacerbated during seasonal periods of high demand such as the summer months.

5.3.8. In summary the evidence indicated that demand during the overnight period between 02:00 and 07:00 was very low.

Recommendation 2:

The principle of providing 24 hour cover for a non-emergency police contact service should be reviewed. Further work to examine the nature of the demand and likely impact of this is recommended.

5.3.9. Call handlers performing both the switchboard and the Force Enquiry Centre functions undertake a significant amount of research. Some of this research was clearly necessary to support the safety of officers being

deployed to incidents. However, frequently the research appeared to stray beyond this. Examples include an additional 8 minutes spent tracking down a phone number and leaving a message for the owner of a lost purse, an additional 7 minutes spent trying different variations of a vehicle registration plate with no result and an extra 16 minutes spent tracking down an officer who could convert a log into a crime so that the details could be updated. The FEC listening exercise observed that the amount of time that call handlers spent on administration, research and data entry after a call was complete was considerable. On average an additional 5 minutes was spent on post-call administration as against an average call time of 8 minutes. In 29% (n=65) of calls there was no further administration required, however in 71% (n=159) of cases it was. The time spent on post-call administration ranged from 1 minute to 50 minutes.

5.3.10. In some cases the research provided key information with potential to protect officers and members of the public however this takes the call handlers away from dealing with the public for a considerable period of time potentially with a low positive yield in terms of protection.

5.3.11. A further key finding was therefore that the roles of the call handlers were poorly defined beyond the core functionality and not consistent across the control room. This meant that the amount of time that call handlers spent dealing with members of the public was not maximised and at times increased already lengthy waiting times

Recommendation 3:

The role of call handlers needs to be better defined with clearer guidance about what research and post-call administration activity should be involved. It may be appropriate to consider meeting some or all of the crime recording and research functions currently undertaken by call handlers within another business area.

5.3.12. It was repeatedly observed that the call centre functions as a close knit team. Call handlers and supervisors generally worked well to support each other and there was a strong desire to ensure that each individual pulled their weight. Call handlers frequently reported to start their shifts early in order to ensure that their tired colleagues could get away promptly at the end of their shifts and without a break in service provision.

5.3.13. Examples of staff and supervisors working well together to deal with abusive callers or particularly tricky situations were observed. It was also clear that staff were well supported following distressing and troubling calls.

5.3.14. Despite this positive pastoral environment a number of observations were made that may be affecting the capacity of the teams to field calls more effectively.

5.3.15. The role of the supervisors in monitoring performance, building capability and making decisions about the profile of skills required at any given time was not clearly evidenced. There was little evidence of intrusive supervision during any of the exercises. Supervisors tended to spend a lot of time behind their desks. When a call handler needed advice they had to leave their work station to seek support. In many cases this involved approaching either other call handlers or police officers in the room, resulting in at least two people considering an issue and frequently more.

Recommendation 4:

A more active and intrusive style of supervision with supervisors ‘walking the floor’ to provide immediate support where necessary rather than requiring call handlers to leave their stations to seek support would save vital minutes and ensure that call handlers were spending more time supporting callers to the best of their ability.

5.3.16. The basis for supervisor’s decisions to switch call handlers role profiles to include additional functions was not clear and information to allow them to review their resourcing decisions against demand historically was not available. This makes monitoring performance or modelling the best response to challenging scenarios difficult.

5.3.17. It was noted that where a call handler on the switchboard believed that they had an appropriate level of competency and were skilled in multiple functions they made the decision to expand their role when the waiting time for the Force Enquiry Centre began to lengthen.

5.3.18. There was a considerable lack of consistency, not just in the level of experience between call handlers, which might be expected, but also in how a call was resolved. Extreme examples included a call handler who recorded a significantly higher number of crimes than other call handlers and an individual call handler who offered different advice to callers with the same information request during the same shift. Notably a caller ringing to report a noisy neighbour could get one of three different outcomes; a crime might be recorded, an incident log created and officers despatched or the caller might be asked to contact Environmental Health. This highlights the complex decisions that call handlers have to make and emphasises the importance of individual judgement of call handlers in considering issues that frequently fall in grey areas of police business.

5.3.19. During the Force Enquiry Centre listening exercise it was frequently noted by observers that there was no urgency to move the caller on or to get sufficient information from the caller to determine what action was needed as quickly as possible. Call handlers tended to let the caller speak for as long as wanted and this was supported by reports of one call handler stating that after waiting for that long callers should have a chance to be listened to. This appears to suggest that reduction of waiting times did not have a high priority.

5.3.20. The role of the supervisor is pivotal in addressing these issues and ensuring greater consistency across the call centre.

5.3.21. A wider concern was the lack of availability of relevant data to support effective performance management. The data that was readily available was of limited use and focused on CMCU targets rather than on broader quality of service issues. This is recognised to be a problem by the management team and work is ongoing to ensure that more relevant data is available for the future.

Recommendation 5:

Supervisors should be required to a greater extent to actively manage queues flows through the transfer of available staff between the various functions. In particular, they should seek to ensure that public calls take priority over the management of internal force crime recording.

Recommendation 6:

The data available to support supervisors and management decisions and to enable more effective and relevant monitoring of performance needs to be critically reviewed.

5.4. What barriers exist to providing a good service to the public?

5.4.1. Existing telephony systems are accepted to be at the end of their useful life and a replacement system is being developed. Existing project plans suggest that the first stage of replacement will be implemented by May 2015 with a second stage to follow at least 6 months thereafter.

5.4.2. In 2012 a new incident management system was implemented called Storm and in April 2014 a new crime recording system was implemented called Unifi.

5.4.3. In addition to these technological changes there have been some process changes that may have impacted on the length of time spent recording information. For example the introduction of improved vulnerability screening may add a vital few additional minutes to the length of each call.

5.4.4. Other technological solutions that might be used such as the e-mail facility for 101 or the online crime reporting facility are not actively promoted by call handlers as alternatives to the extent that they could be.

5.4.5. It was not possible to ascertain whether the functionality of the replacement CC6 technology would meet all of the issues identified in this report.

Recommendation 7:

A Contact Strategy should be developed to identify alternative contact methods and support and promote their development and implementation

Recommendation 8:

An immediate review of CC6 functionality should be undertaken.

5.4.6. There were a number of issues noted with Unifi, the new crime recording system which was introduced in April 2014. There is a large amount of duplication between the information recorded in Storm incident logs and the information recorded on Unifi. In addition depending on the nature of the offence, Unifi requires a large number of additional pages of information relating to the nature of the offence, the location and venue, any property, the offender and the victim to be completed. The level of resource required to undertake this would be justified if the information is used in anger elsewhere in the organisation. However some of the fields that were completed had little real relevance and as such the entry selected by the call handler was sometimes arbitrary. Examples of these fields include the property fields, venue and location description fields. Any subsequent analysis of the nature of crime based on the entries made in these fields will be misleading.

Recommendation 9:

A further review of information input by FEC staff across the range of force systems should be undertaken. This should focus on how the information is used by the wider organisation and seek to reduce duplication.

5.4.7. A small number of calls could have been prevented. Some of these were generated by officers failing to turn up for appointments or failing to update victims as agreed. In addition there appears to be an organisational approach to tell people to ring 101 rather than to provide a dedicated direct dial inwards (DDI) contact number which is not in accordance with the Force policy. Ensuring that wherever possible dedicated direct dial numbers are provided to encourage the public to contact the relevant officers and departments direct could reduce demand by up to 14%, the proportion of calls that were recorded as connected to another internal number in the two week switchboard tally exercise.

5.4.8. Call handlers had little certainty that e-mails or voice mail messages would be acted upon. In particular evidence was presented by the technical support team suggesting that in some business areas voice mail message boxes are backing up.

Recommendation 10:

Where possible police officers and other staff should provide those that are likely to need to call them directly with a dedicated direct dial inward (DDI) contact number to avoid the need for these to be routed through the contact centre.

Recommendation 11:

A force protocol setting service standards for the response to e-mails and voice mail messages by officers and staff must be implemented.

5.4.9. The Force Call Handling Policy was last updated in April 2014. However the current document refers to obsolete systems, does not reflect new contact methods and describes a process that does not reflect the reality that was observed in the Force control rooms.

Recommendation 12:

The Force Call Handling Policy should be reviewed to reflect recent changes in Force systems, additional contact methods such as e-mail and online reporting and changes in working arrangements.

5.5. To what extent is the 101 service being used to handle calls that should be handled by other agencies?

5.5.1. Only 2% of calls received during both the 24 hour listening exercise and the two week switchboard tally exercise were signposted to outside agencies.

5.5.2. The 24 hour listening exercise suggested that 7% of calls received by the switchboard during the period examined were from partner agencies; local authorities, schools and health services for example. However the more extensive 2 week switchboard tally exercise suggested that this percentage was considerably reduced over the longer period with only 4% of calls recorded as from partner agencies. This difference is explained by the fact that the 24 hour listening exercise took place on a Friday specifically to assess the impact of demand from partner agencies which had been reported anecdotally to be greater on Fridays.

5.5.3. Therefore the review concluded that the low proportion of calls from partner agencies and the low rate of referrals do not support the concept of a multi-agency call centre or similar function, especially given the high cost that this is likely to incur. A similar argument exists for calls from other blue light agencies, which accounted for an even smaller proportion of the recorded demand.

5.5.4. The Police & Crime Plan already requires significant improvement in the service provided to 101 calls with the headline performance framework measure focused on quality of service. However the metrics currently used to measure the efficiency of the service were based on the limited performance data currently available. More relevant and direct measures that focus on the issues raised in the current report need to be developed.

Recommendation 13:

The Office for the Police & Crime Commissioner should review the Performance Management Framework contained in the Police & Crime Plan to ensure that it can measure improvements in the performance areas highlighted.

6. Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the call centre consider amalgamating the switchboard and Force Enquiry Centre functions with all calls dealt with by all call handlers as they are during the overnight periods.

Recommendation 2:

The principle of providing 24 hour cover for a non-emergency police contact service should be reviewed. Further work to examine the nature of the demand and likely impact of this is recommended.

Recommendation 3:

The role of call handlers needs to be better defined with clearer guidance about what research and post-call administration activity should be involved. It may be appropriate to consider meeting some or all of the crime recording and research functions currently undertaken by call handlers within another business area.

Recommendation 4:

A more active and intrusive style of supervision with supervisors 'walking the floor' to provide immediate support where necessary rather than requiring call handlers to leave their stations to seek support would save vital minutes and ensure that call handlers were spending more time supporting callers to the best of their ability.

Recommendation 5:

Supervisors should be required to a greater extent to actively manage queues flows through the transfer of available staff between the various functions. In particular, they should seek to ensure that public calls take priority over the management of internal force crime recording.

Recommendation 6:

The data available to support supervisors and management decisions and to enable more effective and relevant monitoring of performance needs to be critically reviewed.

Recommendation 7:

A Contact Strategy should be developed to identify alternative contact methods and support and promote their development and implementation

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