

From: Matthew Scott, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner
To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel
Subject: 999 and 101 service
Date: 25 April 2018



Introduction:

1. It is vitally important that the public are able to contact Kent Police – whether that be in an emergency, to report a crime/anti-social behaviour, to raise safeguarding concerns or to provide information that may assist in the prevention and detection of offences.
2. That is why, within the '[Safer in Kent](#)' Plan, one of the priorities the Commissioner has set the Chief Constable is to 'Deliver an efficient and accessible service'.
3. This paper provides an overview of performance in relation to emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) calls for service, context around the growing public demand being placed on Kent Police, and outlines how it is responding to the challenge whilst ensuring the provision of a first class service.

Call volume and answering times:

4. The table below provides a comparison of total emergency and non-emergency calls received by the Force Control Room (FCR) over the last three years, and daily average figures. It also shows the average call answering time.

	Apr 15 – Mar 16	Apr 16 – Mar 17	Apr 17 – Mar 18
Emergency Calls (999)			
Total	279,027	306,714	315,039
Daily average	762	840	863
Average answering time	00:06	00:08	00:13
Non-emergency Calls (101)			
Total	561,595	584,364	544,393
Daily average	1534	1601	1491
Average answering time	02:14	02:58	03:00

5. Over the last three years, the FCR has experienced an increase in emergency calls of 36,012 or 12.9% - equivalent to over 100 more 999 calls per day. Last summer saw particularly high volumes, with over 30,000 calls received in July 2017 – the highest month over the three year period.
6. The number of non-emergency calls received has fluctuated over the last three years, peaking in July 2016 with almost 56,000 calls – the highest month over the three year period.
7. Average answering time has increased due to a focus on quality call handling and accurate risk assessment for each call. Despite this, and the significant increase in calls over the last three years, the FCR has retained a good level of performance in answering emergency calls. However, answering non-emergency calls has deteriorated, and fluctuates significantly based on call demand into the FCR; this can clearly be seen from last year's monthly average answering time data which ranged from 01:43 in December to 05:58 in June.
8. During times of peak demand, and with a general increase in the volume of 999 calls – on average an extra 23 per day compared to 2016/17 – the FCR faces challenges in providing an effective non-emergency service against the volume of incoming emergency calls, which by definition must take precedence. In effect, the FCR has finite call taking resources, and if a high proportion are dealing with emergency 999 calls this unfortunately impacts on how quickly non-emergency 101 calls can be answered.

9. Service delivery is also impacted by staff vacancies and Kent Police has continued to run a dynamic recruitment campaign using a wide variety of methods to attract the best candidates to undertake this critical function. The campaign focuses on wider marketing, targeting different audiences and utilising a wide variety of contracts combined with making the best use of police estate to attract the widest and best pool of applicants.
10. At the last meeting, Members will recall that they approved the Commissioner's funding proposal that included an increase in the 2018/19 police precept of £1 per month. As well as enabling the Chief Constable to recruit up to an additional 200 police officers, this funding will directly be used to boost the number of call handlers answering emergency and non-emergency calls, so that people can get help quicker and more information can be provided to Kent Police.
11. Whilst calls may come into the FCR through the emergency and non-emergency route, not all calls relate to police business or necessitate an incident record to be generated. Information requests, signposting, guidance, advice and message handling equates to between 30-40% of demand every day. All of these calls, whilst not an emergency or a call that requires police attendance still need to be answered and triaged.
12. Kent Police plans to expand its Switchboard functionality. This will result in members of the public having their call triaged at the Switchboard level during extended opening hours to ensure that only calls requiring a crime report to be created or an incident to be recorded are passed to the FCR. All other queries will be dealt with by the Switchboard, providing a more victim focussed service to the public, and ensuring that many queries are resolved at the very first point of contact.
13. Since re-introducing dedicated emergency call handlers in February 2018, service improvements have been seen and the average answering time has decreased, with the FCR maintaining an average non-emergency time of just over 2 minutes.

Incident Creation:

14. April 2017 to March 2018, 350,500 incidents were created from emergency and non-emergency calls. A further 65,827 incidents were created from other sources (e.g. other agencies, radio contact from officers and PCSOs on patrol who come across incidents). 50% of the total incidents created required police attendance.
15. The top 5 incident types for this period were:
 - Passing information to police 56,017
 - Abandoned 999 call 42,174
 - Disturbance 32,226
 - Suspicious event 31,584
 - Concern for welfare 28,939
16. Approximately 35-40% of the remaining demand was resolved without deployment, for example recording of information to be passed to other departments or officers, misuse/abuse of the emergency and non-emergency service, other agency incidents recorded for information or incidents transferred to another agency.
17. Abandoned emergency calls come from a variety of sources including BT operator error, children playing with phones, phone keypads being mistakenly activated and some from repeat callers. There is a process in place to immediately review every abandoned call and strict protocols to ensure the person is re-contacted to ensure their safety. If it is not possible to call the person back, or if there are any concerns for their safety, whether or not they have been spoken to, a police officer is dispatched to check on their welfare. The workload involved in managing abandoned calls should not be under-estimated – on each occasion they tie a call handler up until it is resolved and prevent them from taking other incoming calls.
18. For the period April 2017 to 28th March 2018, 174,755 incidents were created from emergency calls – equivalent to only 55% of emergency calls received. Not every 999 call is an emergency and this indicates the volume that are mis-dialled or are an inappropriate use of the service. Of these incidents only 38% were graded as in need of an immediate response – where life is at risk or a crime is in progress. The remaining calls had another appropriate grade applied to them that reflected the circumstances.

Staffing:

19. Staffing within the FCR varies by hour of the day and day of the week, over the 24 hour period, 365 days of the year. Resource requirements are determined through specialised workforce management technology that predicts the required staffing level for every 15 minute period across the day based on achieving the pre-determined service levels against predicted call demand. The system has an in-built memory for significant events that the FCR can either use to assist with predictions for events that occur each year (e.g. Christmas Day) or discount if they are a one off (e.g. heavy snow).
20. However there are also many spontaneous events that increase call demand and cannot be foreseen (and therefore cannot be planned for) which have a huge impact on call levels such as each of the terrorist attacks last year, serious multiple vehicle road traffic collisions, traffic delays in the channel tunnel or at the ports and any severe weather event – snow, flood, gales or a heatwave. These will all have an immediate impact on call demand and require answering emergency calls to be prioritised over non-emergency calls.
21. There are currently 152 full time telephony posts in the FCR, and staff work across a 24/7 shift pattern rotation on a five team basis - one team on Early (0600-1600), Late (1000-Midnight) and Nights (2000-0600), with two teams on rest days at any one time. Whilst set around a core shift pattern of early, late and night shifts, the shifts deliberately have flexible start and end times and are a variety of 8 and 10 hour duration. This ensures that as far as possible, the FCR is able to flex the available resource on a daily basis to achieve the variants in demand by hour of the day and day of the week as informed by the workforce management system.
22. The FCR introduced permanent part-time working contracts at the end of last year and started recruiting permanent part-time staff from January 2018. To date there are 16 new starters who are on part-time contracts which are negotiated with each person individually, but also include a proportion of their hours at times of highest demand which are 1600–2200hrs daily.

Training:

23. A new operator who joins the FCR receives 8 weeks full time training in either the call handler or dispatcher role. This training consists of 5 weeks classroom based learning which includes:
 - Customer service training covering communication skills using a variety of methods and tools to suit the needs of the customer, how to deal with difficult conversations and challenging callers and how to say “no” positively when necessary in order to support providing a first class service.
 - Inputs from the Chief Constable, Commissioner and FCR Senior Leadership Team, as well as operational police officers and other agencies (e.g. Negotiators, Mental Health, LGBT, Child Sexual Exploitation Team, the Jigsaw project supporting those with learning disabilities, Welfare, Trading Standards, Crime Scene Investigation).
 - Training on a variety of local and national police information systems.
 - Knowledge and legislation training, including FCR working practices and processes, Law inputs, Home Office Counting Rules, questioning skills, THRIVE – to assist in risk assessing each call, and the National Decision Model.
24. This is consolidated into an assessment period where all aspects of their training are assessed against set standards prior to a new learner being accredited to join the ‘Grad Bay’ (graduation between classroom and the operational environment) element of the training programme.
25. ‘Grad Bay’ consists of 3 weeks training on live call handling or as a dispatcher, where the new learner is supported by a coach who is an experienced member of staff with additional training around staff development. During this time the coach supports the new learner through dealing with live calls, providing constructive feedback. Initially they are supported 1:1 with this being gradually reduced over the period as the staff member becomes competent and confident in the management of calls and the use of all the necessary computer systems required in the role.
26. On completion of this phase of their training they join their team and are allocated a ‘buddy’ who is an experienced call handler or dispatcher who routinely works alongside them as a mentor for at least the next 3 months.

27. Due to the complex nature of the role and the variety of calls and incidents staff deal with it takes between 9 and 12 months from the date of joining the FCR to become fully competent in the role. During their whole service all staff are subject to continuous evaluations against their role requirement to ensure that the highest possible standards of service are provided. Staff are set development plans or are recognised for the high standard of service they provide as necessary following each set of evaluations.

Online crime reporting:

28. Online non-urgent crime and incident reporting was launched in September 2017, and is available via the [Kent Police](#) website.

29. It has been promoted to the public and businesses as well as via the In Voice Recorded Messaging when callers are waiting to speak to a call taker. Facebook has also been used to publicise the facility.

30. Use of the facility continues to increase, with over 600 reports now being submitted online per week and almost 80% of users indicating that it was used as an alternative to calling 101. The Metropolitan Police Service, where online reporting has been live much longer, receives approximately 12% of crime reports online, and other forces range from 3-5%; in Kent, the figure currently stands at 11%. Importantly, 94% of users rate the facility as excellent or good, and 73% would use the facility again.

31. The FCR is shortly to have a Twitter account and web chat will become available later this year as part of efforts to provide a variety of channels for the public to contact Kent Police in a way that best suits them at a time of their convenience. The text messaging service for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired also continues to be effectively utilised as a contact channel.

Conclusion:

32. Like all forces, Kent Police are experiencing greater demand and continue to explore opportunities to drive improvements in call handling within the FCR, but also to provide 21st century services that allow individuals to make contact via alternative channels that fit their lifestyle.

33. The Commissioner is keen to both understand the challenges facing the FCR, and to show his appreciation for the critical, and often difficult role that call takers perform on a daily basis. In light of this, he has, and will continue to make regular visits to the FCR in order to engage with the Senior Leadership Team, chat with call operators and immerse himself in the environment by listening to calls as they are received.

34. More formally, in addition to senior OPCC staff attending Kent Police internal performance meetings, the Commissioner will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account in relation to public contact via their regular 1:1 meetings and the quarterly [Performance and Delivery Board](#). A detailed update was provided at the last meeting and the next meeting is scheduled for 31 May – Panel Members and the public are most welcome.

35. With regards to the increase in call handlers over the next year, the Chief Finance Officer will continue to attend the Force Resource Board each month at which recruitment is a standing item; the Commissioner will also receive regular updates from the Chief Constable at their 1:1 meetings and more formally at the Performance and Delivery Board.