

To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel

Subject: Contacting Kent Police

Date: 1 February 2023

Introduction:

1. Over recent months, Kent Police's performance in terms of managing non-emergency 101 calls has deteriorated, with an increase in the length of time callers have to wait and also in unanswered calls.
2. Whilst primarily the result of staff leaving the Force Control Room (FCR) and an increase in emergency 999 calls, this paper provides context in terms of how the FCR operates and the level of public demand as well as outlining how Kent Police is addressing the issue.
3. The PCC is grateful to Kent Police for its assistance with this paper.

Background:

4. The public rightly has an expectation that they will be able to contact Kent Police when they need to in a variety of ways that work for them, whether that be to report an emergency, report a crime, seek advice, offer information, or express an opinion. When they do make that contact, they expect to receive a timely and appropriate response.
5. The Force encourages individuals and communities to engage and make contact with confidence, by making its services accessible, appropriate, easy to use and safe.
6. In addition to handling 999 and 101 calls, it also maintains other methods of contact, such as online and through personal interaction, to ensure it is open to all and can respond to user needs and situations. Communication is key and the Force recognises the importance of adapting and being flexible and developing modes of communication to suit all.

Contacting Kent Police:

7. The routes through which the public can contact Kent Police are as follows:

Emergency

Call **999** if:

- a serious offence is in progress or has just been committed
- someone is in immediate danger or harm
- property is in danger of being damaged
- a serious disruption to the public is likely

Those with a hearing or speech impairment can use textphone service **18000** or text on 999 if pre-registered with the [emergencySMS service](#).

British Sign Language users can use the [video relay service](#) where an interpreter will help.

Non-emergency

- Call 101 (those with a hearing or speech impairment can use textphone service **18000**)
- Online via the website: www.kent.police.uk (includes Live Chat function)
- Police station front counter
- Out of hours police station phone

8. All contacts are triaged using a risk assessment tool called THRIVE:
 - THRIVE is a mnemonic for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement.
 - It guides call handlers in collecting, analysing and prioritising information and intelligence they receive.
 - It offers flexibility, but also organisational structure and therefore consistency; additionally, it acts as an aide memoire when dealing with time critical incidents.
 - Vulnerability (overt and hidden) is a critical element to ensure victims receive the best service and advice.
 - Every incident created (except for immediate calls where there is an obvious threat) has a clear THRIVE rationale recorded.
 - New information or a change in the incident response results in a new THRIVE assessment.

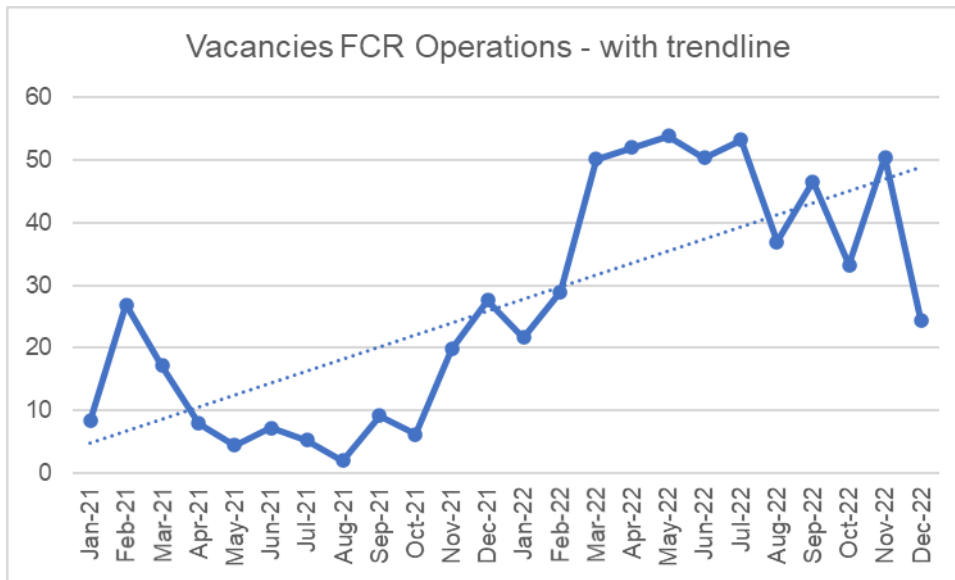
Structure of the FCR:

9. A Chief Superintendent heads up the FCR and the senior leadership team consists of both officers and police staff.
10. On the operational floor, there are 5 teams. Positions include:
 - Single skilled contact handlers
 - Single skilled dispatchers
 - Dual-skilled operators (handler and dispatcher)
 - Other non-call handling functions
 - Crime Investigators and Administrators
 - Duty Inspectors (also Initial Firearms Commanders)
11. Kent is split into 3 policing divisions with each having a Team Leader overseeing staff on their dispatch pod. They will deal with all incidents on that division. Allocation to roles is based on skills as opposed to any local knowledge.
12. All new joiners are given introductory briefings and overviews of Kent and Kent Police, as well as opportunities to interact with both local policing and specialist teams. In addition, attachments within and outside the FCR are encouraged to enhance an operator's knowledge.
13. The following is an overview of the staff establishment and current strength within the FCR (as at 05/01/2023):

Role	Establishment	Current strength	Vacancies
Contact handler	162.16	125.29	36.87
Dispatcher	25.81	9.57	16.24
Dual-skilled	98.93	92.27	6.66
Team Leaders	30.00	31.40	-
Team Managers	5.00	6.00	-
Trainees (not currently operational)	0.00	33.00	-
Total	321.90	297.53	24.37
PC Uplift (6-month posting)*	35	32	3

*101 trained only and not all 24/7

14. Members will note the level of vacancies and the following graph also shows that there has been a significant increase in the number of staff leaving in recent months.
15. Reasons for this include the pay that Kent Police can offer which is much less than many other call centres, and the characteristics of the work in terms of being 24/7 and significantly different in terms of level and nature of the demand.



16. Whilst recruitment continues to be a significant challenge, joint work with central HR is now delivering a sustained higher yield of new joiners.
17. The most recent three courses have yielded 23 (August), 28 (October) and 32 (December) new call handlers and retention at course closure remains high with only 2 leaving from the August and October courses.
18. A further course is scheduled for February 2023, and this currently has capacity for 42 students with 30 already either cleared or in pre-employment checks.
19. Chief Officers also allocated 35 police officers to be posted into the FCR for 6 months to assist with 101 calls. These became effective from mid-November 2022, and whilst not a long-term solution, they will form part of a planned strategic reserve of officers who can assist the FCR to manage demand peaks in the future.
20. Under the FCR Transformation Project, retention options are also being considered to achieve workforce stability given the growing numbers being recruited, to maintain skills and experience and provide a high-quality service to the public. Workstreams include:
 - A review of leaver exit interviews to identify common themes and address any action necessary.
 - A review of role profiles to ensure they are appropriate (which may inform pay/grade review).
 - Review of shift patterns (alignment to Force pattern balanced with demand and staff welfare).
 - Review of supervisor to staff ratios.
 - Review of options around a blended establishment of police officer and police staff.
21. To canvas staff views on recruitment, retention, impact, and environment, the FCR now conducts a Pulse survey every six months.

Emergency 999 contact:

22. The table below shows 999 data for the period April to November over the last four years.

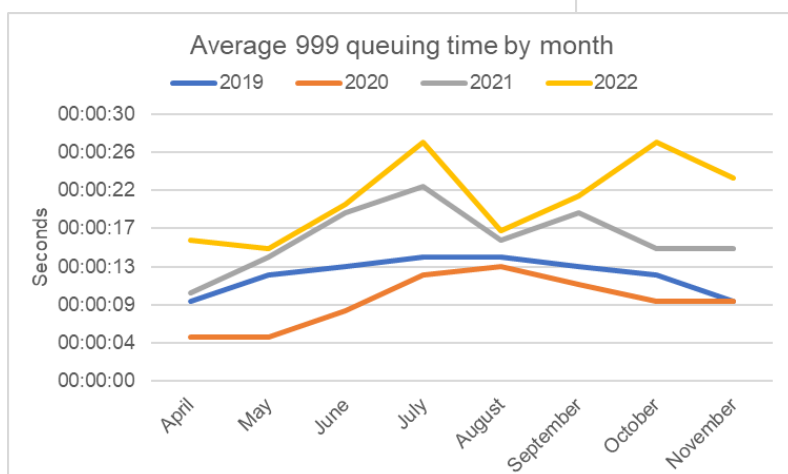
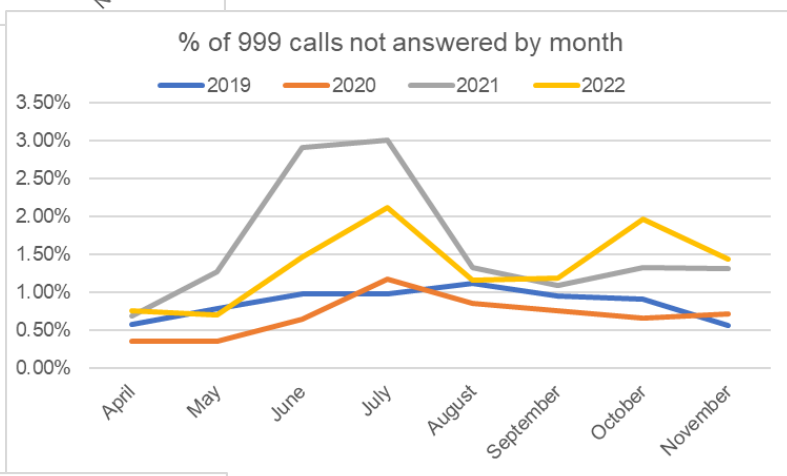
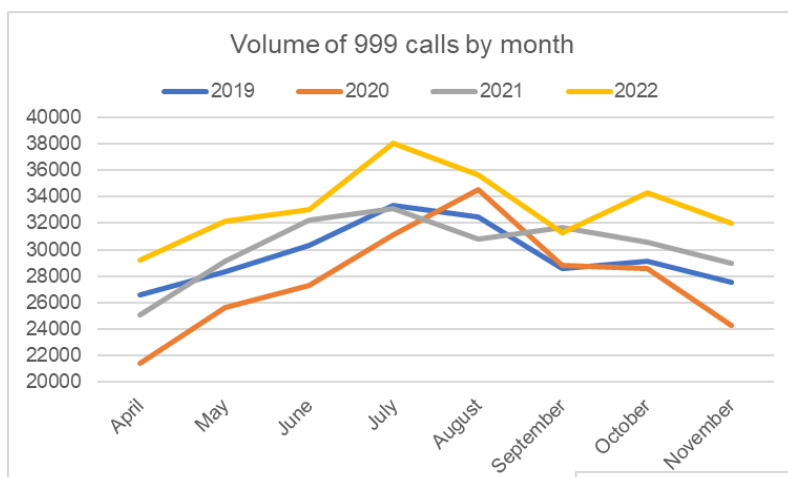
	April to November			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total received	236,342	221,595	241,482	265,747
Total answered	234,289	220,022	237,471	262,088
% answered	99.13	99.29	98.34	98.62
Total not answered	2,053	1,573	4,011	3,659
% not answered	0.87	0.71	1.66	1.38
Average queuing time	00:00:12	00:00:09	00:00:16	00:00:21

23. April to November 2022, the number of calls received increased by 10% compared to 2021 and 12% compared to 2019 (pre-pandemic).

24. The number of calls not answered (or call attrition) was also 1.38%, within the aspirational national benchmark of 2%. Where a 999 call is unanswered, the caller will initially be directed to a pre-recorded message that provides alternative self-service options but subsequently receive a call back as soon as FCR staff are able to.

25. Despite the increase in 999 calls, public satisfaction has not been significantly impacted and there has been no increase in dissatisfaction complaints.

26. The following graphs show Kent Police's 999 call volume, % not answered and average queuing time by month over the last four years



27. In line with all forces nationally, 999 calls in Kent continue to increase. This is recognised by the NPCC lead, ACC Todd and by BT who are similarly challenged with meeting public demand, particularly at peak periods.

- In the rolling year 2021 to 2022, 999 volumes increased 16% nationally.
- Comparing the month of November 2021 with November 2022, 999 volumes increased by 10.6% in Kent, nationally they increased 9.7% and in the Most Similar Group (MSG) of forces by 10.4%.

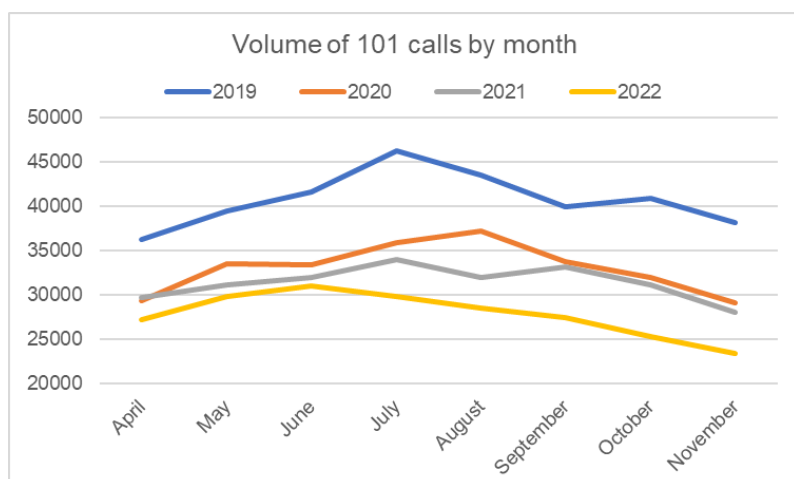
28. Nationally, there is also an Increase in 999 answering delays (calls waiting more than 2 minutes). This is reflected in Kent and some of the MSG forces also.
29. Emergency 999 call handling will remain the priority recognising the threat, harm and risk that sits within these call types.

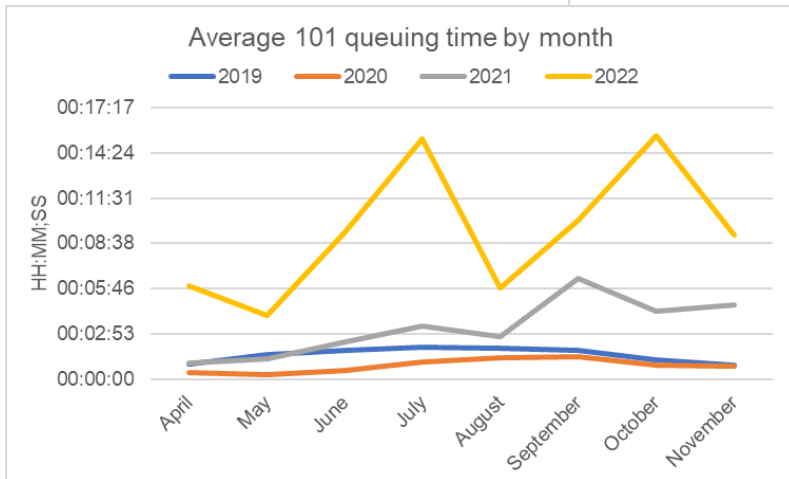
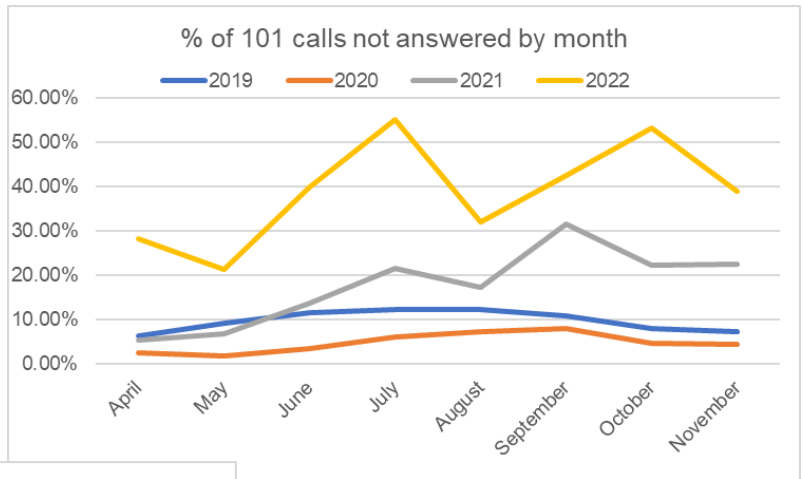
Non-emergency 101 contact:

30. When someone calls 101, the purpose of the messaging is to assist in sign posting to the most appropriate service, contact method or relevant agency, similar to other businesses and services. The information is designed to manage expectations, empower, and educate service users, and assist Kent Police with demand prioritisation, management, and response (and therefore effective use of resources).
31. The current messaging includes direction and advice on self-service options to save the service user time (e.g., online crime reporting) and the Interactive Voice Response has been further refined to allow it to be phased in response to demand. When there are significant increases in 999 demand the Force Incident Manager can authorise messaging for a time limited period that directs non-emergency calls to digital where possible. This supports the strategic aim and responsibility of protecting the Force’s ability to answer emergency 999 calls while providing an effective service to the public.
32. The table below shows 101 data for the period April to November over the last four years.

	April to November			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total received	326,035	264,074	250,851	222,293
Total answered	293,726	251,017	206,160	136,099
% answered	90.09	95.06	82.18	61.23
Total not answered	32,309	13,057	44,691	86,194
% not answered	9.91	4.94	17.82	38.77
Average queuing time	00:01:32	00:00:51	00:03:17	00:09:24

33. April to November 2022, the number of calls received decreased by 11% compared to 2021 and 32% compared to 2019 (pre-pandemic). Nationally, there is also a downwards trajectory in calls received, but it is not clear yet whether this is due to channel shift (to 999 or digital services) or purely a reduction in demand.
34. The number of calls not answered (or call attrition) was also 38.77%. Where a call is unanswered, the caller will be directed to a pre-recorded message that provides alternative self-service options.
35. Whilst the volume of 101 calls received saw a continuation of year-on-year decreases, the totality of non-emergency contact demand remained fairly stable when digital contact was taken into account.
36. The following graphs show Kent Police’s 101 call volume, % not answered and average queuing time by month over the last four years

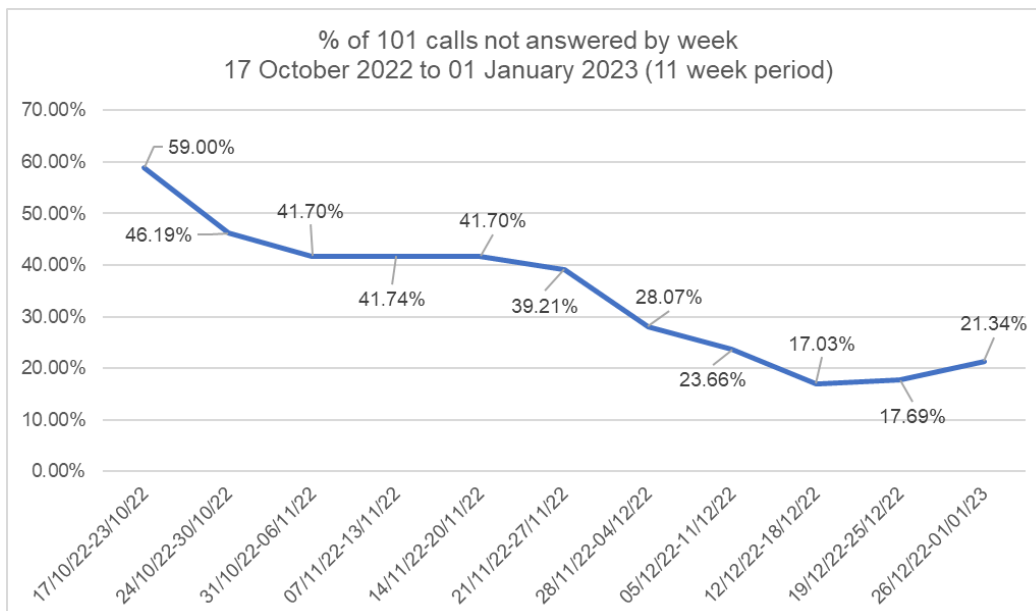




37. The next graph shows the percentage of calls not answered for an 11-week period up to 1 January 2023 (the latest data available at the time of preparing this report).

38. Importantly, it shows a significant downward trend in the percentage of calls not answered. This is the result of a dedicated workstream of the FCR Transformation Project which has included:

- Prioritised recruitment and training for FCR staff, and review of retention interventions.
- Posting of police officers to FCR establishment.
- Prioritised work stream on demand reduction based on internal systems and processes.
- Internal and external engagement strategy to inform users of full range of services including self-service, digital services, and appropriate use of 999 and 101 services.
- Cultural and transformation work to assist with staff morale and retention.



Digital contact:

39. Overall, digital demand into the FCR continues to increase significantly. This is positive as it offers an enhanced service to the public given their ability to select and self-serve via a channel of their choice 24 hours a day providing an effective and customer focussed service.

	April to November			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Online Crime Reports	16,515	21,799	25,171	32,306
Live Chats	10,478	36,817	28,991	46,757
'Contact Us' forms	N/A*	6,997	8,103	8,729
Total digital contacts	26,993	65,613	62,265	87,792

*Prior to 2020 this facility was not available

40. Live Chat is now well embedded as a contact choice and continues to grow in terms of demand. It allows a flexibility of service by enabling the effective use of any home workers in addition to those in the FCR building.

41. Given that most operators manage up to 6 Live Chats at the same time, there are obvious efficiencies, whilst providing an effective and customer-focussed quality service to the public at a time of their choosing through their preferred channel.

Holding to account:

42. One of the principle ways the Commissioner holds the Chief Constable to account is through the quarterly Performance and Delivery Board.

43. The meeting is chaired by the Commissioner and papers are submitted by the Force in advance and published [here](#). The Chief Constable is required to attend the meeting in order to present and discuss the papers, and answer questions about delivery of the [Making Kent Safer](#) Plan and policing generally in the county.

44. The Force has, and will continue to provide a substantive update on public contact within the 'Making Kent Safer: Delivery and Performance' paper.

45. The Commissioner also has, and will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account via their regular one-to-one meetings and briefings.

46. On 18 January 2023 the PCC visited the FCR. In addition to receiving a briefing on performance and speaking with the Senior Leadership Team and other staff, he spent time observing activity and listening to calls.

47. It is clear that staff leaving and the increase in 999 calls has unfortunately had a negative impact on 101 call answering times, as the FCR works to protect and answer 999 emergency calls as a priority. As a result, the number of unanswered 101 calls and average queuing time has unfortunately increased. Whilst there are signs of improvement and the PCC understands the need to prioritise 999 emergency calls, he has made it very clear to the Chief Constable that he expects the direction of travel to continue and be sustained.

48. In response, the Chief Constable has agreed a programme of strategic transformation which is now under way. It will build a FCR that seeks to provide a first-class service, that can meet multi-channel future requirements, including the exponential growth in digital demand and move to Coldharbour as part of the Zenith programme.

49. The PCC also recognises that the current issues are not a reflection of the staff who work in the FCR. and he would like to thank them for their hard work and resilience. The level and nature of the demand, as well as the often challenging and difficult decisions made by FCR staff every day in terms of managing risk, should never be underestimated.

Recommendation:

50. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel is asked to note this report and agree to a further update at their September 2023 meeting.