

**To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel**

**Subject: Contacting Kent Police**

**Date: 17 October 2023**

**Introduction:**

1. Further to the report that was presented at February's meeting, this paper provides an update on Kent Police's performance in terms of managing public demand within the Force Control Room (FCR).
2. Whilst performance in terms of managing 101 non-emergency calls deteriorated as a result of staff leaving the FCR and an increase in emergency 999 calls, I am pleased to report performance has now improved significantly.
3. Following an intense recruitment and training programme, the FCR is now exceeding its staffing establishment and utilising an officer surge capacity to support the management of peaks in demand.
4. The Commissioner is grateful to Kent Police for its assistance with this paper.

**Background:**

5. 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.
6. The Force encourages individuals and communities to engage and make contact with confidence; it aims to make services accessible, appropriate, easy to use and safe.
7. 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.
8. Communication is key and the Force recognises the importance of adapting, being flexible and developing modes of communication to suit all.
9. 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:**

10. A Chief Superintendent heads up the FCR and the senior leadership team consists of both officers and police staff.

11. The operational structure consists of five 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 (who also perform the role of Force Incident Manager and Initial Tactical Firearms Commander)
12. Kent is split into three policing divisions with each having a Team Leader supervising staff on their dispatch pod and overseeing all incidents on that division.
13. 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.
14. This is an overview of the staff establishment and strength within the FCR as at 28/08/2023 (and compared with the strength as at 05/01/2023 reported in the previous paper):

Role	Establishment	Current strength	Vacancies	Strength (as at 05/01/2023)
Contact handler	162.16	167.81	-	125.29
Dispatcher	25.81	7.78	<b>18.03</b>	9.57
Dual-skilled	98.93	88.29	<b>10.64</b>	92.27
Team Leaders	30.00	31.71	-	31.40
Team Managers	5.00	5.00	-	6.00
Trainees (not currently operational)	0.00	25.00	-	33.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>321.90</b>	<b>325.59</b>	-	<b>297.53</b>
PC Uplift (6-month posting)	35	27	<b>8</b>	32

\*101 trained only and not all 24/7

15. As Members will note, the FCR now has no vacancies (compared to almost 25 as at 05/01/23) and is working on increasing the number of staff trained in the Dispatcher role.
16. Over the spring and summer period, there was a successful recruitment campaign with the three most recent courses yielding 32 (May), 23 (June) and 25 (July) new contact handlers. A further course scheduled for September 2023 had capacity for 20 students. In addition, the number of staff leaving the FCR has decreased.
17. Chief Officers allocated 35 police officers to be posted into the FCR to assist with 101 calls – they became effective from mid-November 2022. Officers within other Commands who have FCR skills are also currently being used as part of a planned strategic reserve to assist in managing demand peaks.
18. Under the FCR Transformation Project, retention options continue to be explored and developed to achieve long term workforce stability, 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.
  - Review of shift patterns (with consideration of alignment to wider Force pattern balanced with demand and staff welfare).
  - Review of supervisor to staff ratios.
19. To canvas staff views on recruitment, retention, impact, and environment, the FCR conducts a Pulse survey every six months.

**Emergency 999 contact:**

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

	April to August			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Total received</b>	139,947	150,355	168,138	173,955
<b>Total answered</b>	138,950	147,476	165,983	173,111
<b>% answered</b>	99.29%	98.09%	98.72%	99.51%
<b>Total not answered</b>	997	2,879	2,155	844
<b>% not answered</b>	0.71%	1.91%	1.28%	0.49%
<b>Average queuing time</b>	00:00:09	00:00:16	00:00:19	00:00:13

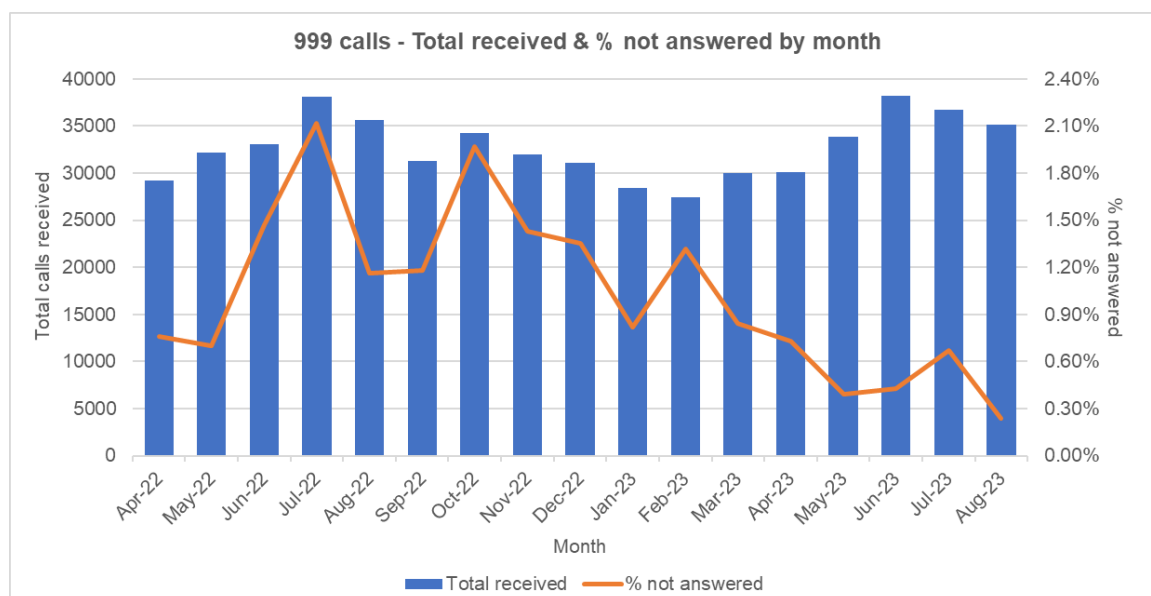
Please note: this is internal Kent Police data that includes emergency calls from the Ambulance Service and other partner agencies. This data will differ from that published by BT as explained [here](#).

21. April to August 2023, the number of calls received increased by 3% compared to 2022, 16% compared to 2021 and 24% compared to 2020 (pandemic).

22. The number of calls not answered (or call attrition) was 0.49% for April to August 2023, within the aspirational national benchmark of 2%. Where a 999 call is unanswered, the caller will subsequently receive a call back as soon as a member of FCR staff is available.

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

24. The graph below shows 999 call volume and the % not answered by month since April 2022.



Data in tabular format	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23
Total received	29,188	32,193	33,054	38,069	35,634	31,316	34,280	32,013	31,080	28,439	27,446	29,977	30,060	33,819	38,237	36,698	35,141
% not answered	0.76%	0.70%	1.47%	2.12%	1.16%	1.18%	1.97%	1.43%	1.35%	0.82%	1.32%	0.84%	0.73%	0.39%	0.43%	0.67%	0.24%

25. In line with all forces nationally, 999 calls in Kent continue to increase. This is recognised by the National Police Chief's Council lead and by BT who are similarly challenged with meeting public demand, particularly at peak periods.

26. Emergency 999 call handling will remain the priority in Kent, recognising the threat, harm and risk that sits within these call types.

**Non-emergency 101 contact:**

27. When someone calls 101 they will initially hear an Interactive Voice Response (IVR). 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 better direct service users, and assist Kent Police with demand prioritisation, management and response (and therefore effective use of resources).

28. The current messaging includes direction and advice on self-service options to save the service user time (e.g. online crime reporting) and the IVR 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.

29. The table below shows 101 data for the period April to August over the last four years.

	April to August			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Total received</b>	169,231	158,590	146,201	126,919
<b>Total answered</b>	161,719	137,611	94,238	111,205
<b>% answered</b>	95.56%	86.77%	64.46%	87.62%
<b>Total not answered</b>	7,512	20,979	51,963	15,714
<b>% not answered</b>	4.44%	13.23%	35.54%	12.38%
<b>Average queuing time</b>	00:00:44	00:02:09	00:08:05	00:01:38

30. April to August 2023, the number of calls received decreased by 13% compared to 2022, by 20% compared to 2021 and 25% compared to 2020 (pandemic).

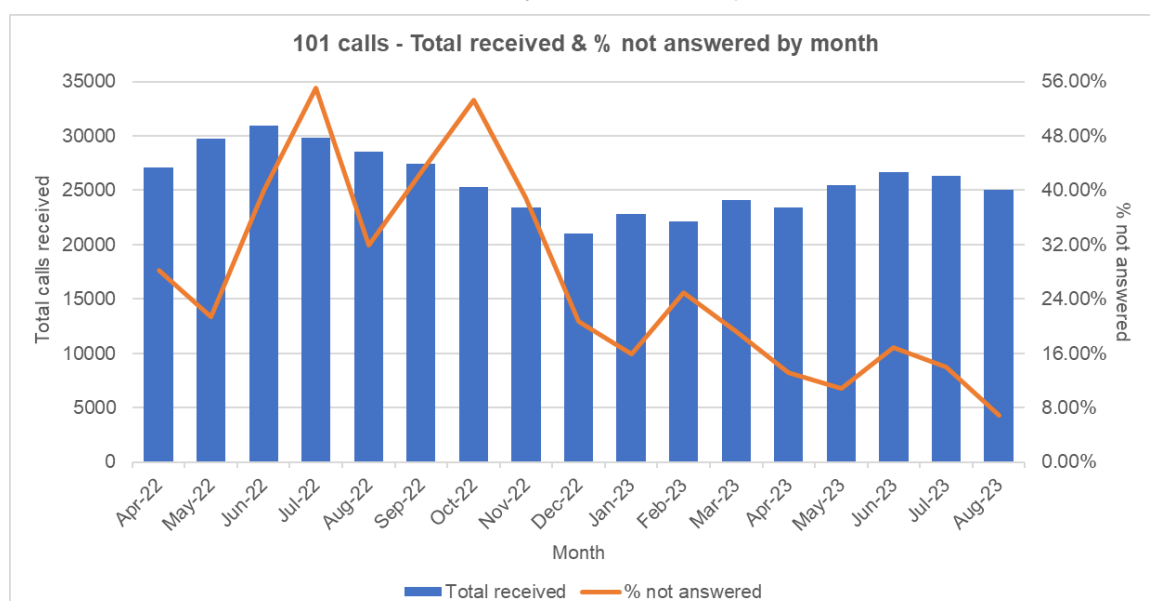
31. Nationally, there is also a downwards trajectory in calls received, but it is not clear yet whether this is because of a channel shift to 999 and/or digital services, both of which have experienced increases.

32. The number of calls not answered (or call attrition) was 12.38% for April to August 2023. Where a call is unanswered, the caller will be directed to a pre-recorded message that provides alternative self-service options.

33. Whilst the volume of 101 calls received saw a continuation of year-on-year decreases, the totality of non-emergency contact demand remained stable when digital contact was taken into account.

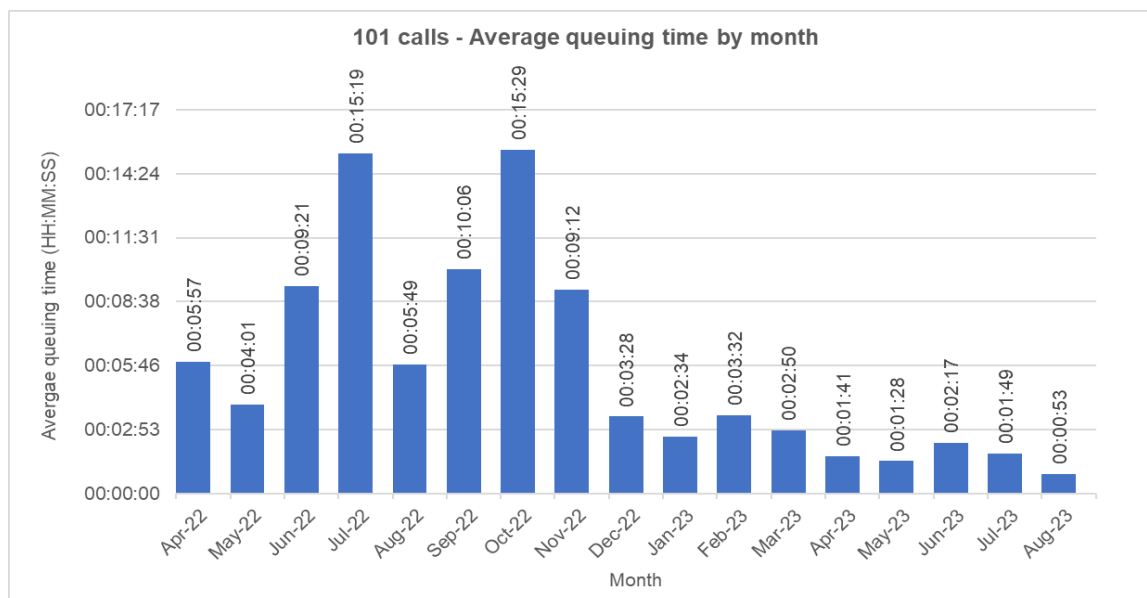
34. The following graphs show:

- 101 call volume and the % not answered by month since April 2022



Data in tabular format	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23
Total received	27,123	29,759	30,979	29,816	28,524	27,418	25,277	23,397	21,020	22,798	22,102	24,108	23,433	25,480	26,660	26,314	25,032
% not answered	28.2%	21.4%	40.0%	55.1%	32.0%	42.6%	53.3%	38.9%	20.7%	15.9%	24.9%	19.2%	13.1%	10.9%	16.8%	14.0%	6.8%

- Average queuing time by month since April 2022



35. Importantly they show a significant downward trend in both the percentage of calls not answered, and the average queuing time. 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:**

36. 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 August			
	2020	2021	2022	2023
Online Crime Reports	13,548	14,283	19,197	20,612
Live Chats	24,849	19,332	27,796	30,909
'Contact Us' forms	4,271	4,896	5,120	7,042
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,668</b>	<b>38,511</b>	<b>52,113</b>	<b>58,563</b>

37. 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.

38. Given that 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:**

39. One of the principal ways the Commissioner holds the Chief Constable to account is through the quarterly Performance and Delivery Board.
40. 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.
41. The Force has and will continue to include FCR performance data and associated commentary within the 'Making Kent Safer: Delivery and Performance' paper.
42. The Commissioner also has and will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account via their regular one-to-one meetings and briefings.
43. The Commissioner regularly visits the FCR and this will continue in the future. Not only does this enable him to observe activity and listen to calls, but also to speak with the Senior Leadership Team and most importantly the officers and staff.
44. It is clear the Chief Constable has taken action to address the performance issues in the FCR, with the recruitment of new staff, posting of officers and reduction in leavers having a positive impact on 101 call handling. Whilst the Commissioner has made it clear that he expects the performance gains to be maintained, he also recognises the FCR has consistently managed 999 calls and the significant digital contact demand effectively.
45. Importantly, the Commissioner is reassured the Chief Constable has implemented a programme of longer-term strategic transformation. Already underway, it will see a move to Coldharbour as part of the Zenith programme and create an FCR that provides a first-class service to the public whilst effectively managing the demands and multi-channel requirements of the future.
46. The Commissioner would like to thank the officers and staff who work in the FCR for their hard work and resilience. The level and nature of the demand, as well as the often challenging and difficult decisions made every day in terms of managing risk, should never be underestimated.

**Recommendation:**

47. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel is asked to note this report.