



Meeting	Policing Performance Committee
Date	10 December 2024
Location	Video Conference
Title of Paper	Police Scotland Response to Public Contact Update
Presented By	Chief Superintendent Barry Blair, C3 Divisional Commander
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	Yes: Appendix A - Call Data

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide the Scottish Police Authority with an update on Police Scotland’s response to public contact and to provide an insight into improvement activity, including delivery against key public contact commitments in the Chief Constable’s 3-year business plan.

Members are invited to discuss the content of this report.

1. POLICE SCOTLAND SERVICE CENTRE PERFORMANCE

999 Performance

- 1.1 Police Scotland Service Centre has continued to ensure that priority is given to protecting the 999-emergency service and aim to achieve an average speed of answer for 999 calls within 10 seconds, a target also required by all 44 UK Forces.
- 1.2 Police Scotland are the second largest Police Service for 999 call volume, answering 450,589 calls with a year-to-date average speed of answer reported nationally by the Home Office of 11.26 seconds, compared with the UK average of 9.08 seconds and compared with 12.68 seconds for the same period last year.
- 1.3 We are currently ranked 37th out of 44 Forces compared with 25th for same period last year. Lincolnshire were ranked 1st with an average speed of answer of 4.81 seconds with Staffordshire in 44th place with an average speed of answer of 14.52 seconds. 16 Forces have an average speed of answer above the national target of 10 seconds. Caution must always be applied to direct comparisons due to the different ways in which Forces resource, manage and measure public contact.
- 1.4 Despite Police Scotland's average speed of answer remaining consistently stable since introduction of the national performance reporting (May 2022), it has been challenging to maintain our ranked position increasing steadily from our best position in July 2022 of 8th (at 10.7 seconds) to 37th in October of this year (at 11.12 seconds), a negligible difference of 0.42 seconds, however, has impacted significantly in terms of our ranking. This is primarily as a result of other Forces undertaking improvement work which has included process reviews, refresh of core functions and tasks, implementing new strategies to manage performance and introducing new technologies to enhance service delivery, reducing their average speed of answer, in some Forces by as much as 16 seconds (Gloucester). Various areas of the work carried out in other Forces is already in place within the Police Scotland Service Centre to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness, such as robust attendance management processes, in-depth daily performance and productivity reviews, and our journey has already commenced to introduce new technology which will further support amendment to current business processes.
- 1.5 Police Scotland, along with all other UK Police Services, measure call data slightly differently to the data published by the Home Office.

The Home Office figures include the time from which the call is received by the BT operator whilst Police Scotland systems measure the point at which the call is offered to Police Scotland by BT.

- 1.6 Home Office data does also not include calls such as immediate BT call transfers i.e. calls without a verbal handover, which account for 9,744 calls to Police Scotland year to date, and can add on between 2-4 seconds to the average speed of answer. Consequently, Police Scotland's data reports that we received an additional 2.1% of 999 calls with an average speed of answer of 9 seconds year to date which is within the nationally agreed target of 10 seconds. This compares well when compared to the same period last year of 10 seconds. This is a national issue which the Home Office are aware of and there is national context available to explain the differences in the data provided. We have no influence over BT transfer time however, BT are reviewing their own processes and availability of Artificial Intelligence technology to automate the transfer of calls to emergency authorities rather than rely on manual input.
- 1.7 Of noting is that Police Scotland experienced a significant unexpected increase in 999 calls during 2023, with June reaching the highest increase of 37% (23,333 calls), this growth trend continued until November 2023. Several factors contributed to this increase including extreme weather (both good and inclement), various large-scale events, changes to legislation relating to XL Bully dogs and, most significantly, an update to the Android operating system that caused mobile telephones using the operating system to inadvertently call 999. This resulted in many thousands of accidental and dropped 999 calls. Additional contacts were subsequently generated as members of the public sought advice and guidance.
- 1.8 The reduction in call volumes has been evident during 2024 with a decrease of 11.7% year to date (61,175 calls). Recognising that 2023 was an 'outlier', when comparing 999 volumes with 2022, an increase of 4.6% (20,229 calls) has continued to be experienced. A breakdown of all contacts can be found in Appendix A attached.

101 Performance

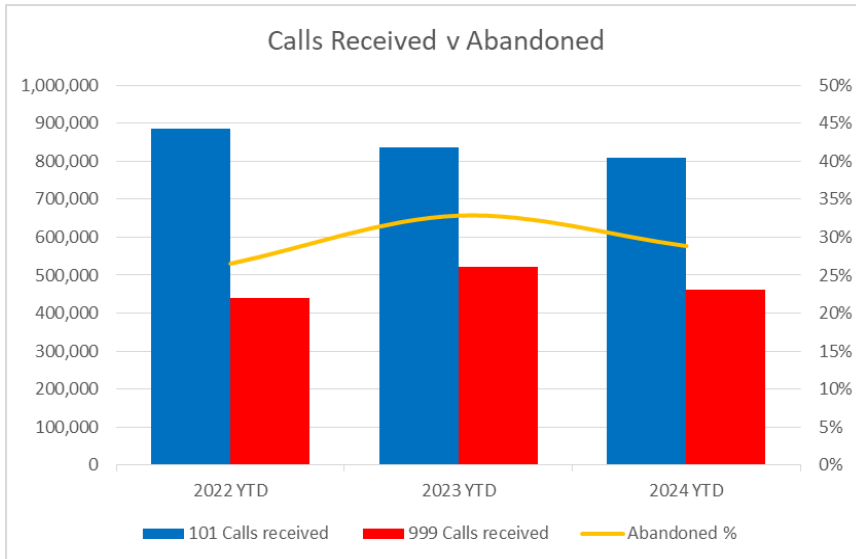
- 1.9 101 calls (IVR Option 4 - where the caller has requested to speak with a Service Advisor) have decreased by 3.5% year to date (28,973 calls). Police Scotland achieved an average speed of answer for these calls of 4 minutes 52 seconds, this compares well with 6 minutes 51 seconds for the same period the previous year,

acknowledging in part that this reduction can be attributed with the reduction in calls to this service.

- 1.10 The Service Centre manages other calls such as from partner agencies (Fire, Ambulance, Coastguard etc), from Alarm companies and calls in response to Media Appeals (Option 1 on 101) or relating to Incident Updates (Option 3 on 101) which are not currently reported on. When including these calls to Police Scotland Service Centre there has been a 6.2% decrease (a total of 99,880 calls). We also receive calls from our buddy Force (PSNI) and via dedicated lines from other national Forces.

2. DISCONTINUED CALLS (also referred to as Dropped Calls)

- 2.1 232,912 calls (29%) of callers where Option 4 was selected discontinued their call in the current year to date which is 41,894 calls (4%) less than last year and remains within the annual average of 25-30% experienced since 2020. Prior to the introduction of the Contact Assessment Model and use of the THRIVE assessment, Police Scotland experienced a discontinued rate of 5% (52,809 calls) for the same period. The introduction of the THRIVE assessment led to a significant increase of 5 minutes for the average time it takes to handle a call. This in effect means that on average a call handler handles less calls but provides a better quality of service to each caller. The impact is therefore notable on the number of discontinued calls as callers wait longer for their call to be answered. However, as indicated, the caller benefits from an improved service with each response tailored to their needs with our Service Advisors taking time to ensure that any risks or vulnerabilities are identified at first point of contact.
- 2.2 During October 2024, 56.4%, a total of 16,341 calls of those who discontinued their call disconnected within the first 2 minutes. Of noting is that of the 29% who discontinued their call in October, approx. 3,515 (12.6%) elected to utilise our online Contact Us facility. Use of our Contact Us email facility has seen an increase year to date of 1,296 emails (1.1%). The table below demonstrates that discontinued calls increase where our call volumes increase and in particular the 999 calls.



- 2.3 Due to limitations in current technology, it remains challenging to understand the granular detail of our discontinued calls and what the actual calls relate to. Work is ongoing within the Force’s Modernised Contact and Engagement Programme, supported by our Service Design Team, to further analyse our call data which will help inform and influence this failure demand work until such time that enhanced technology is implemented through the Unified Communications and Contact Platform (UCCP). As indicated delivery of this technology is due in August 2025.
- 2.4 Police Scotland continue to monitor and review processes in order to identify any improvements which will assist in reducing our average speed of answer and improve our service to the public however it is clear that significant benefits will only be realised following the implementation of the new technology in August 2025 via the Unified Communications and Contact Platform (UCCP) Project, and work is ongoing to ensure these benefits are maximised upon implementation.

3. USER EXPERIENCE/SATISFACTION

- 3.1 The Force User Experience survey results evidence that of people who have used Police Scotland’s services, reported in October, 72.9% said we were easy /very easy to contact. 84.9% said that they were satisfied / very satisfied with initial staff contact and 87.08% agreed that staff understood what they needed. These satisfaction rates remain consistent.

4. CCA ACCREDITATION (Customer Contact Association)

- 4.1 Police Scotland Service Centre has once again been recognised for its outstanding customer service and been awarded Global Accreditation from the Customer Contact Association (CCA) maintaining their successful Accreditation since 2017.
- 4.2 CCA Accreditation is a mark of excellence, demonstrating an organisation's commitment to delivering exceptional customer experiences.
- 4.3 To achieve this recognition, in October this year, the Police Scotland Service Centre were subject of their annual rigorous assessment reviewing all aspects of their contact operation to ensure they actively adopt the guidelines and meet the high standards expected. The assessment covers multiple disciplines such as organisational strategy, policies and frameworks, customer and colleague commitments, performance and operational effectiveness, recruitment and learning and development strategies, partnership working and implementing and managing relevant and new technologies.

5. C3 BUSINESS PLANNING

- 5.1 There are a number of key commitments in the Chief Constable's 2030 vision relating to Public Contact intended to improve performance and the service we provide to the public. Work is ongoing across C3 Division, and more widely, to ensure those commitments are met over the next 3 years.
- 5.2 A number of areas for improvement will be enabled by the introduction of the UCCP technologies and wider digital capabilities including an upgrade to our Command and Control system and Modernised Contact and Engagement platforms. Progress on the projects is routinely reported to the SPA Resources Committee.
- 5.3 Our technology refresh will enable a higher quality of service to the public through automated telephony and email routing as well as the potential to use Artificial Intelligence to support these processes. Clearly, any decision to leverage AI capability will be subject to a robust EQHRIA however this type of technology is being used routinely in other Forces and wider contact management organisations and is not viewed as contentious. The new systems will provide much improved data analytics relative to our contact demand including our discontinued calls. This will enable us to more accurately quantify positive and negative abandonment and

focus efforts on improving user experience. It will also assist and understand the reasons for repeat callers.

5.4 In addition, Contact, Command & Control Division have recently undertaken benchmarking opportunities to identify best practice in order to further protect the 999-emergency service and help to reduce the 101 average speed of answer and our call discontinued rate. These include: -

- Adding an anticipated wait message where the wait time is less than 5 minutes (currently this is only provided where callers are waiting longer than 5 mins).
- Reviewing the automated telephony routing to identify any further efficiencies that can be obtained.
- Removing the 999 “Whisper” received by Service Advisors to inform them of the geographical area where the call is being made from. This is provided via the EISEC details electronically.
- Creating a surge capacity where peaks in 999 demand are experienced through use of other C3 business areas such as Controllers and Resolution Team (where capacity exists).
- Reviewing the 999 Emergency Call Handling Training to train new recruits on immediate entry (rather than within weeks 12-20 of service). This will maximise our 999 skilled staff and potentially increase our capacity between 15-20%.
- Re-introduction of 999 performance on display screens across our C3 operational estates to enhance our division’s primary focus and empower staff to more effectively manage emergency calls.
- Advise callers on our 999 system, where the matter is of a non-urgent nature to redial using 101. This will free up our Service Advisors to answer 999 calls that are waiting and seeks to drive behaviour change among the public to minimise misuse of the 999-emergency service.
- Increasing the number of staff trained to answer 999 calls will better protect our 999-emergency service where surges are experienced, this should also assist in some capacity to reduce the number of discontinued 101 calls.

6. NATIONAL 101 WORKING GROUP

- 6.1 A national 101 Working Group is currently set up specifically tasked by the Home Office to progress the possibility of publicising 101 data similar to 999 data. Initial agreement is to publish 101 Call Volume and 101 Average Speed of Answer (Mean). Police Scotland have provided a full breakdown of Police Scotland's incoming call data for 2023 and 2024 for this purpose. This data reflects all incoming contact to the Police Scotland Service Centre.
- 6.2 It is anticipated that access in the first instance to this data will be made available internally to Forces for benchmarking purposes via the Digital Public Contact Knowledge Hub. This was scheduled for July this year with external publication to be considered thereafter, however, a decision remains awaited following the new Ministerial postings.
- 6.3 The proposed areas for discussion at the next 101 Working Group relates to "Abandoned Calls" (Discontinued/Dropped) and "Repeat Callers". Police Scotland Service Centre Senior Management are members of this Working Group and are actively engaging with the first meeting taking place on Thursday 13 November.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are personnel implications in this report. Whilst it could be considered that an increase in resources would improve overall performance, the focus under the Chief Constable's 3-year business plan is on introducing new technology, improving processes and maximising the capacity that we currently have available. It is therefore considered beneficial to await the delivery of the new suite of technology in August 2025 prior to any review of resource requirements for call handling.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications in this report.

10. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are potential reputational implications in this report. Whilst we continue to prioritise the 999 service to achieve an average

speed of answer under 10 seconds, it is recognised that Police Scotland's position in the ranking when compared nationally with other UK Forces may be perceived negatively with other Forces performing more strongly. There are many factors that influence this, and Police Scotland continue to benchmark with other Forces to inform any improvement work but at present we are working at optimum level within the current constraints. Other Forces do have technological advantages which through the delivery of the UCCP Project will bring Police Scotland in a more comparable position. It is envisaged that the delivery of new technology will improve overall organisational performance.

11. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no social implications in this report.

12. COMMUNITY IMPACT

12.1 There are no community implications in this report.

13. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no equality implications in this report.

14. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the content of this report.

<u>Calls Received</u>	2024 v 2023 FYTD				2024 v 2022 FYTD			
	2023	2024	Diff	% Diff	2022	2024	Diff	% Diff
999	521517	460342	-61175	-11.7	440113	460342	20229	4.6
Other Emergency	56060	55839	-221	-0.4	48887	55839	6952	14.2
Alarms	18658	16074	-2584	-13.8	19277	16074	-3203	-16.6
101 Opt 4	836667	807694	-28973	-3.5	885518	807694	-77824	-8.8
101 Opt 1 Media	30000	28775	-1225	-4.1	29296	28775	-521	-1.8
101 Opt 3 Inc Update	155465	149763	-5702	-3.7	149018	149763	745	0.5
All Calls	1618367	1518487	-99880	-6.2	1572109	1518487	-53622	-3.4
Emails (Contact Us)	119332	120628	1296	1.1	102203	120628	18425	18.0
All Contacts	1737699	1639155	-98544	-5.7	1674312	1639155	-35157	-2.1
<u>Discontinued Calls (Abandoned/Dropped)</u>								
101 Opt 4	274806	232912	-41894	-15.2	234835	232912	-1923	-0.8
% Discontinued	33	29	-4	-4	27	29	2	2

