

SURREY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 24 NOVEMBER 2020**PROCEDURAL MATTERS – PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES****1. Question submitted by Paul Kennedy**

The average waiting time for callers to Surrey Police's 101 service was 3 minutes 51 seconds in August, and 5% of callers who got through had to wait 20 minutes or more, according to Surrey Police's latest monthly performance report. The report does not disclose the presumably huge number of abandoned calls, representing thousands of missed reports a month about suspicious and antisocial behaviour, drug dealing, domestic abuse, thefts, assaults, vehicle and rural crime etc from victims of crime and other concerned members of the public, many of them without access to other forms of communication.

Do you agree that this level of delays and missed reporting is unacceptable and if so what are your plans to improve the 101 service for Surrey residents?

Response:

This is an area of concern for me as PCC. This is a performance measure I monitor closely and discuss regularly with the Chief Constable, including at our recent Performance Meeting last week.

As said in the question, the average answering time for 101 calls has increased from 1 min 24s in March to 3 min 51s in August. This has been due to Covid-19 and restrictions in place. Different working arrangements have had to be made in the Contact Centre - with less desk sharing for shifts and making use of different buildings to the usual Contact Centre facilities. This has made the logistics of answering calls and supervision difficult. In addition, there have been times of staff having to isolate and call taking is not a role that can be done from home. Covid restrictions have also affected the recruitment and training of staff. At the same time demand has increased.

I believe the Surrey Police Contact Centre has done their best to maintain public contact during these times. Answering of 999 calls, for people needing emergency assistance, is always prioritised over answering 101 calls, and this has remained very quick at an average of 4 seconds. During periods of very high demand (e.g. a road traffic incident) calls to the emergency number can spike and 101 calls can take 10 or 20 minutes to answer until that peak demand is passed.

In August 2020, Surrey Police answered 29,042 non-emergency 101 calls, as opposed to 21,960 in March 2020 and 13,143 emergency 999 calls as opposed to 10,652 in March 2020. The planned roll-out of the digital contact including Livechat and reporting via social media went ahead as planned, and many Surrey residents are making use of this new facility for contact.

My office is not currently picking up concerns from the public about waiting times. It may be that the public accept that during these difficult times non-emergency call answering may be a little longer.

Whilst people are waiting to be connected to an operator, they hear a recorded message signposting them to the Surrey Police website, including being able to make reports online or use the Livechat function. Many people abandon their call at this stage. It is not known how many go on to use other forms of contact, but it can be considered highly likely that many of

these abandoned calls are due to people choosing a different form of contact, once advised of that option.

In summary, I am concerned about 101 call answering times and look to see improvements as Covid-19 workplace restrictions are eased in the future and demand returns to near normal levels. But I do think Surrey Police are doing their best and that people are getting the help they need.