

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

Thank you Chairman and thank you Commissioner for your response.

Like you, I would like to pay tribute to everyone who is working so hard to keep us all safe in these difficult times.

This morning, I sent you some evidence (see below) which appears to contradict your answer about the number of 101 calls actually answered, and also your suggestion that abandoned calls are due to the initial recorded message rather than waiting times.

However, my supplementary question relates more to the tone of your answer, which seems to be saying four minute waiting times are unfortunate but there is not a lot more we can do at the moment, and we are encouraging people to use other forms of communication instead.

So my supplementary question is: "Is it your policy during the pandemic to deter or at least discourage people from using the 101 service?"

Additional information provided:

I would like to alert the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey and the Surrey Police and Crime Panel to three apparent inaccuracies in his original response:

1. Numbers of 101 calls answered

The Commissioner stated:

"In August 2020, Surrey Police answered 29,042 non-emergency 101 calls, as opposed to 21,960 in March 2020 ..."

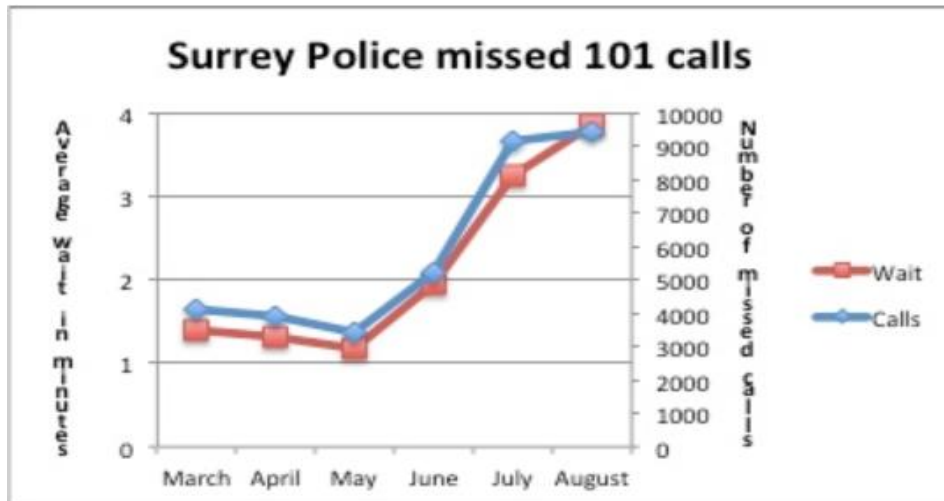
However, a Freedom of Information request (attached) has confirmed that these figures are the numbers of calls received rather than answered by an operator. The actual numbers of calls answered were 19,614 in August 2020 (just 68% of calls received), compared with 17,833 in March 2020.

2. Impact of Covid-19 on 101 performance

The Commissioner stated:

"This has been due to Covid-19 and restrictions in place."

However, the chart below suggests that performance actually improved during the first two months of lockdown when the Covid-19 risk to staff was at its highest. Performance only deteriorated later, particularly in July, when just 11,943 calls (57% of calls received) were answered.



3. Abandoned calls being due to initial recorded message

The Commissioner stated:

"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 of these abandoned calls are due to people choosing a different form 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."

However, the chart above suggests that the number of abandoned 101 calls in each month is closely correlated to the average waiting time to be answered. 9,428 calls were abandoned in August when the average waiting time was 3 minutes 51 seconds, but only 4,127 were abandoned in March when the waiting time was 1 minute 24 seconds.

The primary reason for abandoning a 101 call would appear to be frustration with the length of the call.

RESPONSE:

With regard to numbers of calls answered, Mr Kennedy is correct. Apologies that my office (OPCC) used the term 'calls answered' rather than 'calls received'.

With regard to the performance and months, Mr Kennedy is correct that call answering did not deteriorate in the first few months of restrictions and took until June to show a marked effect. The force reports in the 101 answering times that I have received and have informed me that the deterioration in answering calls was due to Covid and the changes in working practices required. The data shows that this took a few months to have an impact as Mr Kennedy has said.

I agree that increases in time taken to answer a 101 call lead to increased abandoned calls. But given that the recorded messaging continues to provide people with alternative options for contact, people may well have chosen to take up one of those alternative forms.