

WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

DATE: 25 NOVEMBER 2021

WEST MERCIA POLICE OCC PERFORMANCE

Recommendation

Members of the Panel are asked to note this report.

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to update members of the panel on holding to account (HTA) activity undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in respect of Operations & Communications Centre (OCC) performance.

Public correspondence relating to public contact

2. This calendar year-to-date (01/01/2021 – 09/11/2021) the PCC has received 32 contacts from the public raising concerns and complaints in regards to 101 call handling.

3. This is an increase of 12 cases compared to the same period in 2020. Over a third of these contacts have been received Oct – Nov 2021. This is likely associated with the reduction in 101 performance seen over the last quarter (performance data is summarised in the sections below).

4. 3 of these contacts have been made by local Councillors on behalf of a number of constituents. 29 of these contacts have been made by individual members of the public based on their experiences.

5. The correspondence predominantly related to excessive waiting times. 1 contact related specifically to the ICT outage in September 2021 (further details of which are set out below).

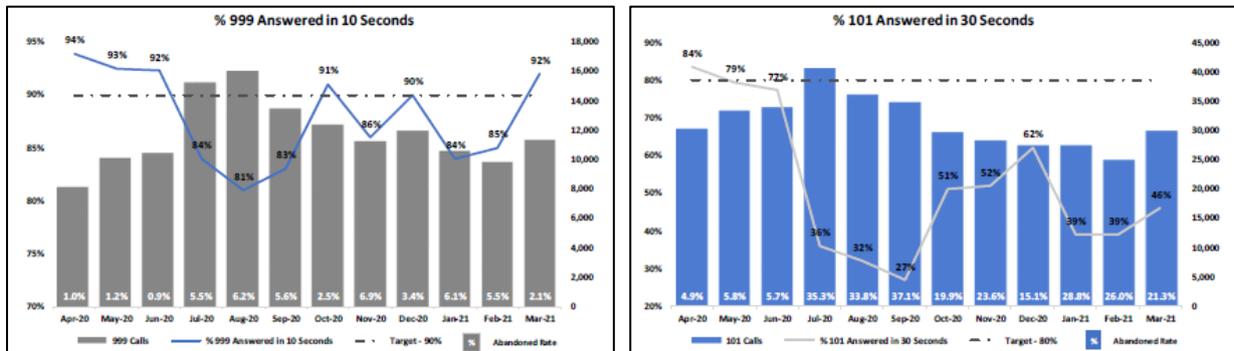
6. The concerns raised by the public have been reflected in the PCC's draft Safer West Mercia Plan 2021 – 2025 which includes a specific commitment to ensure West Mercia Police set and consistently achieve targets for 999 and 101 calls.

Call handling targets and performance 2020/21

7. There are local and national targets in place for 101 and 999 call handling performance:

- 90% of 999 calls within 10 seconds (national target);
- 80% of 101 within 30 seconds (local target).

8. 999 and 101 performance for 2020/21 is set out in the charts below:



9. Call handling performance is monitored by the PCC on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis and is used to inform the cycle of HTA undertaken by the PCC which is summarised below.

September 2020 Holding to Account Meeting

10. Following a significant deterioration in 999 and 101 performance Jul – Sep 2020, the PCC held a thematic HTA meeting on public contact in September 2020.

11. The meeting was used to scrutinise:

- Call handling performance and management of demand;
- Future performance expectations and targets;
- Transition to the new command system; and
- OCC staffing and resources.

12. The PCC queried the impact call handling performance was having on the public and set out that communities needed an explanation and reassurance around the level of service being provided for both 999 and 101 calls.

13. The Chief Constable (CC) acknowledged that performance did not meet the expected standards and had been impacted by a number of factors including:

- Increased demand;
- Staffing issues (inc. COVID absences and existing vacancies); and
- Implementation of the new command system (including training and impact on management information (MI)).

14. The PCC reiterated the need for additional reassurance and raised an action for the CC to provide a delivery plan for improving the service to the public, including timescales for meeting local and national targets.

15. Whilst prioritising and stabilising 999 performance would remain the focus for the OCC, the force set an aspiration to meet the local 101 target by March 2021.

May 2021 Holding to Account Meeting

16. Following scrutiny at the September 2020 HTA meeting, 101 and 999 performance was on an improving trajectory Oct – Dec 2020. However performance reduced significantly Jan – Mar 2021 (see charts above).

17. This reduction in performance was most notable for 101 calls and the force was unable to meet the target of answering 80% of non-emergency calls within 30 seconds by March 2021.

18. As a result, the PCC called an extraordinary HTA meeting on calls for service in May 2021. The meeting focused on 101 call handling as well as broader performance in relation to demand management (i.e. unresourced incidents.)

19. The PCC was concerned that he had not been notified when it became clear that the target for 101 calls would not be met. In addition, the PCC queried why the force had not been more proactive in updating the delivery plan and taking action prior to intervention from the governance.

20. The Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) for Local Policing acknowledged the oversight in terms of updating the PCC and provided assurance that the delivery plan had been updated to reflect the downturn in performance as well as legislative changes.

21. The reduction in performance from January 2021 was associated with a number of factors discussed at the previous HTA in September 2020, including:

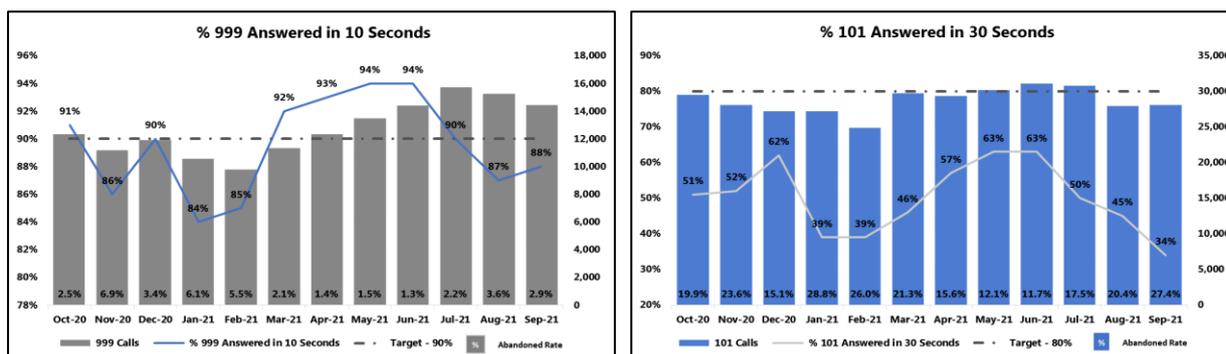
- COVID-related track and trace abstractions;
- Staff vacancies;
- ICT outages; and
- Access to limited MI.

22. The ACC confirmed it would not be possible to meet the 101 target until the vacancies in the OCC were filled. It was estimated that the department would reach establishment by December 2021. It would be at this point that the force could reach the aspiration of answering 80% of 101 calls within 30 seconds.

23. The PCC requested quarterly briefings on progress against the call handling delivery plan and performance against targets.

October 2021 Holding to Account Meeting

24. Despite an increase in demand linked to the easing of COVID restrictions and the Euro 2021 football tournament, 101 and 999 performance improved considerably Mar - Jun 2021 (see chart below for 2021/22 data):



25. The ACC provided the PCC with a Q1 briefing in July 2021 setting out the activity delivered by the force since the May 2021 HTA meeting. This included:

- A trial of more efficient call handling for grade 2 calls – this had proved successful and was rolled out across all shifts;
- Identification of additional Saab terminals which enabled additional call handling support from the Crime Bureau;
- Identification of specific failure demand in relation to calls for officers;
- Manual dip sampling to drive call taker performance; and
- The introduction of deployment principles.

26. However, performance deteriorated from Jul – Sep 21. This reduction was most notable for 101 as the OCC prioritised the response to 999 calls.

27. The reduction in call handling performance in July was associated with extraordinary 999 demand (a trend seen nationally). However, performance in August and September was further impacted by significant ICT power outages.

28. As a result, the PCC's performance HTA meeting in October 2021 focused on:

- Understanding the impact of the ICT outages (inc. impact on the public);
- Recovery from the ICT outages;
- OCC performance (inc. trajectory to deliver agreed targets); and
- Progress against the delivery plan in Q2.

29. At the meeting, Chief Officers provided an overview of the significant outage in September; outlining the impact on services, staff, the public and finances and the steps taken to mitigate the outage both at the time and afterwards.

30. A number of key factors that impacted OCC performance were discussed including the increased summer demand, significant disruptions to systems, instability of the ICT, high staff attrition and low levels of recruitment.

31. The ACC provided reassurance that plans were in place to deal with the summer demand and innovative steps were being taken to improve the rate of recruitment.

32. Details of the remedial work in terms of the ICT were set out, including how the force provided governance and oversight of the issues. Chief Officers also committed to commissioning a 'lessons learnt' report that would be scrutinised at a new force board focused on organisational learning.

33. It was concluded that given the current context, it would not be feasible to meet the 101 target by December 2021. However, the CC did set out the force's commitment to work towards the 80% target. The PCC acknowledged the hard work of the staff in the OCC but expressed his disappointment that sustained improvements had not been made for the public. The PCC raised an action for the CC to provide a clear timeframe for meeting the 101 target.

34. The CC's response to this action was received on 3rd November and an extract is included at Appendix 1. The presentation sets out the roadmap to achieving consistent performance and meeting the aspirations set locally and nationally.

35. As set out in the presentation, the force do not expect to meet the 101 target until June 2022.

36. Whilst the PCC welcomes the clear articulation of work to be undertaken and acknowledges the hard work of the staff within the OCC, he remains concerned regarding:

- The timeframe for delivering the agreed level of service for the public (8 months after the last HTA intervention);
- The force's ability to achieve and sustain performance at this level, given trends over the last 2 years.

Risk Management Implications

None.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

None.

Equality Implications

None.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Extract of OCC Deliverables Roadmap

Contact Points for this report

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