



## Report of the Police and Crime Panel

**Report title:** Thames Valley Police Contact Management update

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**Author and contact:** Chief Superintendent Simon Dodds

**Purpose of the report:** Positional update

**Recommendations:** Continued reporting and monitoring

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### Executive Summary

The following report provides an update on Thames Valley Police call handling performance. It includes current positioning, challenges the department are currently facing, and measures being put in place to mitigate future risk and improve performance.

### Operational overview

Thames Valley Police (TVP) Contact Management department forms part of a collaborated service with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Constabulary (HIOWC). At the operational level the two forces are largely independent, but benefit from a collaboration that extends across the senior leadership team, business support and performance management.

The overarching vision for Contact Management is for ‘a modern, innovative and professional Contact Management department that is accessible and able to effectively respond to those who need policing services’. The vision is supported by a strategy founded on four strands, improving accessibility, a focus on public service, driving efficiency and looking after our people.

Calls into TVP Contact Management department continues to follow national trends with increased in 999 and online contact and decreases in 101 calls.

999 calls in TVP are up 15% on 2022, with an average speed to answer (ASA) of 7 seconds and just over 84% of calls answered in under 10 seconds. Whilst the force sees the 6<sup>th</sup> largest volume of 999 calls nationally it places 15<sup>th</sup> in the percentage of calls answered in under 10 seconds. Projections are that 999 call volume will continue to rise (Figure 1.)

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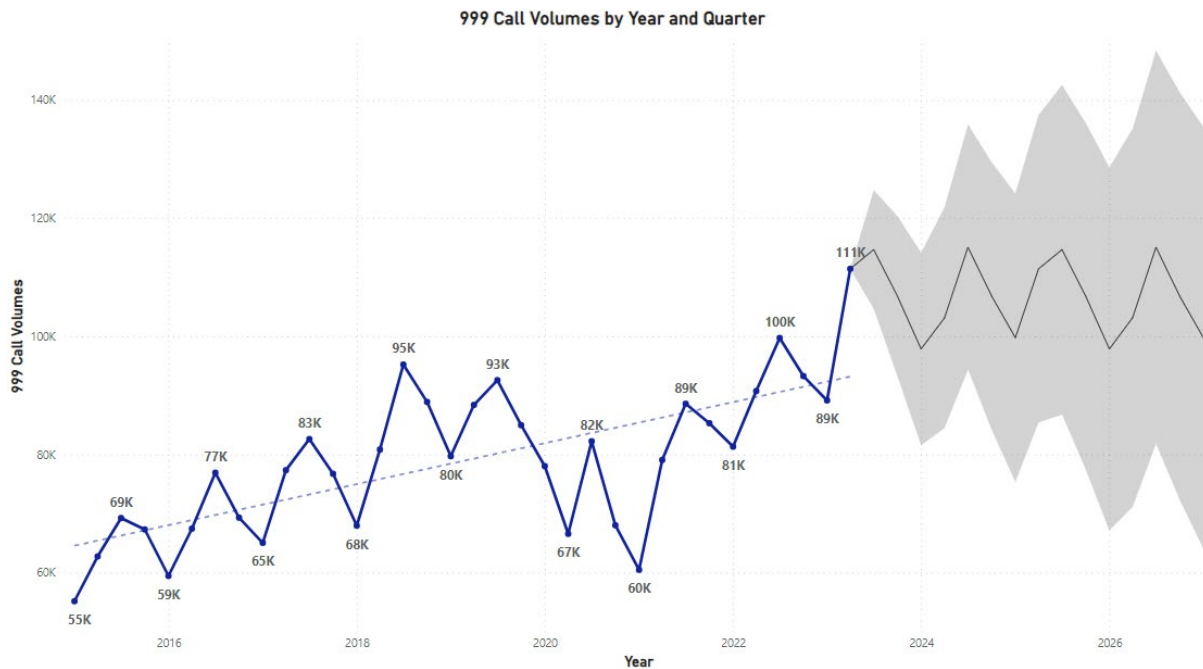


Figure 1.

Total 101 calls into TVP Contact Management have decreased by 11% on 2022 with the ASA across the year remaining above 7 minutes. Abandonment of 101 calls after 3 minutes sits just under 20% and as in 2022 26% of calls are still waiting over 10 minutes to be answered. Whilst the force must to continue to prioritise emergency 999 calls, it recognises that 101 call performance, specifically abandonment levels and calls waiting over ten minutes still needs to improve.

Online reports into TVP Contact Management continue to increase year on year and now make up 10% of demand, with 68% of people having been online and completed a survey indicating this was their preferred choice of contact. The same staff who deal with 999 and 101 calls are also responsible for servicing online reports. Whilst all reports are triaged at point of submission to ensure there is no associated immediate risk, the force has a service level agreement to respond to online reports within 24 hours. Front Counter staff are used to assist meet this service level.

### Risks

Call handling performance is impacted by three main influencing factors. The volume of incoming demand, the stability of IT and telephony systems used, and resourcing. Whilst the last 12 months have seen fluctuations in IT reliability and call demand, most notably the 'android' upgrade to mobile phones which saw a spike in 999 calls in error during the summer months (Figure 2.), the greatest challenge has come from resourcing availability.

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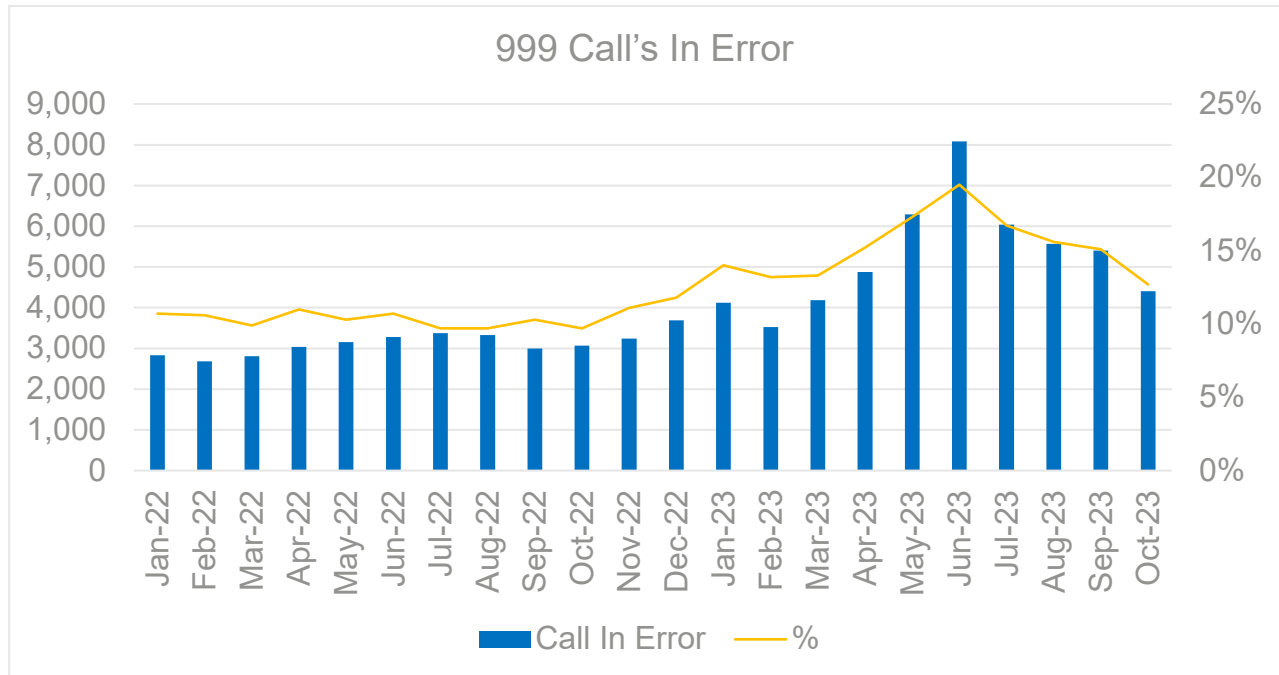


Figure 2.

The Contact Management Centre’s (CMC) at Milton Keynes and Kidlington are responsible for responding to 999, 101 and online demand. Staff in the Police Control Room’s (PCR) at Abingdon and Milton Keynes are used to provide additional further support for call handling capability.

Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Establishment across TVP CMC and PCR is 431.9 posts. These department are currently carrying 54 vacancies, 44 of which from within CMC. This is impacting on call handling capability, most notably the service that is offered across 101 non-emergency calls.

Whilst the recruitment pipeline into CMC remains good, and provision into 2024 for both training and tutoring is in place, staff retention continues to present a risk. Between August and October 2023 there were 36 leavers from the department (14 internal, 24 external including retirements). Based on current projections a return to full establishment will not be achieved until early 2025 at the earliest. As a result managing non-emergency call demand into and across summer 2024 is likely to continue to be challenging.

### Response to risks

The response to risk extends across the three identified areas, namely management of call demand, IT and telephony stability, as well as recruitment and retention.



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### Management of call demand

TVP and HIOWC have invested in a programme to improve 101 ASA whilst ensuring 999 performance is protected. This programme is referred to as CM101. It focuses across three strands. New digital public contact, process efficiency and automation, and recruitment and retention.

The programme is intended to help reduce 101 ASA times in TVP down from 7 minutes to 4 minutes. Benefits from early developments with robotic processes assisting with crime filing, crime recording and officer contact are already helping towards projected savings of over 9000 operator hours per year (equivalent to removing 36,000 calls). Projections for phase 1 of the Victim Portal, which is already live, have identified further savings of 8,400 operator hours per year (equivalent to removing 33,600 calls). Phase 2 of the Victim Portal, due to go live in February 2024, will facilitate two way interface between victims and officers and will again add to 101 call volume reductions.

### IT and telephony stability

Contact Management systems are highly complex, with integrations between a number of systems and suppliers. In 2023 both forces were due to receive a number of significant upgrades to ensure ongoing systems connectivity and national airwaves compliance. These upgrades were initially rolled out in HIOWC upon which it soon became apparent there were serious impacts on system stability, in turn leading to a marked downturn in call handling performance. Whilst TVP have been impacted to a lesser extent, the decision was taken to stop the rollout in TVP until such time that the issues being experienced in HIOWC have been resolved. An ICT Gold and Silver Group has subsequently been stood up to oversee ongoing system stability, with the telephony upgrade programme (move to Avaya Red) not now due to roll out in TVP until February 2024.

### Recruitment and retention

TVP Contact Management continue to chair a weekly stakeholder meeting specifically looking at the pipeline of recruits into the department. This meeting streamlines activity through advertising, candidate awareness sessions, assessment provision, vetting, occupational health, training and then tutoring. The stakeholder group reports into a monthly governance board (Op Fleck) which coordinates wider improvement activity across recruitment, retention, training and service mitigation.

In support of a more timely return to full establishment CCMT have agreed to prioritise and fill the 15 police constable vacancies in PCR. This has involved directed officer postings, and the provision of 'hard to fill role' bonus payments equating to £1600 over the next 18 months.



**Matthew Barber**

Police & Crime Commissioner  
for Thames Valley

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Additionally in support of staff retention CCMT have agreed retention payments for police staff equating to £2000 over the next two years. This follows the success of a similar scheme in HIOWC where the payments were associated not only with improved retention but also improved attendance.

With internal police staff opportunities in various other roles across TVP, and the uncertainty associated with potential estate changes at Abingdon and Milton Keynes retention will continue to present a risk which will need to be carefully monitored.

## **Recommendations**

Call handling performance, specifically meeting national 999 targets, 101 ASA, abandonment rates and callers waiting over ten minutes continues to be reported upon and monitored for service improvement.