



## STRATEGIC POLICING AND CRIME BOARD 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017

### Access to Services

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

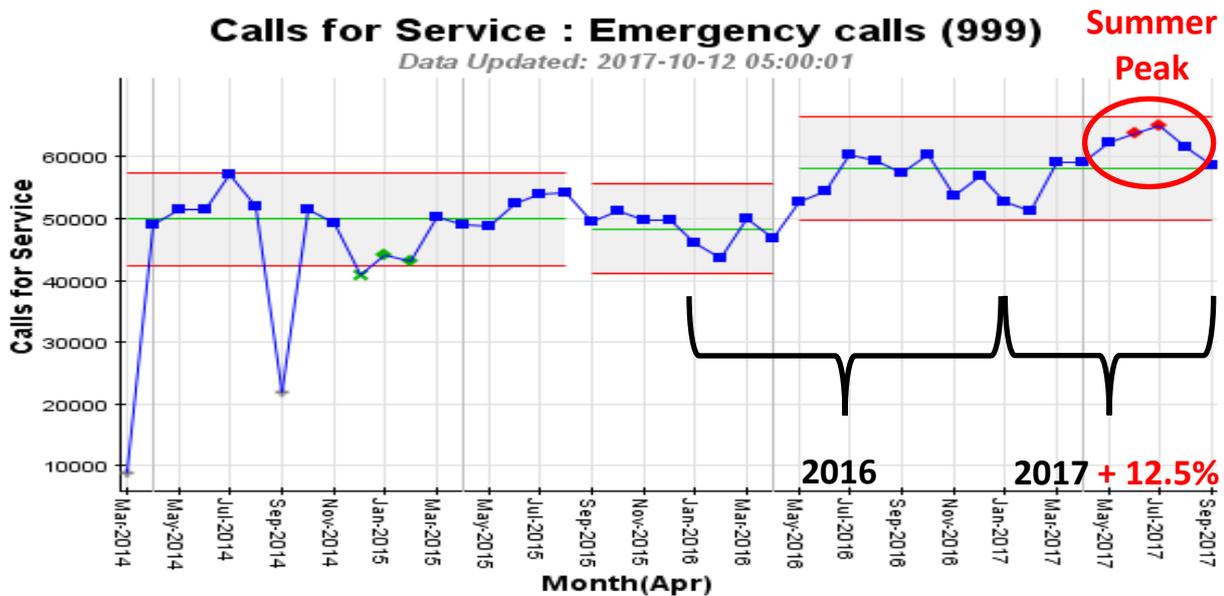
1. This report provides a further update to the Strategic Police and Crime Board on recent performance and service levels achieved by West Midlands Police Force Contact Department.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. In recent years, as a key component of the WMP2020 programme, Force Contact has undergone substantial change, refining and modernising its structures and business processes. Whilst operating in a tight resourcing framework, these changes are now yielding productivity gains and much more consistent service levels, particularly now that Force Contact has the staffing that it was intended to have.
3. 2017, though, has presented some extraordinary and unprecedented demands upon Force Contact (and WMP generally): 999 calls are up 12.5% compared to 2016, and the final weekend in June saw more 999 calls on each day of that weekend than we had previous had during any 24 hour period; the expected increase in summer demand for policing services considerably exceeded predicted levels; recorded crime has increased across the West Midlands, as has gun crime and other critical incidents; and WMP has supported the national efforts to protect and reassure our communities following the various terrorist attacks.
4. Whilst demand remains high, there are clear indications that calls for service, both emergency and non-emergency calls, are now returning to more normal levels.
5. Despite the challenging operational environment, Force Contact has consistently answered nearly 90% of 999 calls within 10 seconds, improved its effectiveness in answering the non-emergency 101 calls from 20-30% within 30 seconds in the early summer to about 50% in recent months; whilst abandoned 999 calls have reduced to less than 1%, and abandoned 101 calls have halved in recent months.
6. The exceptional summer demand was effectively addressed, although not without some knock on consequences - substantial support to Force Response was provided through

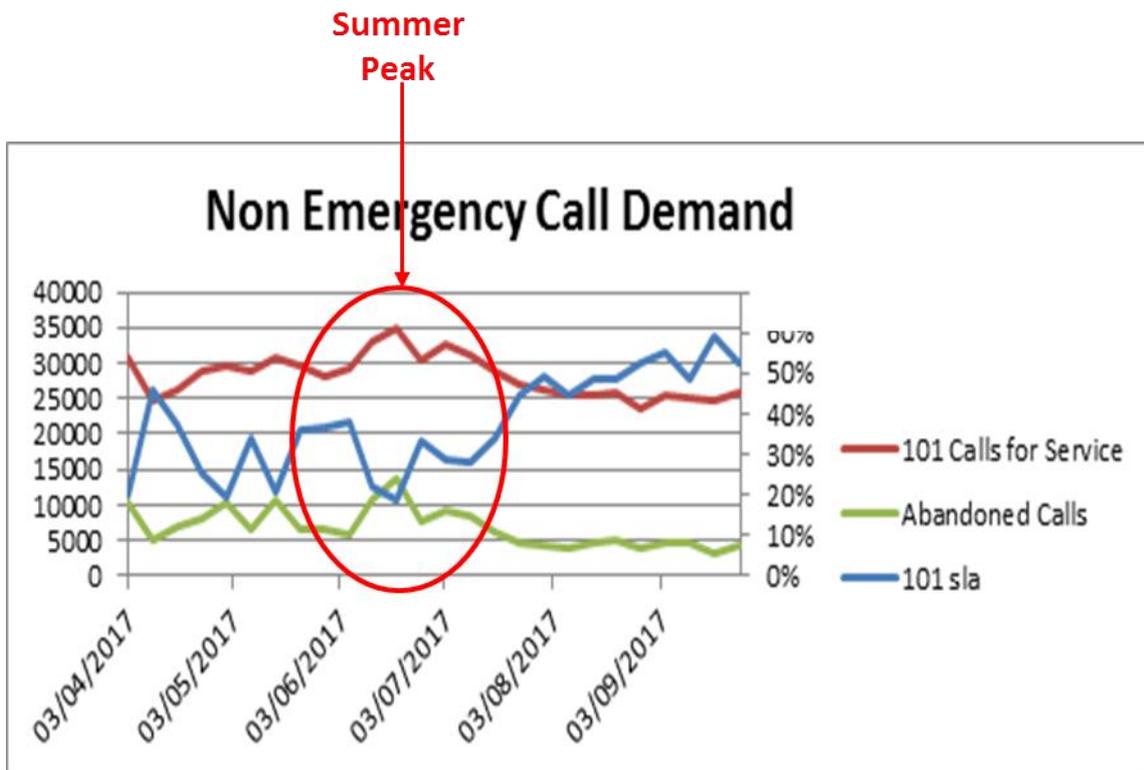
regular overtime; some Neighbourhood Policing capability was diverted towards response demand, as were Force Traffic at times. Our efforts to address this exceptional summer demand has some important learning that is now being implemented to improve our efficiency at handling these high volumes of calls for service.

## EMERGENCY SERVICE



7. The volume of Emergency 999 calls have continued to rise over the year with 12.5% or 64,000 more 999 calls being presented to West Midlands Police than in 2016. June and July saw exceptional volumes, well in excess of 60,000 calls each month, as can be seen in the graph above. There are signs though that the rate of increase is slowing, with the last 3 months (July-September) increasing by just 4.5% or 8,000 calls, compared to the same period in 2016.
8. Despite the sustained high level of call demand, WMP maintained a consistent service to the public, and in some areas actually improved.
9. The average speed to answer 999 calls has been faster at 8 seconds compared to 15 seconds in the same quarter last year.
10. The proportion of 999 calls answered within the 10 second Service Level Agreements (SLA's) for the same quarter last year was averaging at 80%, however, this has been an improving picture and in the last 3 months has seen it rise to 88%.
11. Despite the increased demand, the amount of calls being abandoned has also reduced to less than 1% of calls over the last 3 months. This is compared to the same period last year that saw 2.8% calls abandoned
12. Force Contact has delivered these service and performance levels through its investment in training all staff to receive both 999 calls and 101 calls (rather than being dedicated to 999 or 101), which allows staff to be surged to meet the most pressing need at that time, and through substantial improvements in overall staffing levels.

## NON-EMERGENCY SERVICE



13. Whilst non-emergency 101 calls peaked at 35,000 calls a week during the height of the exceptional summer demand, overall volumes have reduced by 12% compared to the same period last year (July to September). There is no doubt that as the department improved its ability to answer 101 calls there was a consequential reduction in abandoned 101 calls, which declined by 25% over this period.
14. The average speed to answer 101 calls has also reduced from 3 minutes to 2 minutes in the last 3 months.
15. The proportion of 101 calls answered within the 30 second SLA's has also been showing improvements over the last 3 months, increasing from 34% in July to 53% in September. As with the improvements with 999 service levels, these improvements with 101 calls can also be attributed to improved staffing levels and to benefits of training staff to handle both 999 and 101 calls, which allow staff to be surged to where the greatest need is at that time.
16. Force Contact staff continue to resolve around 74% of all Calls for Service, without the need for further resource, 4% of all calls received by Force Contact result in a crime being recorded at first point of contact. This means officers are able to prioritise attending incidents where there are vulnerable persons in need of our support or there are good investigative opportunities available at the scene of an incident.

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR CITIZENS

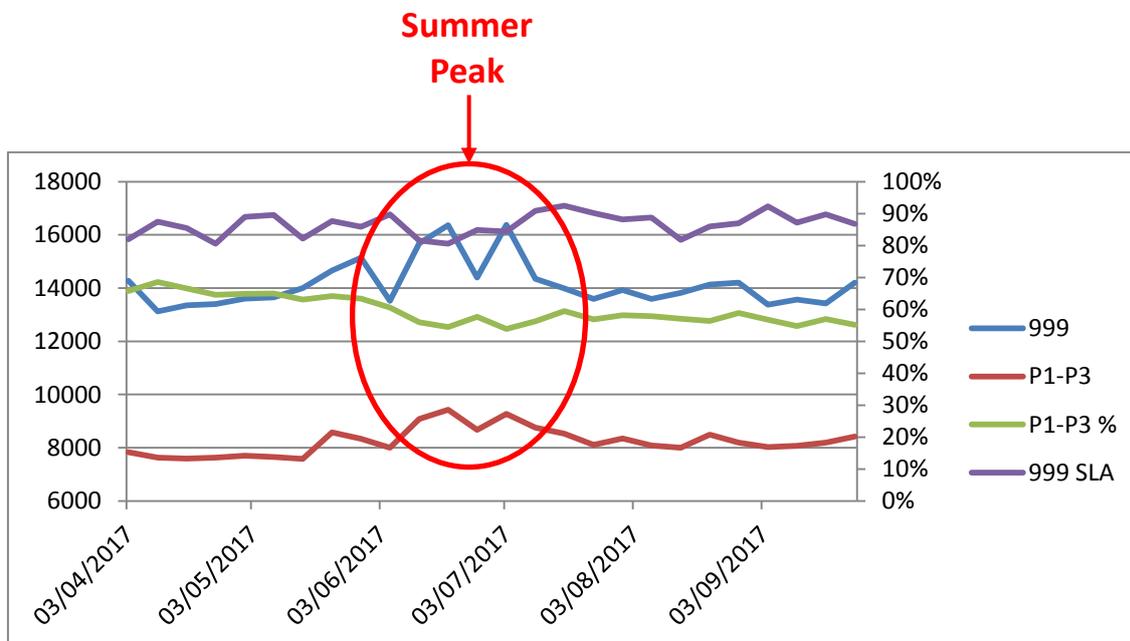
17. Ground breaking new digital technology has been introduced over the last 3 months to further improve the policing experience for citizens by creating new channels for people to contact WMP. At the end of July 2017, a new West Midlands Police web portal was launched which gives citizens access to advice and guidance on a wide range of issues people call us about; and online incident reporting and case tracking initially for theft,

criminal damage and non-residential burglary. This has received much positive feedback and usage is increasing, so far taking over 1000 crime reports online.

18. In August 2017 Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology was switched on to enable citizens who call us on 101 to be directed to the right person/specific departments without the need to speak with a contact officer.
19. The next phase of WMP2020 projects (which started over the summer) includes a New Ways of Contact programme. This programme is focussed primarily on scaling up and enhancing recently launched digital capabilities to shift non-emergency demand online and on maximising digital opportunities for people to connect with and be kept updated by West Midlands Police.

## **SUMMER PERIOD**

20. There is no doubt that the summer period has placed extraordinary demands upon West Midlands Police.
21. The awful terrorist attacks earlier in the summer in London and Manchester required West Midlands Police to draw numerous officers away from their normal duties to undertake sustained and considerable operational deployments across the region to protect and reassure our communities.
22. As has been outlined in previous sections of this report, West Midlands Police experienced exceptionally high call volumes for both 999 emergency call and 101 non-emergency calls, particularly in July, which translated into extremely high volumes of incidents that required Force Response and other departments to attend. Whilst the volumes have been challenging, so has the seriousness and complexity of many of these incidents (such as gun and knife crime) been significant over the summer period.
23. It was the combined effects of the policing response to the terrorist attacks, the incredible volumes of calls and incidents, and increased frequency of critical incidents across our region that caused the summer period to be so extraordinary for West Midlands Police.
24. WMP, as you would expect, had plans in place which were ready to deal with our predicted or usual increase in demand over the summer period. However the volume and complexity was unprecedented and far exceeded our expectations. To ensure there was a whole force response to this challenge ACC Boycott and ACC Beale jointly chaired a Gold Group, which met frequently throughout the summer, to help the force prioritise and coordinate the combined efforts necessary to meet this extraordinary demand for policing services.
25. The below chart illustrates performance against the demand challenges;
  - The blue line shows the total number of 999 calls, peaking at 16,374 week commencing (w/c) 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017
  - The red line shows the total of P1-P3 logs created, peaking at 9,429 w/c 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017
  - Despite the clear high call demand in June-August the purple line shows WMP provided a very consistent 999 service, an average of 87% of 999 calls answered in 10 seconds
  - The green line also shows a consistent response to incidents graded P1-3, despite the high summer demand.



26. Whilst it should be reassuring that despite exceptional summer demand West Midlands Police has maintained effective emergency policing services. It should also be recognised that this has been achieved through considerable diversion of resources and capability towards immediate response policing during this period. The force invested considerable additional overtime provision into Force Response to enhance their capacity during this period; Neighbourhood Policing and Force Traffic, for example, were often diverted away from their long term intervention and prevention work to service the immediate needs of P1-3 calls for service; and Force CID and the Public Protection Unit, again by way of example, diverted some staff away from investigations to be the first responders for appropriate incidents, meaning some of their existing investigations have taken longer to progress.
27. It was also notable during this period that the volume of open incident logs during this period increased from a 'normal' 1,400 or 1,500 to well over 2,000, and recently peaked at approximately 2,700. It has also proven challenging to bring this backlog of non-emergency work down. ACC Boycott and ACC Beale have continued to manage the risks and issues associated with this backlog through the Gold meetings. Staff had worked hard to refine our approaches and create additional capacity, resulting in some recent solid progress with these logs. Whilst progress has been made this issue continues to be subject to Gold oversight from ACC Boycott and ACC Beale.
28. Force Contact, throughout the summer, provided public messaging utilising their WMP social media account to give examples of poor use of the 101 and 999 services to enable the public to be able to self-serve more effectively. This work continues.
29. Force Contact were more robust in signposting and encourage web reporting during these peak levels of demand. We will continue to try and be more robust going forward as part of business as usual.
30. The IVR technology was also used following the Parsons Green terror attack during the summer by placing a pre - recorded message on the system explaining that we were experiencing increased call demand and advising of other digital channels that could be used to answer any queries that they may have. Again, we will look to expand and capitalise on this messaging.

## STAFFING

31. For the first time in 18 months Force Contact are now at their agreed establishment level. Whilst some staff are still undergoing initial training for Contact Handling and Dispatch they are all actively contributing to live demand as part of their training. A recruitment plan has been agreed with People and Organisational Development (POD) in order to maintain staffing levels moving forward, taking into account our anticipated attrition levels
32. The increase in staffing levels within Contact Handling has meant that over the last 3 months there has been a 22% reduction in the amount of 999 calls being answered by our Dispatch staff meaning that they are better able to support Incident management and the assistance that they are able to provide to operational colleagues.
33. The Crime Service Team have recently recruited a number of new staff to bring their staffing levels up to the agreed establishment level.
34. A new scheduling and forecasting system has been introduced within Contact Handling. This will support us to dynamically manage incoming call demand in a much better way. It also enables our staff to see Annual Leave availability by showing how many hours are available to book off at particular times.
35. Several areas of Contact have been improved over the last few months, all of which have received in main, positive feedback amongst staff who are starting to see and feel the changes and work with their leadership team to shape the future.

## **NEXT STEPS**

36. As has been previously said, in recent years, as a key component of the WMP2020 programme, Force Contact has undergone substantial change, refining and modernising its structures and business processes. Whilst operating in a tight resourcing framework, these changes are now yielding productivity gains and much more consistent service levels, particularly now that Force Contact has the staffing that it was intended to have. However the ambition to continue to develop and improve the services offered remains.
37. The New Ways of Response (NWoR) and New Ways of Contact (NWoC) WMP2020 programmes are taking forward further opportunities to develop Force Contact's emergency and non-emergency service offer to the public. In particular with the non-emergency service offer Force Contact will be introducing further means by which the public can engage West Midlands Police, such as web chat, building on recent developments, such as the web portal and IVR.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

**ACC Marcus Beale**  
**Operations**