



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP25/31

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
11 JULY 2025**

SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO CALLS FOR ASSISTANCE

SUMMARY:

1. This paper covers the reporting period from **1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025** to inform the public on Suffolk Constabulary's position on responding to calls for assistance to enhance both public confidence and public accessibility to Suffolk Constabulary.
2. The paper also provides the benefits of the investment that was made in the Command and Control Room and to maintain Suffolk Constabulary maintains excellent emergency response and call handling performance by continuing to use a range of alternative methods and channels to create greater public accessibility to Suffolk Constabulary.
3. Furthermore, this report also highlights the benefits of the Digital desk investment into both Digital desk and Suffolk Constabulary Domestic Abuse Video Response (DAVR) virtual rapid video response service in line with Suffolk Constabulary priority to tackle Domestic Abuse.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is asked to consider the progress made by the Constabulary and raise issues with the Chief Constable as appropriate to the PCC's role in holding the Chief Constable to account.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper supports the commitment in the Police and Crime Plan.

- Maintain, and where necessary enhance, its good emergency response and call-handling performance.
- Improve its processes for answering non-emergency calls and develop appropriate channels to report crime and contact the police.

1.2 Background: In October 2023 the Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) rated Suffolk Constabulary as 'inadequate' in how it responds to the public.

1.3 In 2022 an investment of 1.4 million uplift supported the constabulary to invest and develop this area of business. The Constabulary has made significant progress with call handling, recruitment of control room operators achieving national 999 call handling targets and reducing 101 abandonment rates. The change has seen the introduction of Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) and launching a suite of digital contact by introducing a Digital desk and Domestic Abuse Video Response (DAVR) by modernising Constabulary capability providing the public a wide range of contact options to contact the Police.

1.4 Throughout the 12-month period Suffolk Constabulary performance has continued to improve consistently achieving over 90%. As a result of the improved and consistent performance, HMICFRS have removed Suffolk Constabulary from being a cause for concern to adequate. The average over this period is 91.4%. This compares favourably to our most similar groups (MSGs).

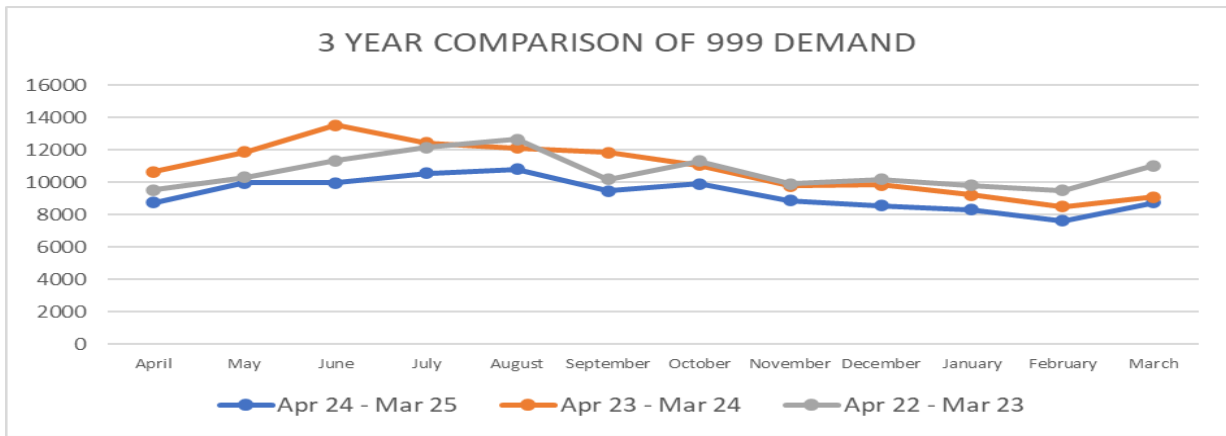
Annex A includes a report in Policing Insight – National article reporting on the success of call handling.

2. EMERGENCY CALL (999) PROCESS and DEMAND

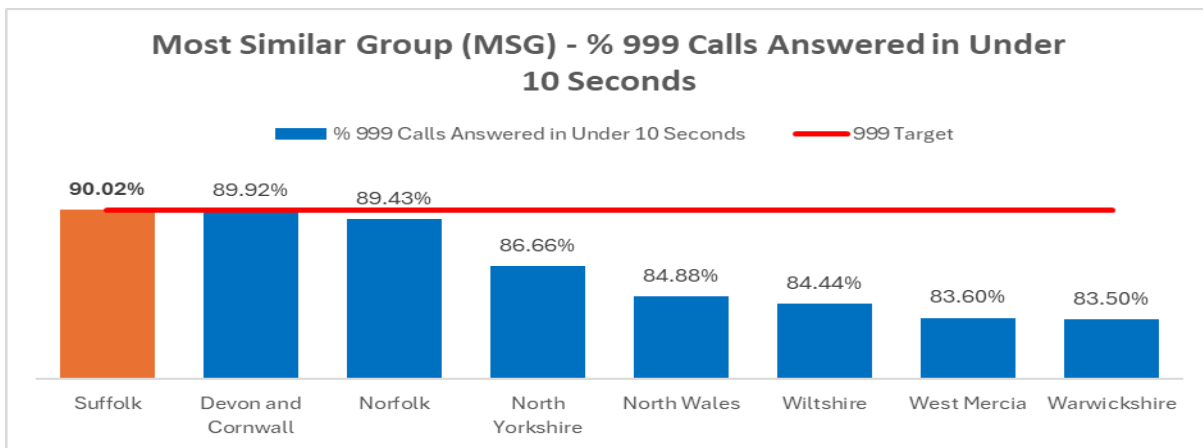
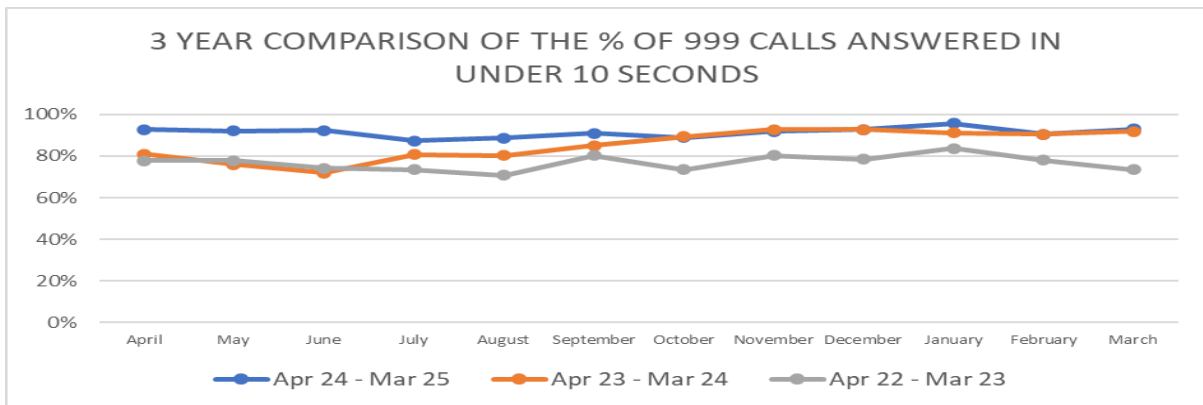
2.1 Suffolk Contact and Control Room (CCR) Call Handlers remain responsible for answering and handling both 999 and 101 calls. The number of 999 calls handled by the Constabulary between 2019 and 2022 increased significantly, replicated in 2022/23. An increase in digital capability providing the public with a menu of reporting options 'may' have contributed to the 2023/24 decrease in 999 demand.

2.2 Call Handlers continue to face a sustained level of demand. Call Handlers are balancing the need to respond to emergency 999 calls as a priority over non-emergency 101 calls. In addition, Call Handlers are taking more calls that involve vulnerable people, dealing with mental health concerns and other complex problems that across society; as a result, to mitigate risk Call Handlers require extra time to complete appropriate checks and manage complex calls, ensuring that our Thrive assessments (risk assessment tool) process is adhered to prioritising risk and demand.

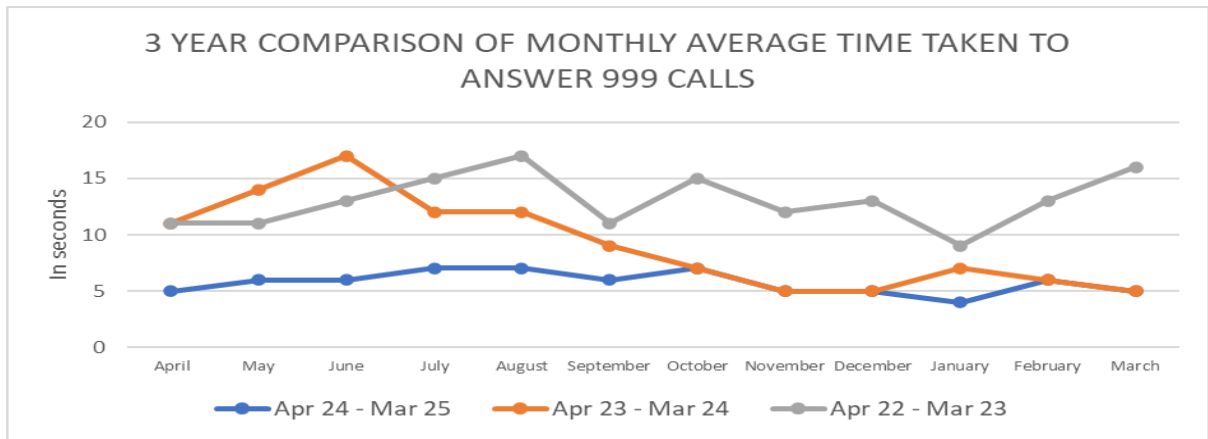
2.3 In the reporting period Suffolk Constabulary CCR received 111,732 '999' calls. This is a decrease of 14.2% compared to the same period in 2023/2024 and a 12.8% decrease since 2022/23.



2.4 In previous years the Constabulary has seen an increase in 999 demand in June. This reporting year has not followed the trend. While there is no clear reason for this, it is noted that increased temperatures arrived later across the summer which often coincides with increased demand. With this period replicating the previous year for a rise in demand in the October month (not the case in 22/23).



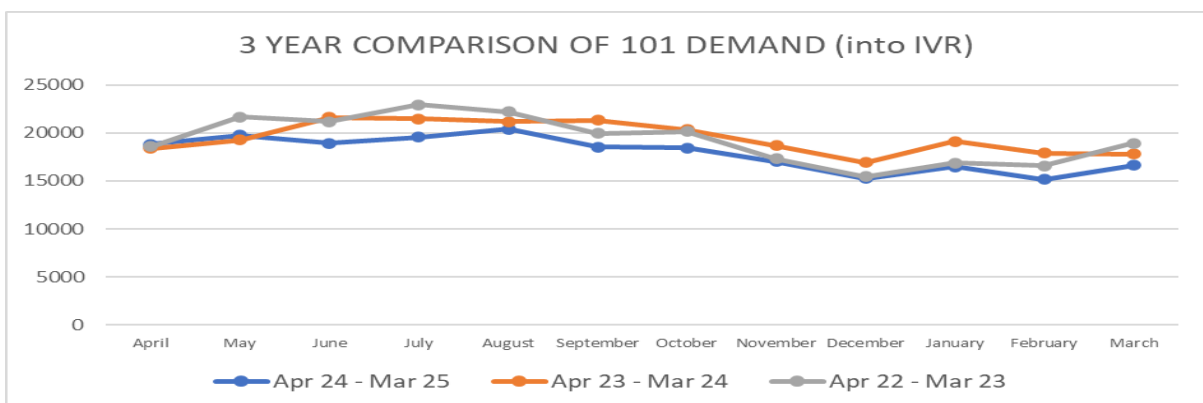
2.5 Average Time to Answer 999 calls was naturally longer at points of peak demand. Data across this period demonstrates the progress made when comparing data to previous year's performance with significant gains in our answer times. This period the call answered average was 5.75 seconds in comparison to 23/24 (9.1 seconds) and 22/23 (13 seconds).



3. NON-EMERGENCY CALL (101) DEMAND

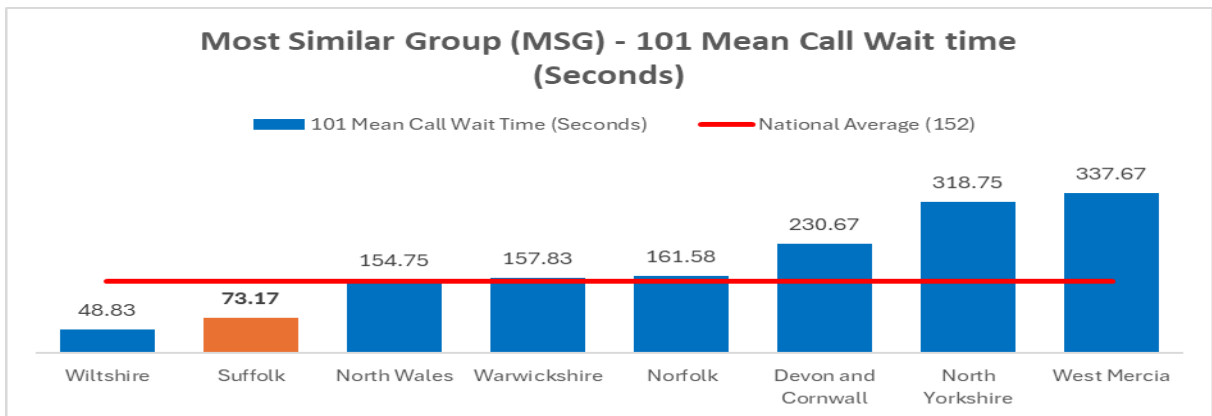
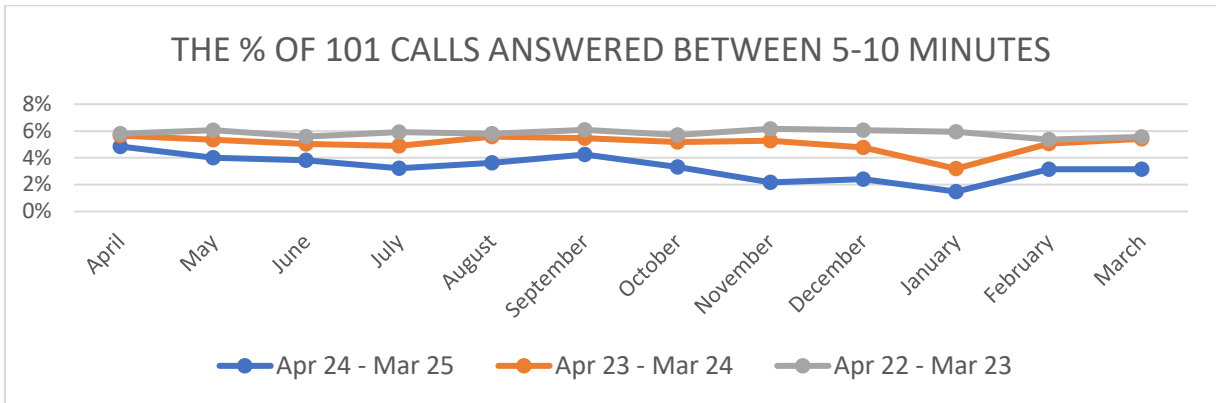
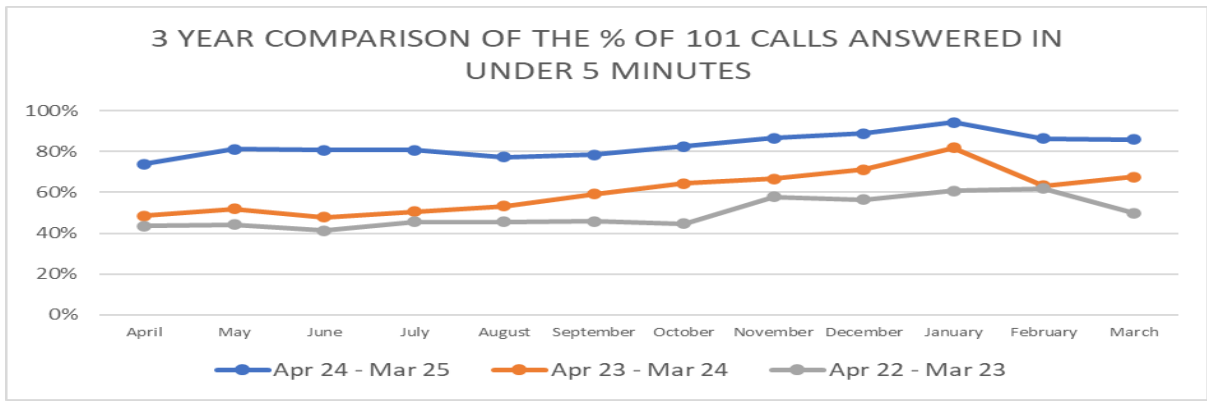
3.1 Suffolk Constabulary received 214,939 calls, a decrease of 8.1 % compared to the previous period. When dialling 101, callers are presented with a series of options. A number of these allow self-service via a voice recording menu of options via initial voice recording (IVR). Of the 101 calls, 168,473 continued past this stage without selecting a self-service option and were answered by a switchboard operator in the Central Call Answering (CCA) Team.

3.2 101 call demand has been consistent over the three-year period. Increasing numbers of service users are choosing digital channels (online reporting, Live Chat, social media). Single Online Home was introduced in November 2023. Digital uptake is a likely explanation for the slight decrease of 101 demand. Monthly fluctuations can be attributed to seasonal trends.



3.3 In this reporting period:-

- 83% of 101 calls were answered in under 5 minutes, a 23% improvement from the previous 12-month period.
- Over 86% of 101 calls were answered in under 10 minutes with positive performance increases year on year for handling times.
- Mean answer times on 101 compare favourably when considering our MSG's.



3.4 There is currently no national set standard for 101 call handling. The Constabulary is part of the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) working group for 101 call handling, developing the National Contact Management Strategy promoting standards and best practice. This provides the force an opportunity to influence change on a national platform to inform Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for 101 call handling and abandonment rates. All forces have now published their data www.police.uk, alongside a narrative for each force explaining their service delivery as there are many interdependencies which impact handling times.

3.5 There are two types of abandonment rates measured for 101 calls.

- short (under 30 seconds)
- long (30+ seconds)

When a caller dials 101, they are greeted with a list of options before being put through to an operator. During this time, members of the public are informed to end the call and dial 999 for an emergency. Callers are presented with a variety of options to report incidents online except for Mental Health and Public Safety matters which have specified queue pathways. These messages are known as a Recorded Announcement Device (RAD). RAD has an impact on abandonment rates and alternative pathways.

- 3.6 The Constabulary publishes the combined short and long abandonment rate. There has been a significant decrease in abandonment of 17% compared to the previous year, potentially reflective of additional caller options, enhanced staffing, changes to policy and procedure as well as more users opting for a digital channel option.

Yearly 101 abandonment rate Combined	Apr 24 - Mar 25	Apr 23 - Mar 24	Apr 22 - Mar 23
	11.1%	28.1%	43.7%

- 3.7 It is hypothesised that with short abandonments, service users are increasingly opting to utilise digital platforms rather than to wait in a call queue. Systems analysis does not allow data interrogation therefore both short and long abandonment are combined when examining abandonment. The Constabulary is part of a national working group to exploring options to review and monitor the data in greater detail to enhance data literacy nationally and locally.

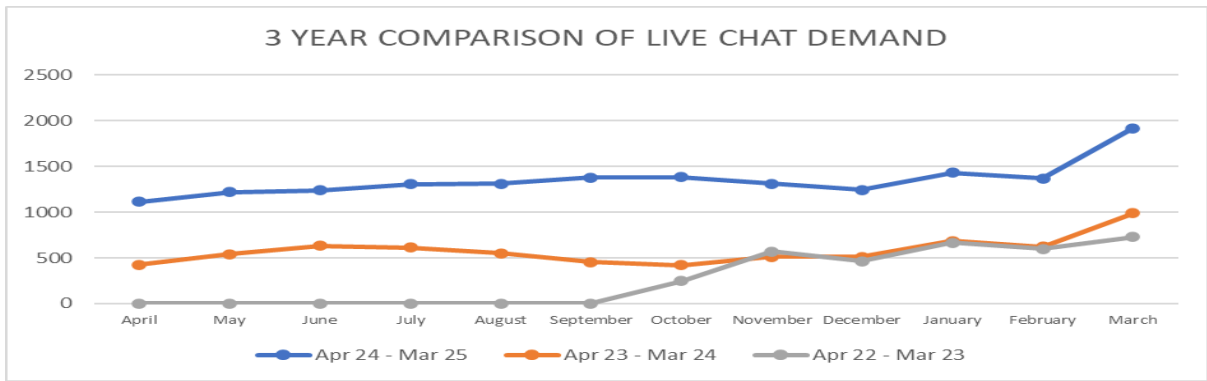
4. DIGITAL CONTACT AND ENGAGEMENT TEAM

- 4.1 Prior to the launch of a CCR Digital Contact and Engagement Team (DigiDesk) all emails, live chat and contact workload was managed by CCR staff. In March 2024, the Constabulary launched the Digital Contact and Engagement Team to streamline the work in the CCR. The team consists of a dedicated team of 12 staff and 2 supervisors. DigiDesk team members manage 90% of the digital demand coming into CCR between the hours of 0700 – 2200hrs reducing demand in the main control room.

The core functions of the Digital Contact and Engagement Team are:

- Public contact through webchat, extending the current provision and supporting alternative contacting with Constabulary by telephone.
- Process emails and other digital correspondence.
- Monitor Constabulary social media channels and direct messaging.

- 4.2 In this reporting period the live chat service saw 16,219 users (peaking in March 2025 with 1919 users). There have been over 1200 users of live chat per month for 11 consecutive months demonstrating consistent demand. The average time to respond on live chat by DigiDesk team was 6 seconds, with an abandon rate of 0.3%. 93% of users completing a post-chat survey (not mandatory) state they would recommend 'live chat' and would use the service again. 74% rated the service as very good or good.

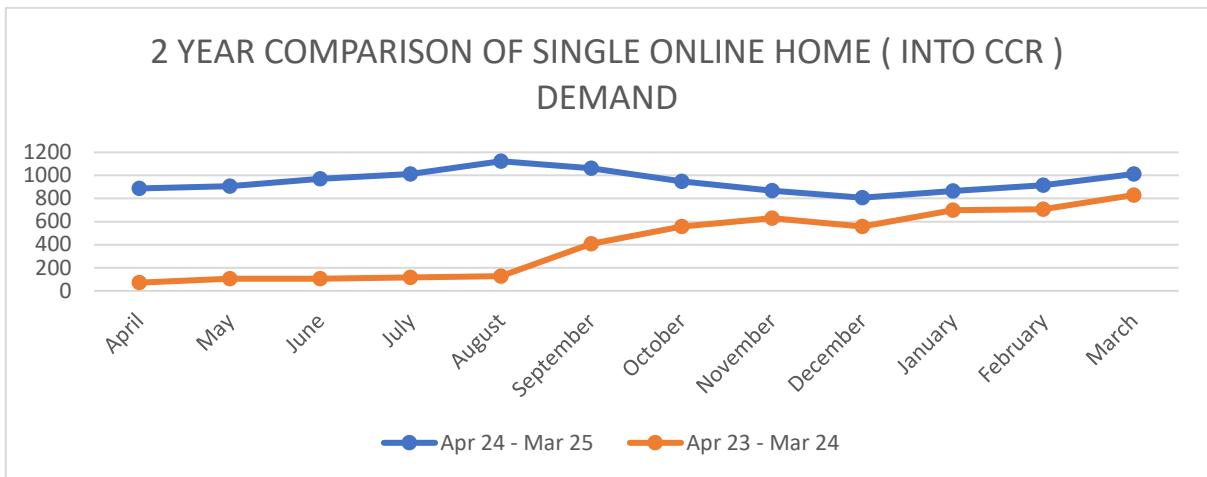


4.3 To get best value from its investment the Constabulary proactively reviewed the DigiDesk capacity in January 2025. The Constabulary resultingly introduced some changes:

- Taking on a strand of Single of Online demand from the Crime coordination.
- Developed capability to create intelligence reports
- Enhanced collaborative working with the Constabulary Corporate Comms team to enhance and support media messaging
- Assisting the main call centre in the closure of pending Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD's) where appropriate

5. SINGLE ONLINE HOME (SOH)

5.1 In November 2023, the Constabulary website was replaced by Single Online Home (SOH) a digital contact platform. SOH facilitates contact with the Constabulary including direct reporting of matters and crime auto generated onto the police crime recording system (Athena). Firearms licencing applications, Freedom of Information requests and reporting Road Traffic Incidents can be received. SOH has contact forms additionally directed into specific email accounts. Volume demand has remained consistent over the period and consistently above the previous year.



5.2 The introduction of Online Services appears to have had a positive impact on 101 abandonment rates through alternative crime reporting methods and information access. This continues to be monitored through user responses to online questions sets.

5.3 Single Online Home (SOH) is now at a stage where all processes are embedded, maturing and working effectively. The Crime Coordination Centre dept retain around 60% of all SOH contacts reducing necessity and demand for work to be disseminated to other departments.

6. RECRUITMENT

- 6.1 The Constabulary has continued to invest into CCR as part of the transformation programme. 29 additional operatives employed with attrition tracking below the national average for call handling roles. New staff are supported and mentored by experienced tutors.
- 6.2 The Constabulary has modernised and streamlined the recruitment process to be accessible and efficient. A new 'online' process allows candidates to directly book into assessment centres once eligibility has been achieved. Diversity and inclusion is a key part of recruitment processes to ensure Suffolk Constabulary is reflective of the communities we serve. Constabulary recruitment process have been praised by the College of Policing and has been taken forward as primising practice.

7. CALL GRADING & RESPONSE TIMES

- 7.1 **Urban Grade A** (Target attendance 15 minutes). The Constabulary has achieved an average time within the target of 8 minutes 52 seconds, 10 seconds on average slower than the previous year.

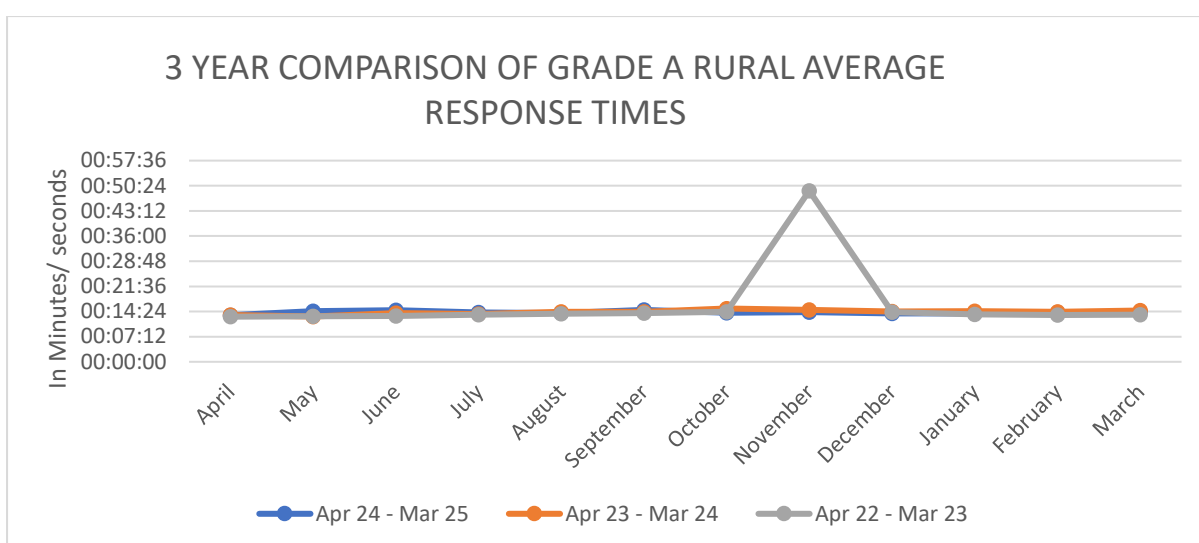
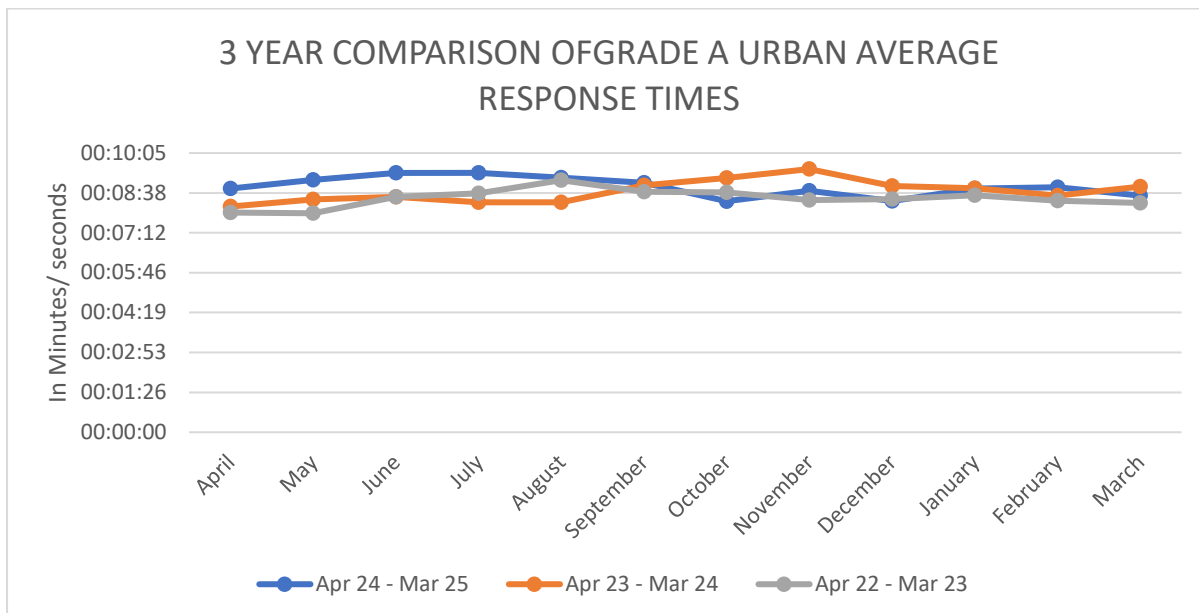
Rural Grade A (Target attendance of 20 minutes). The Constabulary has achieved the target each month with average timings of 14 minutes 9 seconds, 4 seconds on average quicker than the previous year.

Note: In respect of rural incidents, the distance between locations is a key factor in arrival times.

If a call is upgraded the time measured is not considered, this can automatically lead to a failure. Whilst there is a slight decrease in the Grade A Urban response times for this reporting period, there have been significant gains in responding to Grade B1 (1hr response) and Grade B2 (24hr response).

B1s (Target up to 60 mins) Constabulary average arrival time 38 mins and 29 seconds, 14minutes 13 seconds quicker than the previous period.

B2s (No target) Average arrival time was 8hrs and 4 minutes, 2hrs and 44minutes quicker than the previous period. These gains can be attributed to the collective efforts of the new operating model for resource deployment, CCR policy change, RCRP, Digital team and uplift in staff.



8. RIGHT CARE RIGHT PERSON (RCRP)

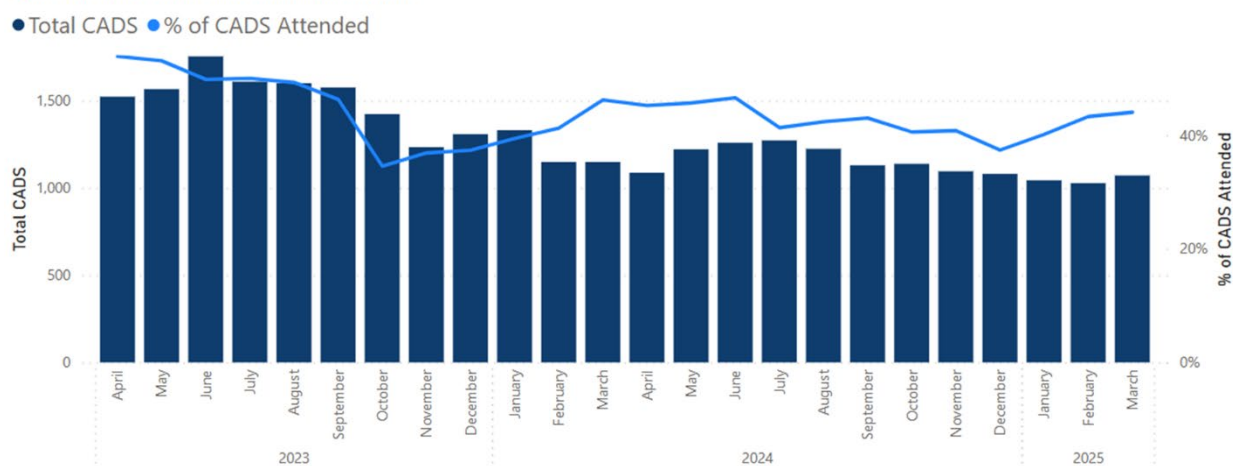
8.1 This section provides an update on RCRP, phase 3 of the CCR transformation programme. The below chart uses the criteria that Humberside Police adopted, which includes incidents that are categorised as ‘Concern for Safety’ or ‘Mental Health related’. Since the Constabulary implemented RCRP there has been a steady decline in the number of calls for service indicating members of the public are increasingly accessing the most suitable service.

8.2 Percentage of officer attendance to such matters has decreased suggesting calls into policing are becoming more appropriate for a policing response. Based only on CAD timestamps (subject to data quality) an average saving of 545 officer hours a month since RCRP implementation may have been achieved. These savings come in small pockets of time that are not solely attributable to one officer or one area.

8.3 The savings are utilised in managing current demand and reflect in part in performance improvements across the Constabulary such as arrival times. It is evident the Constabulary is receiving fewer calls into the CCR positively contributing to 101 performance and reduction of abandonment rate. The chart shows an increase in officer attendance, however when

correlated with demand coming in, we attribute this to officers who are now attending more appropriate calls.

Concerns for Welfare CADs and % attendance

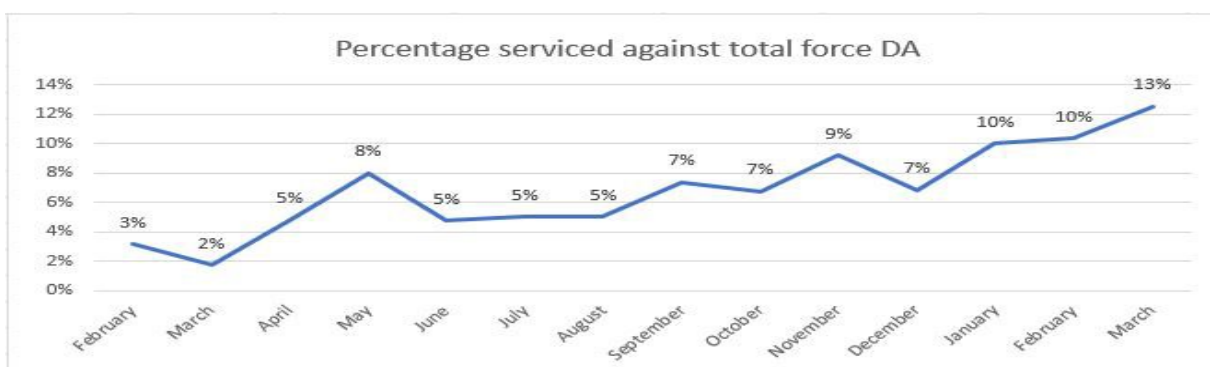
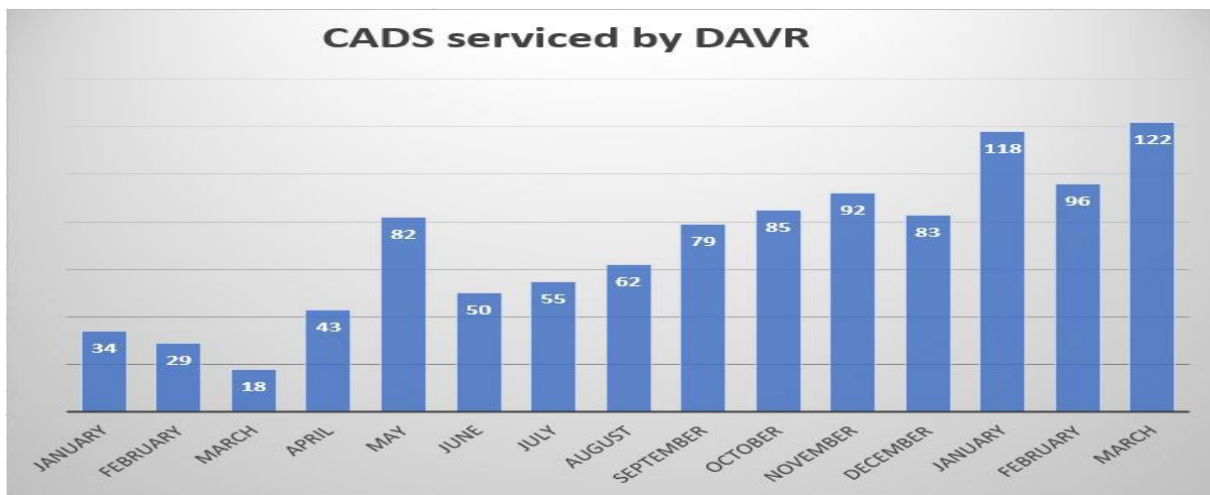


Analysis Period	CADS	CADS Attended	% ATTENDED
April 2023 to March 2024	17,231	7,817	45%
April 2024 to March 2025	13,658	5,817	43%

8.4 The Constabulary is committed to continuous learning. An additional internal survey in Jan 2025 with CCR staff, focused on RCRP training and support. 88 % of the respondents indicated they received sufficient support and supervision throughout implementation.

9. DOMESTIC ABUSE VIDEO RESPONSE (DAVR)

9.1 In January 2024 Constabulary implemented the DAVR Team. The team consists of 1 Sergeant, 3 Constables and 6 support staff investigators. The final wave of investigators joined January 2025. Each Domestic Abuse call is risk assessed to ensure suitability for DAVR. The team engage with victims utilising video technology offering ‘live’ time consultation and scheduled appointment options. Since inception and continuously improving processes, we have seen an increased number of CAD’s serviced by the team with March 2025 showing the highest return since inception. The Constabulary is exploring options to reach marginalised, minority and migrant communities to promote the use of DAVR seeking to improve Domestic Abuse recording from communities that are ‘seldom’ heard.



10. ENGAGEMENT.

10.1 The Constabulary is continuously seeking to improve and innovate. We are linked in with both National and regional leads and closely engage with the Eastern Regional Innovation Network learning about new opportunities, research, learning to improve and modernise local practices and processes to create further efficiencies and effective processes .

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None.

12. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

12.1 None.

13. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

13.1 Suffolk Constabulary has significantly improved its public contact services between April 2024 and March 2025, following a £1.4 million investment in its Command and Control Room.

13.2 Emergency (999) call handling performance exceeded national targets, with average answer times reduced to 5.75 seconds. Non-emergency (101) services also saw major gains, with abandonment rates dropping from 28.1% to 11.1% and 83% of calls answered within five minutes. These improvements reflect enhanced staffing, streamlined processes, and the growing use of digital alternatives.

- 13.2 Digital transformation has played a key role in improving accessibility and efficiency. The launch of the Digital Desk (DigiDesk) and Single Online Home (SOH) has enabled the public to engage with the Constabulary through live chat, email, and online forms. DigiDesk now handles 90% of digital contact, with a 6-second average response time and 93% user satisfaction. SOH usage has consistently outperformed the previous year, reducing pressure on traditional call channels and offering more flexible contact options.
- 13.3 Innovative services like the Domestic Abuse Video Response (DAVR) and the Right Care Right Person (RCRP) initiative have further enhanced service delivery. DAVR provides virtual support to victims, showing strong uptake and satisfaction, while RCRP has reduced inappropriate police responses to mental health-related calls, saving an average of 545 officer hours per month. These developments demonstrate Suffolk Constabulary's commitment to modernising public contact, improving response times, and delivering a more accessible and effective service.

FEATURE:

How Suffolk Constabulary transformed its call response performance

OPEN



27th May 2025

[Ian Weinfass, Policing Insight](#)



By combining a suite of national innovations with its own local solutions, Suffolk Constabulary has transformed its contact management and response functions; Assistant Chief Constable Eamonn Bridger tells Policing Insight’s Ian Weinfass how the force moved out of an HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services ‘inadequate’ public contact rating to no longer being assessed as a ‘cause for concern’ - all within 10 months.

An [October 2023 PEEL report](#) from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) rated Suffolk Constabulary as inadequate in how it responds to the public.

The Inspectorate said its contact and control room had capacity and capability issues, noting that it only answered 76.6% of 999 calls within 10 seconds and saw 36.9% of non-emergency 101 calls abandoned.

The rate of abandoned non-emergency contact calls had also been flagged by the Inspectorate in its previous PEEL review two years earlier.

In August 2024 though, HMICFRS said the issue was no longer rated as a 'cause for concern'. Data provided by the force shows that in the year to 30 September 2024, 91% of emergency calls were answered within 10 seconds, with an average wait time of six seconds, and just 16% of 101 calls were abandoned. So what prompted the turnaround?

Suffolk's Assistant Chief Constable Eamonn Bridger told Policing Insight that the improvement was brought about by the introduction of a large suite of measures, some of which were, crucially, already being planned.

"It was something we'd recognised ourselves, our performance challenges. There had already been agreements around further investment through local taxation that were in place prior to the inspection happening," he said.

In fact, in early 2022, Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner Tim Passmore announced an increase in the rate of council tax residents would pay, with a £1.4m uplift targeting control room improvements, particularly public dissatisfaction with the 101 service.

Between the 2021 and 2023 PEEL inspections, HMICFRS actually found the 101 response had declined at the force. ACC Bridger said many of the planned improvements hadn't been fully bedded in before the Inspectorate gave its 2023 assessment.

Its strategy was drawn up to put greater focus on serious incidents that required attendance. By combining some innovations that were rolling out nationally with targeted local schemes, it was able to improve, he explained.

ACC Bridger said the force needed to balance the growing levels of public demand while ensuring the right people were available to deal with issues involving threats to life or ongoing crimes within seconds.

“Obviously to do that, we need to create some level of efficiency around the things that can actually be dealt with in the next 12 or 24 hours, or [else be] done in a really convenient way to the customer [and] also to the constabulary,” he said.

An uplift in funding thanks to increased council tax revenues was partly invested into improving the contact and control room. Some of this was used to recruit extra call takers, but other innovations followed at the same time.

A suite of digital contact methods

The force rolled out the single online home platform where non-emergency contact can be easily made through its website.

ACC Bridger acknowledged this is now commonly used throughout England and Wales, but said that allied to the introduction of a dedicated digital desk handling enquiries through it and social media, it has made a big difference.

“It’s probably had the biggest impacts on our 101, non-emergency contact. But it also moved demand away from the traditional call handlers which meant that they weren’t as bogged down by non-emergency issues and therefore were able to really concentrate on the things that were higher risk or emergency,” he said.

The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) defines a digital desk as some or all of a force’s digital estate being monitored centrally within its control room. Around [20 forces use the model](#).

Suffolk’s digital desk, established in March 2024, is linked to its contact and control room system, though does not physically sit within it due to estate constraints.

It is staffed every day between 7am and 10pm, and provides real-time responses to live chat enquiries, social media, emails and online reports between 8am and 9.30pm.

Right care, right person

The very same week that the force's 2023 PEEL inspection was published, it also started rolling out its 'right care, right person' scheme.

The initiative aims to have agencies other than police deal with concerns for welfare relating to mental health, medical or social care issues, ie the person responding is the right person for the needs of the call.

It has been rolled out across all forces in England and Wales and was recently [highlighted in a Home Office evaluation](#) as having delivered on its aim of identifying time savings for police and freeing up resources.

The review cautioned that resources of other agencies might be a limiting factor and called for parties to ensure their communication remains strong.

ACC Bridger described implementing the initiative as "another significant success" for the force: "Having worked that programme through as part of the same transformation, it's meant that some of those unnecessary demands are not reaching the call handlers, call dispatchers and digital desk and they are then preserved for people who need a policing service whether it be an emergency one or non-emergency one," he said.

Rapid video response

Another innovation the force has adopted is video calling of digital contact for domestic abuse victims.

Situated within the contact and control room, the rapid video response team was established after a three-month pilot, to provide an option to speak to the constabulary remotely via video link, providing details of an incident and initial evidence.

The team takes calls between 8am and 10pm. A survey in 2024 found 95% of people using the service were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied', and 92% preferred it to meeting with police in person.

For those suffering domestic violence and unable to visit a police station due to their abuser potentially watching their movements, the contact provides a safer option for speaking to police.

The force says its team will only schedule a remote call once it has been established with the victim that it is safe to do so. As of December, the team consisted of three police officers, six police support investigators, an administrative assistant and a sergeant. All appear on their calls in either police or staff uniform.

The service is not used in cases where the victim is under the age of 18, where a suspect is present or might return, calls requiring an interpreter, any sexual offences, or any immediate 'Grade A' call.

PCC Mr Passmore described the scheme as "excellent value for money". He added: "The rapid video response does exactly what the name suggests and is an excellent example of where technology can help not only the constabulary, but more importantly, the victim too."

Rapid video response was pioneered by Kent Police in 2021, where it was [found to have brought about greater victim satisfaction, faster police response times and a 50% increase in arrests.](#)

Enhanced video response

The initiative has been viewed as such a success that Suffolk Constabulary is looking to roll it out for other crime types; earlier this year it held a three-month pilot enabling victims of non-urgent crimes to make reports in a similar way.

Members of the public were able to schedule video appointments for issues without imminent risk through the scheme, known as enhanced video response. The number of available appointments was limited so the force could test how the policy worked as it went along.

ACC Bridger said this was used for "quite a wide variety of stuff", with much of it resolved during the first call. He named examples of non-dwelling burglaries and anti-social behaviour.

“They would include simple damage crimes, anything that isn’t part of a series or has got particular complexities around vulnerability,” he said.

“I think on the whole, the public know the things that they want to report and get dealt with quickly and conveniently – they also know the things that that they wouldn’t want. Obviously, there’s higher risk crimes, such as sexual offences and serious violence, elements of domestic abuse, which clearly wouldn’t be appropriate.”

He added: “We see so much potential in the video response element that that’s the next area we’re really keen to explore further: mainly because it gives victims convenience and choice.”

It also frees up personnel time from attending non-serious incidents, with other potential savings such as petrol costs also in play, and environmental benefits from reduced travel.

“We’ve never taken a position that people are mandated to take those options, but we make it as an available offer and allow the public to choose.

“We’ve got a real range of demographics in our communities and there are some people that are really comfortable in digital space and want all of their life dealt with in that way. Obviously at the other end of that spectrum there are some people that would much rather talk to an actual person.”

Victim choice

ACC Bridger, who has been promoted to deputy chief constable at the force – a role he will take up in September – added: “Victim choice is really important to us and timeliness is really important to us.

“Efficiency is definitely a secondary benefit but that then allows us to reinvest back into those things that are most threat, most harm to other people or property or whatever else it may be.”

He stressed that he did not want to give the impression that efficiency for the force is the primary focus. “It really isn’t,” he said. Results of the pilot are being analysed as ACC Bridger spoke to Policing Insight, with a view to rolling the facility out more widely over the course of a year.

“I think choice is probably what all of us as consumers of public sector service want. We all want choice, we all want convenience, but we all want to achieve a high-quality service that keeps us safe. All those component parts are equally relevant.”

Reflecting on the improvements made so far, ACC Bridger said: “It was never one singular thing, but the investment in the traditional ways of working and the more modern ways of working all coming together has then had that overall effect of success.”

Providing value for money to the public whose taxes were going up was also prominent in the minds of force leaders.

“All of these initiatives were kicked off by further investment and obviously our public paying more tax, in short, so it’s really important to us that we spend that wisely and in a way that is most likely to give back the productivity gains or the performance gains that have been proven to be successful elsewhere,” he said.

A good direction

Surveys show public confidence has increased in the force since its initiatives have been rolled out. ACC Bridger said its local policing model was also redesigned around the same time and despite ongoing financial pressures, a number of factors have come together to improve how it is seen.

“We know that we’ve got good engagement with our public. We are seeing a high degree of improvement in satisfaction, confidence, and we are seeing partner and public feedback that is really impressive. I think they’re all demonstrating a police force that is moving in a good direction. And hopefully it will continue.”

Earlier this year, Mr Passmore praised the work to improve control room contact as “great news for us all”. He said: “I know the public have noticed the improved service because in previous years, issues with the 101 service were raised with me everywhere I went; in our last series of public meetings these complaints were noticeable only by their absence.

“Better communication is a key theme in my new police and crime plan and something I will monitor regularly. These improvements to the constabulary’s response times will play a major role in keeping crime levels down, benefitting all homes and businesses across our county.”

Picture © Suffolk Constabulary

This article can be found here:

[How Suffolk Constabulary transformed its call response performance](#)

Policinginsight