Rolling out the police single non-emergency number (101): research into the public's and practitioners' views

Katharine McKenna, Nicola Smith, Jenny Williams, Rachel Gardner (Ecorys)

In 2010, the Government set out its commitment to establish a national non-emergency police number for England and Wales which would provide a single, memorable non-emergency number for contacting the police (101).

This study reviewed the extent to which the 101 service was operating as intended in some of the first forces to implement 101. The study also examined call handling of non-emergency incidents more generally, including public perceptions and expectations of how non-emergency incidents should be dealt with.

Interviews with Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers staff responsible for managing the roll out of 101 and members of staff in each police force as well as members of the public who had used the 101 service were undertaken. These were supplemented by focus groups with the public to understand wider attitudes to contacting the police.

On balance the evidence from this early research suggests the 101 service was operating as intended in the first forces to implement it and that users were largely satisfied.

The main recommendations from the research are to address misapprehensions amongst the public over use of 101. These misapprehensions discourage some members of the public from reporting non-emergency incidents, or lead to inappropriate use of the 999 system. Future awareness campaigns should:

- emphasise that non-emergency call handling is done to the same level of professionalism as 999 and accurate records are made for all relevant calls made to the police;
- clarify and give examples to the public about the circumstances where non-emergency contact with the police would be encouraged; and
- emphasise that calling 101 will put you through to your local force.

Contents

Keywords

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All police forces have non-emergency police numbers which are intended to divert non-emergency calls or routine enquiries from the emergency 999 number. However, many people are not aware of the existence of these numbers. In 2010, the Government set out its commitment to establish a national non-emergency police number for England and Wales which would provide a single, memorable non-emergency number for contacting the police (101).

This study reviewed the extent to which the 101 service was operating as intended in three of the first forces to implement 101. The study also examined call handling of non-emergency incidents more generally, including public perceptions and expectations of how non-emergency incidents should be dealt with. Interviews with Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) staff responsible for managing the roll out of 101 and members of staff in each police force, as well as members of the public who had used the 101 service were undertaken. These were supplemented by focus groups with the public to understand wider attitudes to contacting the police.

Overall, implementation of the 101 service across the three police forces who had adopted it was perceived to have been achieved successfully. Factors which were perceived to have contributed to a successful roll-out included: strong national and local project management; close internal and external partnership working between police forces, the ACPO and the Home Office; the ability to integrate the 101 telephony into existing local call-handling infrastructure; and a comprehensive communications campaign targeting police officers and staff.

Roll-out was felt to have been hindered by forces being unable to accurately predict demand for the 101 service and delays in confirming the supplier of the telephony

contract and in the late delivery of a communications toolkit prepared by the Home Office.

Prior to the introduction of 101, police forces across England and Wales had used different numbers to connect members of the public to their non-emergency services. The introduction of 101 did not impose a uniform definition of what constitutes a non-emergency call. 101 simply replaced these diverse non-emergency numbers used previously with a single easy-to-remember number.

Call volumes to 101 increased rapidly as the service was rolled out across more forces between September and December 2011. This rise appears to have diverted calls from other non-emergency numbers, without substantially affecting overall levels of (999 or non-emergency) calls to the police.

Most members of the public had clear ideas about what constituted a non-emergency situation and the appropriate circumstances in which to use 101. However, the focus groups highlighted the existence of some strongly held negative views about how the police deal with non-emergency calls. These views were partly based on prior experience of non-emergency phone contact with the police, but were more often simply myths on the way non-emergency calls were handled (compared with 999 calls). Some participants believed incorrectly that non-emergency calls were not logged, the national non-emergency number delivered a less localised service to the public than local non-emergency numbers and that non-emergency call handlers were less fully trained than their emergency counterparts.

For some, their views simply made them disinclined to contact the police over non-emergency issues; for others, their expectations led them to state they would use 999 regardless of what they needed to speak to the police about, as they believed it would simply generate a quicker

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and more active response from the police than a non-emergency number.

Participants with experience of 101 had generally positive views about the service. Members of the public reported that the number was extremely easy to remember and use. The majority of users stated that they got through to a 101 call handler quickly and on their first attempt. Call handlers were viewed as taking calls seriously and treating callers with courtesy and professionalism. Only a small number of participants reported being dissatisfied with the service; typically this was the result of delays in speaking to a handler or calls failing to be returned. Most members of the public appeared to be unaware that there was a small charge to use the 101 service. However, when informed of the cost, users generally felt it was reasonable.

Home Office and Police representatives reported that a number of improvements and developments were already planned for the immediate months following the completed roll-out. These focussed on raising public awareness, monitoring demand and improving the customer experience. In the longer term, some expressed an interest in extending 101 to be a partnership number, covering more services than just the police. Not all of those interviewed were supportive of this idea with some concerned about potential confusion and knock-on effects on service quality.

The current system for 101 was launched as an exclusively telephony-based system. On the whole, there was a strong preference expressed by the public to maintain telephone contact due to the immediate and personalised acknowledgement and support that can be accessed through human contact. There was some enthusiasm for alternative mechanisms, such as email, internet or text message (SMS), but certain groups such as older people did not favour email or SMS due to accessibility issues. The following recommendations emerge from this research and should be considered by the Home Office, ACPO and all forces:

- explore the potential to use large-scale or national events as an opportunity to further promote the existence of 101; and
- address misapprehensions amongst the public over use of 101 in future awareness campaigns, including:
  - emphasise that non-emergency call handling is done to the same level of professionalism as 999 and accurate records are made for all relevant calls made to the police;

  - clarify and give examples to the public about the circumstances where non-emergency contact with the police would be encouraged;
  - emphasise that calling 101 will put you through to your local force; and
  - reinforce the low cost of 101, highlighting that although a cost is involved, it is likely to be cheaper than the cost of calling some of the previous non-emergency numbers.

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1. Introduction

It is estimated that the police in England and Wales receive more than 67 million calls in total from the public each year (Flanagan, 2005) and that 70 per cent of these are non-emergency calls, i.e. they do not require an immediate response from the police (Brooks et al., 2011). Many of these calls, however, are inappropriately made to police emergency 999 operators.

To divert routine enquiries from the 999 number, all police forces have either a single or range of non-emergency phone numbers (typically seven digit numbers starting 0845 or 0300) which are intended to be used by the public to report minor crime and incidents which are not crimes. However, findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey suggest that many people are not aware of these numbers. For example, in the 12 months to March 2011, 43 per cent of the public said they did not know how to contact their local police if they wanted to talk to them about non-emergency policing issues of crime or anti-social behaviour (ASB) (Moon et al., 2011).

In England and Wales, a three-digit, easy-to-remember non-emergency number (101) was piloted in 2006. In 2011, the Home Office committed to rolling out this number to all forces. This report presents the findings of research exploring the introduction of this single non-emergency police number.

Background

Single non-emergency numbers (SNEN) were first introduced in the United States of America (USA). A number of research studies (e.g. Solomon and Uchida, 2003, Mazerolle et al., 2003) have shown that in the USA demand for, and calls to, the emergency services decline following implementation of a non-emergency number, but that this can be offset by an increase in calls to the

new non-emergency service (Mazerolle et al., 2003). In addition, research has found that in the USA members of the public are generally positive about the introduction of single non-emergency numbers. When such a service was introduced in Austin (Texas), 75 per cent of respondents believed the SNEN had contributed to an improvement in the 911 service (Solomon and Uchida, 2003).

The single non-emergency number (101) piloted in England and Wales in 2006 was a joint enterprise between local authorities and police forces, which aimed to give the public a single point of access to report and/or get advice on non-emergency issues of policing, crime and anti-social behaviour. The number was piloted in five areas (Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, South Wales, Northumbria, South Yorkshire and Leicester and Rutland) in the summer and autumn of 2006.

The models introduced by the five sites varied widely due to the autonomy given to sites in the implementation of 101. Key differences between the sites were around the complexity of the local partnerships, the degree of risk in the technological solution and the quality of project management. Despite these different approaches, the pilots highlighted a number of general lessons about the implementation of non-emergency numbers.

- Partnership working – it was important to ensure that people with sufficient decision-making and financial authority sat on the project board.
- Recruitment of staff – contingency plans should be developed to address the risk of a poor up-take in the recruitment of additional call-handling staff.
- Training – trainers need to be given sufficient time to build up a knowledge base on 101 before delivering training.
- Performance management – developing 'feedback loops' was identified as a way to help improve the delivery of 101 by highlighting issues early to allow appropriate action to be taken.

- Scope of the 101 service – careful planning should be undertaken about how 'out-of-scope' calls are handled.

The introduction of 101 in the pilot areas had had little impact on existing patterns of 999 calls (in contrast to the evidence from US studies). However, it was acknowledged that reducing demand on 999 was a longer-term aim of the introduction of a non-emergency number.

Following the pilot of the partnership 101 model, Hampshire and Sheffield continued with their 101 service, funding it locally. Additionally, in 2009, all four Welsh police forces took the decision to adopt 101 as a police-only non-emergency number for all non-999 calls. Most other English forces continued to use their own local numbers to handle non-emergency calls.

The roll-out of 101 to all police forces

In 2011, the Government set out its commitment to establish a national 101 non-emergency number across all forces in England and Wales (A New Approach to Fighting Crime, Home Office, 2011). The Home Office, in partnership with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and working with a technology provider, used the lessons from the previous pilot alongside wider evidence to redesign the 101 service in order to implement a different model which would be affordable and sustainable. Unlike the pilot 101 number, the new 101 service was set up as a police-only non-emergency number.

The 101 service was designed to provide a single, memorable non-emergency number in place of the variety of different numbers that forces operated[1]. The intention was that 101 would be the number to call when the public wanted to contact the police for any non-emergency situation (for example, to report crime that does not need an emergency response, to provide information to the police or for any other police enquiries). When a member of the public calls 101, the system determines where the caller is located and connects them to their nearest police force which then deals with their call according to locally agreed protocols. According to the project initiation document the expected benefits of a national 101 service are:

- improved public access to non-emergency police services – through the introduction of a single easy-to-remember national number which avoids the public having to look up their local force telephone numbers;
- improvements in public satisfaction and empowerment – through giving the public a single, convenient way to contact their local police to report non-emergency crime and disorder, making it easier for the public to pass on information about crime in their neighbourhoods and allowing the police to take swift action; and
- more accurate monitoring and improved resourcing of demands on emergency and non-emergency numbers by helping to reduce pressure on 999.

On 28 January 2011, all 43 Chief Constables agreed at the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Council to adopt 101 as the national police non-emergency number, and subsequently signed a Memorandum of Understanding. A phased roll-out for 101 began in South East England in July 2011 and all forces were using 101 by mid-December 2011.

Study aims and scope

In summer 2011 the Home Office commissioned research into the early implementation of the 101 service.[2] The study had two broad aims. To:

- review the extent to which the 101 service is operating as intended in some of the first forces to implement 101, and identify good practice and barriers to successful implementation; and
- explore call handling of non-emergency incidents more generally, including public perceptions and expectations for how non-emergency incidents should be dealt with.

The study sought to address the following key questions.

- To what extent is the 101 service operating as intended?
- What are the facilitators and barriers to successful implementation?
- What are users' views of the 101 service?
- What are the perceived benefits of the 101 service to the police and local partners? What aspects of implementation could be improved?

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1   While some forces planned to phase out their existing non-emergency numbers as the 101 number embedded, some intended to keep their existing numbers.

2   Ecorys with CGL Bosham Ltd.

- How do users think call handling of non-emergency incidents could be improved?
- How could more people be encouraged to report non-emergency incidents via other methods?

Emerging findings were fed back to the 101 Project Delivery Board so that any difficulties experienced early on in the 101 roll-out process could be identified and resolved prior to subsequent phases of roll-out.

Study scope and data limitations

This report presents the key findings from the research. It briefly summarises the learning from the implementation of 101 which was used by the Home Office, ACPO and police forces to support the subsequent phases of roll-out (Section 3). These findings were presented in more detail for use by the forces, ACPO and the Home Office but have been summarised in this report. The main focus of the report, however, is presenting findings relating to the ongoing operation and future development of 101 in the context of how the public contact the police (Section 4 onwards).

Most fieldwork, particularly interviews with Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) staff responsible for managing the roll out of 101 and members of staff in each police force, was undertaken within one to two months of the launch of 101. The findings presented in this report should, therefore, be viewed within the context of early implementation.

The report reflects the personal perceptions of participants. These may not always reflect the views of the police force or the type of organisation they represent. Quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate views expressed by participants. All quotes are anonymised. Findings from the different evidence sources are integrated and presented alongside each other throughout this report, with sources identified where appropriate.

Structure of the report

The report contains the following sections:

- **Section 2** outlines the methodology for this study;
- **Section 3** describes how 101 was implemented in each force area;
- **Section 4** outlines the evidence of the early operation of 101 including the effectiveness of the call-handling process and the emerging outcomes of 101 for police forces;
- **Section 5** looks at the future operation of 101 including possible longer-term developments; and
- **Section 6** provides conclusions and recommendations.

2. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted to explore and probe in-depth views on the 101 service. Of the six South East region[3] police forces which were the first to roll out 101, three (Hertfordshire, Essex and the Metropolitan Police Service) volunteered to take part in the research. Further details on the methodology used in this research can be found in Appendix 1.

The study began with a review of background documents relating to the current roll-out of the single non-emergency number. This review informed the design of research tools. Interviews were undertaken with Home Office and ACPO staff responsible for managing the roll out of 101 and members of staff in each police force, as well as members of the public who had used the 101 service. Several focus groups were held with the public to gain an understanding of wider attitudes to call handling non-emergency incidents. Each of the methods used is summarised below.

Methods

Staff interviews

In order to gather views on the implementation of 101, in-depth interviews were held with national staff responsible for managing and monitoring roll-out. Five face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with Home Office and ACPO project managers and policy leads in July 2011. The interview topics covered:

- rationale for the current roll-out of 101;
- progress and challenges faced in designing and implementing the service;
- perceptions of service delivery to date and key lessons learnt; and
- future plans for the service.

Twenty-seven face-to-face interviews were also held with staff in each of the three forces in July and August 2011. Interview questions were tailored to the role and responsibilities of the interviewee but in general covered the following main themes:

- staff understanding and expectations of the 101 service;

- planning and implementing the service;
- communications and awareness-raising activity;
- handling calls to 101;
- early perceived benefits and emerging impacts;
- learning from the setting up and delivery of 101 and the potential for sharing with other areas; and
- risks or threats.

Appendix A provides full details of the methodology used and provides a breakdown of the profiles of interviewees in each of the three areas in Table A1.

Interviews with users

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 41 users of the 101 service drawn from across the three research locations. The interview schedules for user interviews covered the following:

- reason for call and awareness of 101;
- experience of calling 101;
- outcomes and what happened after the call to 101;
- whether 101 met expectations and suggested improvements;
- views on preferred/alternative methods for reporting or accessing support.

Further information on how users were sampled and how the interviews were conducted can be found in Appendix 1.

Focus groups with the public

To explore more general issues on reporting and accessing support for non-emergency incidents, a series of focus groups were held with members of the public living in the three areas. Six focus groups (two in each force area) were held during September and October 2011 involving 60 members of the public. Each focus group lasted between 90 minutes and two hours and all were recorded with participants' permission. The groups were run by two researchers.

The following themes were covered in the focus groups:

- understanding/awareness of non-emergency incidents;
- experience of contacting the police in relation to non-emergency incidents;
- preferences and views on different methods of contacting the police; and
- awareness of 101 and views on the service.

3 Essex, Hertfordshire, Metropolitan Police Service, City of London, Surrey and Sussex.

Further information on how the focus groups' participants were recruited, how locations for the groups were selected and how the groups were run can be found in Appendix 1. Table A2 in Appendix 1 provides details of the focus group profile in each of the three areas.

Analysis

All transcripts and interview notes were entered into a qualitative analysis software package (MAXQDA) for primary analysis. MAXQDA allows sections of text (data) to be coded or tagged using a bespoke coding framework designed for the study. The second stage of the analysis involved researchers further drawing out cross-cutting findings, identifying key themes, patterns and issues relating to the focus of the research.

3. Implementation of 101

This section describes how 101 was implemented in each force area and summarises the perceptions of Home Office, ACPO staff and members of staff in each police force. The main lessons learnt from implementation of 101 are also briefly summarised.

Overview of implementation arrangements

The Home Office and ACPO negotiated a central contract with an external telephony provider to supply the technology system that underlies 101. When a member of the public calls 101, the system determines the caller's location and connects them to his/her nearest police force. The caller hears a recorded message announcing that they are being connected to their nearest police force and interactive voice response (IVR) technology allows a user to use the keypad to select options to connect to other forces. If a caller is on a boundary between two or more forces, the recorded message gives them a choice of which force to be connected to. Beyond this system, the processes for answering and handling 101 calls are locally owned and operated by individual forces. Each force had a different way of handling non-emergency calls before the introduction of 101 (and these were allowed to remain after its introduction). Table 1 below summarises the key characteristics of the model of 101 implemented in each of the three locations covering key features of the service, including the numbers and model used, and the call-handling and staffing arrangements. In general, the technical set-up of 101 did not require forces to significantly alter their existing call-handling infrastructure and processes for handling non-emergency calls.

Table 1: Characteristics of the 101 arrangements in Phase 1 forces

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Existing non-emergency numbers	Multiple local non-emergency numbers Numbers retained but intention that these are phased out	A single low-cost non-emergency number Number retained	A single low-cost non-emergency number Number retained but intention that it is phased out
Model implemented	Police-only non-emergency number	Police-only non-emergency number	Police-only non-emergency number
Operating times	Operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week No change under 101	Operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week No change under 101	Operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week No change under 101
Scope of calls (i.e. type of call it was the responsibility of 101 call handlers to resolve)	No defined scope No change under 101	No defined scope No change under 101	No defined scope No change under 101
Call-handling set-up	Separate teams of 999 and non-emergency call handlers No change under 101	Call handlers answering both 101 and 999 No change under 101	Call handlers answering both 101 and 999 No change under 101
Staff recruitment	Existing staff used	Existing staff used	Existing staff used
Call-handling processes	Unaffected by 101	Unaffected by 101	Unaffected by 101

How non-emergency calls were handled was largely consistent across the three forces. Once answered, call handlers took relevant details from the caller and recorded them in a log, typically containing a written record of the issue/concern being reported and details of the caller. If police attendance was required, the log was passed on to dispatch officers. If police attendance was not required, the call handler provided advice or information, such as signposting to other services. If call handlers were busy, a selection of options were made available to the public via local IVR systems, such as holding to speak to a call handler or leaving a message if it was a non-emergency matter.

The introduction of 101 did not impose a uniform definition of what constitutes a non-emergency call. 101 simply replaced diverse non-emergency numbers used previously with a single easy-to-remember number. Although no single definition existed, feedback from local police force staff identified the types of calls typically defined as in and out of scope; they are summarised in Table 2.

The lack of a clear definition of what constituted an emergency or non-emergency call meant that call handlers had to make judgements to determine the action taken on the basis of an individual call. This might mean deciding whether, for instance, a non-emergency call needed to be reclassified as an emergency. This was important in all force areas to ensure officers were dispatched to respond appropriately. However, it was particularly critical in the one force in this study where emergency and non-emergency calls were handled by different teams. Here, the time taken to transfer a call, although minimal, added to the overall time it took for the police to respond.

Call handlers reported receiving some calls which were outside of the remit of the police. Typically these were calls where the issue reported fell within the remit of the Local Authority (for example, calls about parking or noise). Across all three areas, 101 call handlers had been trained to redirect the member of the public appropriately where the call was about an issue outside of the remit of the police. Call handlers reported that there was some pressure to move these users on quickly, in

Table 2: The scope of 999/101 calls

	999	101
In scope	• Calls to report a crime that was in progress • Calls about incidents where there was an immediate danger to life	• Calls to report crimes and disorder where there was no immediate danger e.g. stolen cars, criminal damage • Calls to report intelligence or information to the police
Out of scope	• Calls where there was no immediate danger to an individual	• Calls that related to issues that were the responsibility of Local Authority e.g. parking, environmental health issues (noise, fly tipping)

part to help meet local performance targets around call-answering times. Moreover, in two forces call handlers were also responsible for answering 999 calls and felt that their first priority was to respond to emergency calls, and therefore calls clearly outside the remit of the police needed to be concluded promptly.

Lessons learnt from implementation

On the whole, the implementation of the 101 service across the three forces was perceived by interviewees to have been a success and no major barriers were identified. Any issues that were identified were fed back and dealt with during the later stages of the roll-out. Home Office, ACPO staff and members of staff in each police force identified three factors which had contributed to a successful roll-out.

- Setting up strong national and local project management teams with knowledge and expertise in police call handling combined with close joint working between police forces, ACPO and the Home Office. Each force established a small local project team to implement 101. This established clear lines of management early on. It also designated roles and responsibilities for implementing 101, bringing together project management, corporate communications and IT expertise.
- Integrating the 101 telephony system into existing local call-handling infrastructure. This simplified the technological requirements for forces. The approach promoted consistency in operational activity and ensured call handlers were able to efficiently work under the new arrangements.
- Setting up a comprehensive communications campaign targeting staff within the forces to ensure all received consistent messages. Internal staff were kept informed about the main messages by a variety

of information channels such as training days, the display of 101 posters in control rooms, force-wide emails and articles on the force intranet and magazine. Forces were keen to ensure both staff who were directly involved in delivering 101 and other colleagues who had operational contact with the public had a good level of awareness.

Although the overall process of implementation was deemed to have been a success, interviewees highlighted a number of factors which were felt to have hindered roll-out. First, in one force area, an inconsistency was discovered between the actual policing boundaries and the geographical areas covered by call-routing equipment. This force initially had calls routed to them from several postcode areas which were in their county but served by a different police force. This had implications for staffing levels and call response times when 101 was initially launched. It was subsequently resolved by the telephony company. A second issue concerned the delays in confirming the supplier of the telephony contract and the late delivery of a communications toolkit prepared by the Home Office to the first phase forces. This condensed the time available for planning prior to launch date.

Finally, interview participants felt that forces did not have the data to accurately predict demand for the take-up of 101. While some data existed from the 2006 pilot and from the introduction of 101 in Wales, the current version of 101 operated on a different basis. This limited the extent to which some forces felt that they could rely on the data to predict demand for 101. While the 2006 pilot did not record an initial surge in call volumes after the introduction of single non-emergency number, forces were not confident this would be replicated. Data from the previous 101 initiative were used as widely as possible to inform resource planning in anticipation of 101, but was done so cautiously.

Furthermore, at the time of the launch of 101, all three forces were experiencing staff shortages in call-handling units and a force-wide recruitment freeze was in place in one force. Local representatives from two forces expressed concerns about resource levels to handle non-emergency calls on the launch of 101:

"That is a challenge at the moment but it would be a challenge without 101 … My concern was by not having enough people to answer the phone [whether they ring 101 or not] that we will put the public off using 101 if we can't answer the phones."

(Project lead)

To mitigate the risk of not being able to resource a surge in demand, the three forces each implemented an initial 'soft' launch; activities to raise public awareness of 101 were initially deliberately limited. Forces also monitored call volumes to assess the extent to which subsequent attempts to raise public awareness were having an impact on call handlers' ability to deliver a high quality service:

"Our call volumes haven't increased dramatically and we weren't expecting them to … we made the decision to do a soft launch, we weren't going to go out there and tell the public that we've now got 101 this is how you contact us, we were just going to let it slowly drip feed out and people become aware of it."

(Data analyst)

Call-volume data provided by the telephony provider (Figure 1) confirm that the soft launch did not generate a surge in demand in the first few months following the expansion of the 101 service to the first five forces. However, call volumes did increase rapidly once the service was rolled out across more forces between September and December. Overall, calls to 101 increased from around 75,000 per month before the first phase of forces began implementing it to 1,315,000 in June 2012, a 17-fold increase.

Figure 2 shows indexed figures for calls to 999 and non-emergency numbers for 34 police forces. Calls to 999 and the total number of calls to non-emergency numbers are fluctuating (possibly due to seasonality

Figure 1: Changes to call volumes to 101 during phased roll-out

Source: Telephony supplier management information
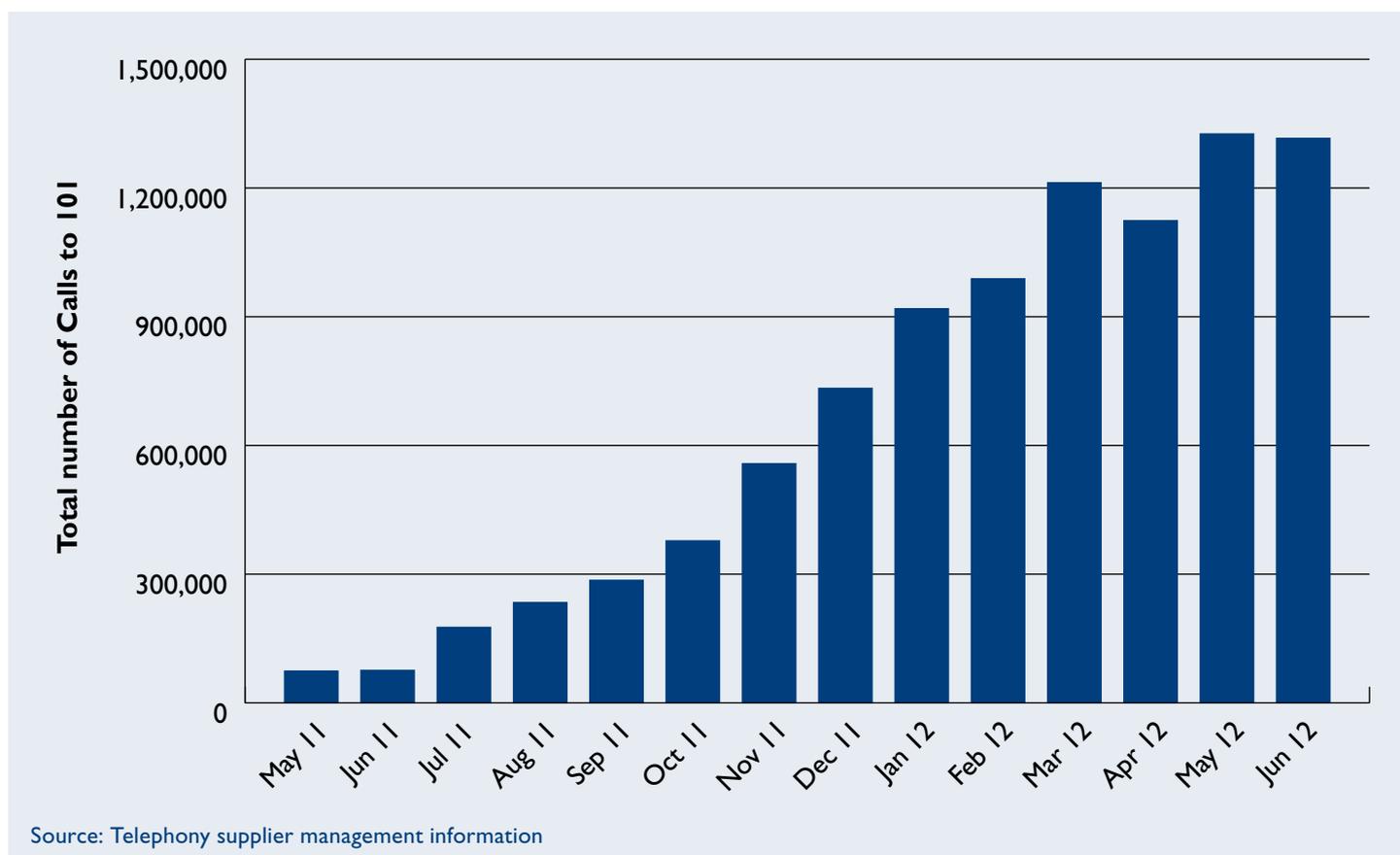
effects) but generally stable. While 101 is clearly diverting calls that would have been made to other non-emergency numbers, it does not yet appear to be substantially affecting total number of calls to the police. Further monitoring of longer-term trends would help to assess the effect of 101 on call volumes.

4. Public experiences of contacting the police and using 101

This section presents the findings on the public's expectations of contacting the police and from users who have called 101. It looks at wider issues underlying the public's perception and satisfaction with contacting the police and then examines the findings from users' experience of the 101 call-handling process.

The evidence presented here is drawn from the focus groups with members of the public (many of whom had not used 101) and the qualitative interviews with users of the 101 service.

Figure 2: Call volumes to police emergency and Non emergency numbers (NEN) roll-out
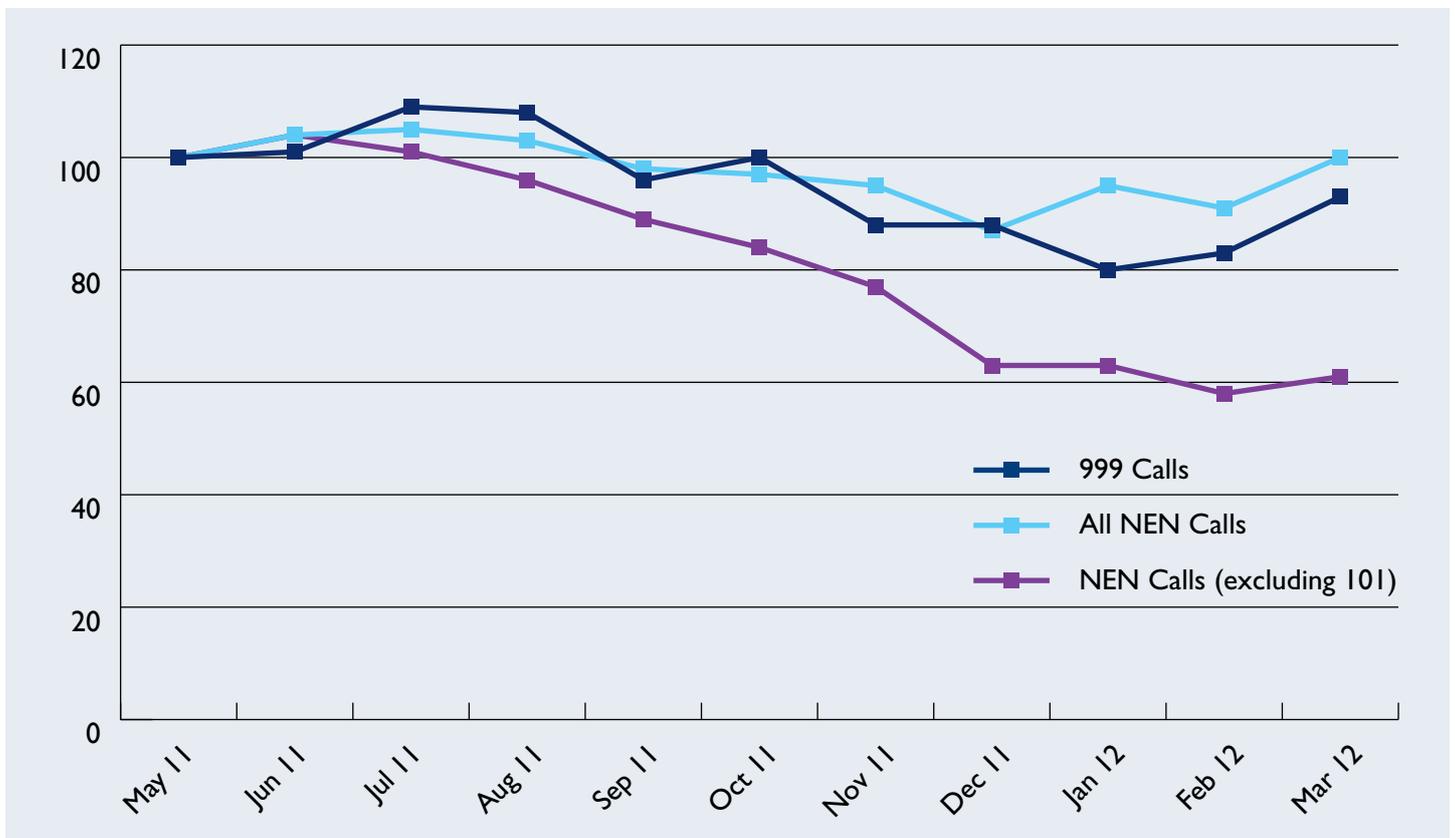
Source: Internal management information supplied by 34 police forces

Expectations of contacting the police

The public's assessment of emergency versus non-emergency calls was explored in the focus groups. The public's views broadly corresponded to those definitions promoted by Government and police forces which state that emergency issues are those where there is an immediate safety risk:

"If someone's in danger, that's an emergency."
(Focus group participant)

"You see somebody getting hurt then you have to respond and ring 999. It's very natural to want to respond if you see someone being beaten or something."
(Focus group participant)

Focus group participants agreed that non-emergency incidents were those where there was no immediate victim or a property crime where the perpetrator had since left the scene. The groups offered specific examples of offences which they classified as being covered by 'non-emergency calls'. These included vandalism of community facilities, theft from gardens where the crime was not witnessed or the perpetrator was not still on the premises or anti-social behaviour such as drunken behaviour.

However, when participants were asked to provide a more detailed assessment of what constituted an 'emergency', there was less agreement amongst participants. Where specific crimes and the circumstances in which they occurred were discussed the distinction between emergency and non-emergency became less obvious. Previous experience of crime influenced an individual's views and the only agreement that emerged was that emergency was a fluid concept, varying between individuals and often depending on the circumstances of a particular incident:

"One person's perception of emergency will be another person's can't be bothered."
(Focus group participant)

One example was given of how the context of an incident influences the perception of 'emergency'. There was a consensus amongst focus group participants that if an incident of indecent exposure should occur in the vicinity of adults only that this was not an emergency. But it would be viewed as more urgent if the incident took place with children nearby.

The focus groups also explored whether individuals were inclined or not to contact the police, and their views on using non-emergency or emergency numbers to do so. The view of participants varied widely. The choices made by the public as to whether to contact the police at all and, if so, using which telephone number, were influenced to a greater extent by the expected response from the police rather than the nature of the incident.

The views of those individuals who were inclined not to call non-emergency numbers are of particular interest. These individuals generally held a range of negative views about the likely nature of the non-emergency call handing, and the response.

The first misconception was that using 101 to contact the police resulted in a less localised service. Some participants perceived that existing non-emergency numbers connected them to their local police station, rather than a call centre. As a result they felt that using local non-emergency numbers meant they were speaking to someone with better local knowledge. They were concerned that 101 did not provide the same access to local knowledge:

"I'd prefer to ring up the local police station as you stand a better chance of getting the information from them rather than ringing a 101 number."
(Focus group participant)

For others, concerns about a less localised 101 service were compounded by the timing of the introduction of 101 alongside the closure of local police stations. Since the expectation was that local non-emergency numbers linked you to your local station, some participants assumed the introduction of 101 was directly linked to station closures, and was itself indicative of a less local, more centralised police service.

The lack of a local police presence was, potentially incorrectly, also assumed to apply to the location of police officers. These in turn affected views on the speed of the response that the police could provide in both a non-emergency situation and ultimately in this example, an individual's inclination to make a timely report to the police:

"If they're further away, it's going to take longer to get to you. What's the point ringing them; they're not going to get here any time soon. You might as well do it in the morning, have my kip now and report it in the morning."
(Focus group participant)

Others described a general frustration that call handlers simply did not possess detailed local knowledge. One participant described an experience of contacting the previous non-emergency number to report anti-social behaviour. He was frustrated at having to give detailed information on the location of the incident. The area was thought to be renowned for ASB and the individual felt the police call handler should have recognised the location:

 "They just didn't have a clue where it was, I had to ... the road names were really well known roads but I had to really spell it out."

(Focus group participant)

Some focus group participants simply anticipated the police response to non-emergency calls, regardless of the number used, would be **less formal, was dealt with by less trained individuals or always received a lower level of response**. For example, some participants believe, incorrectly, that details of non-emergency calls were not logged formally. Another commonly held misconception was that non-emergency call handlers were not as well trained to understand and deal with issues:

"Well no [I wouldn't use it] because you're going through to the Force Communications Room and you've got people there that don't even know the problems that you're asking them to deal with, so very untrained if you want to put it that way."

(Focus group participant)

In terms of the response received, some participants believed that using a non-emergency response meant that a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) with limited powers to take action, rather than a police officer, would be responsible for responding to calls:

"What's the point of sending a Community Support Officer around, they can't do anything."

(Focus group participant)

Others perceived that the speed of response from the police would be slower through using non-emergency contact mechanisms. This influenced their propensity to contact the police:

"I actually find that if you ring the police with non-emergency problems they don't respond between Thursday and Sunday because they're all busy in the town. So I wouldn't necessarily bother during these times."

(Focus group participant)

For a wide range of reasons, some participants explicitly stated that they would continue to call 999 regardless of the level of emergency to ensure they got a quick response:

"If I'm ringing the police I want something done now, so right I'll dial 999 and I will have somebody out now."

(Focus group participant)

In spite of the high level of understanding of what did (and did not) constitute a situation requiring an emergency response, there were many focus group participants who would, regardless, opt to use a 999 service over an non-emergency number. A second group were identified who were tending to delay, and potentially resist, contacting the police about non-emergency issues.

Experiences and expectations of 101 users

A strand of research was conducted specifically with members of the public who had direct experience of using 101 since its launch. The following sections report findings on the experiences and views of 101 users on a number of aspects of the 101 service they had received.

Remembering and using the 101 number

Overall, the callers interviewed who had used 101 were using the number as intended. They gave no examples of using 101 to contact the police in an emergency situation. In the main, users were calling to report a crime which they did not deem to be an emergency, commonly theft, burglary or vehicle crimes which were not 'crimes in action'. Other reasons for calling 101 included to report items being found which had previously been reported as stolen, and in more isolated cases, seeking to access information from the police. For example, one caller wanted to speak to the officer who was dealing with an ongoing case and, in another example, a caller was seeking information on the welfare of an individual being held in custody. Among the 41 callers selected for the research there were only three examples where the reason a user called 101 was clearly outside the remit of the police (in all cases to report parking issues).

One of the key objectives of 101 was that it would improve access to police non-emergency services through using an easy-to-remember number. Both the users interviewed and focus group participants were in agreement about the ease of remembering and using 101, particularly when it was compared with existing local non-emergency numbers:

"It was a quicker number to dial; you didn't have to dial the 01992 number. It was just 101; it is a quick punch in and an easy number to remember rather than the local number."

(Male user)

"It was incredibly easy to remember it's a lot easier than trying to look out for the number for the particular police, especially when you're in a hurry or an unfamiliar place."

(Female user)

The Interactive Voice Response process and getting through to 101

Typically, users reported that they got through to a 101 call handler quickly and on their first attempt. Some did experience a slight delay in their call being answered but the delay was not long enough to affect their experience:

"I didn't have to wait at all; they pretty much picked up straight away every time that I rang. I rang on busy times and late at night and that was no problem."

(Male user)

However, there were examples of 101 users who did experience some difficulty in speaking to a call handler or were less satisfied with the length of time before their call was answered.

"The only thing I would say sometimes, it's, the first time I rung it took forever for them to answer, it was about ten minutes or something silly."

(Female user)

Some callers were not expecting to have to use an automated/Interactive Voice Response (IVR) call-handling system and this appeared to have a negative affect on their experience. These individuals perceived that having to listen to the message and then – if they do not require the local force – select the force they wanted to be connected to, delayed their call getting through. Users' dissatisfaction appeared, however, to stem from the IVR system in general and preferences to connect to a human from the beginning of their call. No users explicitly mentioned the number of IVR options being a negative feature of the system.

There were isolated examples of callers not receiving a prompt call back after they were instructed by a message to leave their details:

"When I rung it I couldn't get through, they asked me to leave my name and a number for them to call me back, but then nobody called me back, so then I rung them again about two hours later and left my name and number again, said they'd call me back, no-one actually called me back, so then I got hold of another number, the 03 number or something, rung that and I managed to get through and then in the end that 101 number called me back in the morning."

(Female user)

Where users felt able to comment on previous experience of contacting the police using a non-emergency number, their experience of getting through was not perceived to be markedly different from 101. This is to be expected, given that the call-handling set-up and process within each force did not change markedly under 101.

Perceptions of call handlers

Callers were positive about their interaction with the call handler and their experience of the call. Most respondents had positive things to say about the overall telephone manner of the call handlers, describing their manner as 'professional'. Users' satisfaction was generally linked to how clearly the call handler spoke, how easy they were to understand in terms of the language used and how polite they were. A reassuring style of engagement was also highlighted as important:

"Her telephone manner was fine, very helpful and very polite, yes, no problem with her manner at all."

(Female user)

"Oh very good, I thought he was, he was very friendly and he was very reassuring really."

(Female user)

While callers' experiences partly related to the politeness and manner of the call handler, it also stemmed from them feeling that they were being listened to and that they were able to provide the information they wanted to give to the police. Users commonly reported that the call handler asked appropriate questions and sought to fully understand the issue the caller wanted to raise. This was perceived by callers as a demonstration that the call handler was taking the issue seriously:

"The person on the phone did really well trying to piece together any information they possibly could. They asked a lot of questions so they were interested."

(Male user)

Length of contact and perceptions of efficiency

One factor which appeared to be linked to callers' satisfaction was the perceived efficiency with which a call was handled. Callers highlighted the importance of call handlers explaining the processes and stages involved in handing their call, and managing their expectations in terms of the timeliness of the response.

Some callers who were transferred by a call handler to another individual viewed this process negatively. One individual perceived that the initial call handler could not answer their query. This coloured their view of the call handler's knowledge and skills. Dissatisfaction was exacerbated in instances where the caller was felt not to be informed, or did not understand, why they were being transferred, or to whom:

"I think they were transferring me through to the control room but I didn't know. They should have told me why I was being passed on."

(Male user)

These comments suggest a lack of public understanding of the existence of many different, specialist roles within the police in dealing with calls. While there are clearly limitations on what any single call handler can address and transferring of calls is inevitable, it does highlight the importance of explaining to callers what is happening to their call, and why.

When users were told they would be re-contacted with information, the timeliness of this call back was important to users:

"I got through to so many different people and then I had to wait until the next day to phone again and then it was eventually someone got in contact with me but it was a bit sort of here, there and everywhere."

(Female user)

When users were re-contacted when they were told they would be, this was viewed positively:

"Yes actually I was quite impressed, it was very good, and they got back to me when they said they'd get back to me."

(Male user)

Costs of calling 101

Callers' reactions were more mixed around the costs of calling 101. Costs to 101 are charged at 15 pence per call. In general users were not aware that there was a charge for calling 101, and very few knew the actual cost of the call. When informed of the cost, there was a distinct difference in the opinions expressed by 101 users and focus group participants (who tended not to have used 101). Some 101 users hoped that 101 was free of charge but felt that the cost of 101 was fair or reasonable:

"Yes well that's fair enough; I understand that, that's quite reasonable."

(Male user)

"I'm quite happy to pay 15p…. it's not a major amount, if it had been a premium rate you're talking £1.50 a minute or something like that, then it may be different, but 15p for a flat rate one-off charge I don't consider that too bad."

(Male user)

This may have been because users were aware that previous non-emergency numbers attracted a cost. In contrast, however, the majority of focus group participants felt strongly that the 101 number should be free of charge. It was less clear, however, whether all participants who expressed this were aware of the previous charges:

"Calling 101 should be free; it is dealing with community problems. We are already paying for it through our taxes."

(Focus group participant)

There was a view expressed that the cost of the call would encourage some people who needed to ring the number multiple times to ring 999 instead:

"It depends on how many times a day you've got to do it [ring 101] .., because [name of her husband] rang that [the 101 number] three or four times…. [so it could add up to] a fiver a week."

(Focus group participant)

Expectations of the police response

Many of the callers interviewed did not expect a response from the police following their call to 101. They often did not perceive the issue as important enough to require a response. For example, reporting a lost item as found was perceived by users as closing a case so no further action was expected.

Where some action was undertaken in response to a call to 101 reporting a crime, this typically involved a subsequent contact from the police, in person or on the telephone, to gather further information or to provide an update to the caller in response to their specific enquiry. Most users who received some follow-up were satisfied with the response:

> "I think there's not a lot that could have done that wasn't really. I got a call back probably three days later to give me an update. An Officer came to the door just to have a quick chat as well. I don't think I could have expected any more given that nothing was actually taken from my garage."
>
> (Male user)

However, a handful of people interviewed who had used 101 were unhappy with the subsequent police action following their call. In some cases, the dissatisfaction resulted from a perceived lack of action or follow-up that the caller expected to receive. For example, one user who reported criminal damage to his car was not contacted again by the police:

> "With regards to the response afterwards from the police I wasn't happy; I didn't get any follow-up."
>
> (Male user)

For one other user who called 101 to get an update on an earlier call to report a burglary, the timeliness of the response was key to her dissatisfaction:

> "I had to wait for the next day to phone again and then eventually an Officer got in contact with me in the end when somebody actually pin pointed who was on my case, so it was here, there and everywhere."
>
> (Female user)

Conclusions

Most focus group participants held clear ideas about what constituted an emergency situation and the appropriate circumstance in which to use 101. However, a minority of participants held misconceptions about using non-emergency numbers and some had specific concerns about 101. Some mistakenly assumed that those handling the local non-emergency numbers had better local knowledge than those handling 101 calls; that non-emergency calls would not be logged; and that non-emergency call handlers were less well trained than their emergency counterparts. Some reported that they would opt to use 999 even if the situation was not an emergency.

Users who had experience of 101 generally had a positive view of the conduct of call handlers, who were viewed as taking calls seriously and treating callers with courtesy. However, a small number of participants reported being dissatisfied with the service, typically as a result of delays in speaking to a handler or their calls failing to be returned. In general, users were not aware that there was a charge for calling 101. However, when informed of the cost, most users of 101 generally felt it was reasonable.

5. Future operation of 101

This section reports findings relevant to the future operation of 101 including its immediate and longer-term developments and wider developments for call handling more generally. It also looks at the risks that may be faced in any future development and operation of 101. The findings presented here are drawn from the interviews with Home Office and Police representatives, users of 101 and from the focus groups with the public.

Immediate developments for 101

Home Office and police representatives reported on several improvements already planned in the immediate months following the launch of 101. These focussed on public awareness raising and improving the IVR system.

Raising awareness

One of the most commonly mentioned developments for the 101 service by those interviewed was raising public awareness of the 101 service. This was an immediate priority that had been planned by all forces soon after the initial launch (given the conscious decision not to promote 101 too widely in the first few weeks, in order to ensure demand for 101 could be managed). The absence of awareness-raising campaigns was mentioned by both 101 users and focus group participants:

"I just think awareness [of 101] needs to be raised a bit really. It's a good idea so why are they keeping it quiet."
(Male user)

All three groups of contributors to this study offered suggestions on how the 101 service could be promoted in the future. Many suggestions from the public were approaches that the forces had already employed, such as posters, leaflets, newspaper articles or advertisements, and radio adverts. A number of local call handlers and one communications officer suggested that, once 101 had been rolled out to all forces in England and Wales, it would be a good opportunity to consider some wider promotion of 101.

Improving the Interactive Voice Response system

In one force area it was suggested that the IVR system could be altered to make the process of calling 101 more consistent:

"An area for improvement is to try and get that consistency so it sounds like the journey of the caller is not too fragmented. [Different voices in the IVR] is a very small thing but from a caller's point of view sometimes that can be quite an impact for their perception of how they've been dealt with as a police force."
(Communications officer)

Other staff also thought that the IVR system could be improved by reviewing the length and wording of the recorded message. This would address concerns that the message is not clear enough in directing users to the right force.

Longer-term developments for 101

Evidence from local and national members of staff, and users' and focus group participants' views identified two main themes on how 101 could develop in the future:

- extending the scope of the service; and
- expanding the 101 brand to encompass additional formats of contact.

Each of these is discussed below.

Extending the coverage of 101

There were mixed views amongst staff interviewed on whether extending the coverage of 101 to incorporate other agencies (as in the previous model of 101) should be pursued. Some local and national members of staff were enthusiastic about exploring the potential for developing 101 in this way as they thought it could lead to better value for money:

"Going forwards it could really be beneficial for Local Authorities to get integrated into the 101 number, so sharing resources with regard to answering 101 calls to generate potential efficiency savings that may be had there."
(Local staff member)

Amongst users and focus group participants there was also some support for expanding the coverage of 101. Some issues which residents felt ought to be covered by a single non-emergency number were not covered by the present police-focused incarnation of 101 but fell under the remit of Local Authorities (e.g. rubbish, parking) but they felt it would be easier to have a single number to report all these issues.

However, other members of staff (and some members of the public) took the opposite view. Against a background of budget cuts across the public sector, senior local staff members highlighted the potential difficulties in resourcing such an expansion (and the risk that any additional burden could unevenly fall on the police due to their more established provision of the 101 service). Some also thought that extending the scope to Local Authorities would simply generate too many calls to be managed using existing resources. Some members of the public also felt that expanding the existing scope of 101 could lead to delivery of a poor service for customers.

Expanding the 101 brand and contact format

When asked to consider a range of different ways for getting in touch with the police, overall, focus group participants indicated a strong preference for telephone contact, even for non-emergency incidents. This was due to a combination of factors: the perceived speed of making initial contact; the instantaneous nature of the response; and the reassurance that can be provided by speaking directly to someone:

"Something like that [reporting a crime] you can't do without the human contact. I don't think you'd want to take that out."

(Focus group participant)

"It's just having that quick response; you phone you want somebody there within a few minutes."

(Focus group participant)

Views on expanding 101 to incorporate other methods of contact, such as email, internet and SMS, were mixed. Some members of the public were enthusiastic about using email or online mechanisms to report non-emergency incidents or intelligence to the police. Participants felt this would work particularly well if police had hand-held devices and could act on emails quickly:

"If there was a simple 101.com to report crime, I think I would use it."

(Focus group participant)

Some focus group members recalled instances when they had previously not reported incidents to police. They felt that the police would not be able to help immediately and they did not want to waste police time. Some reported that, had an online system been available, they would have been more inclined to report the issue to the police:

"My brother-in-law, he's a taxi driver, his car got broken into and he didn't report it to the police because he felt it would be a complete waste of time, they wouldn't find the people responsible, he had to get the windscreen fixed and just start working the next day. In that instance to log on and not have to speak to somebody for something like that, I think I probably would do it."

(Focus group participant)

In contrast, other focus group participants were more negative about the possibility of using email or the internet to report issues to the police. It was common for older participants, in particular, to report that they did not have access to or did not want to use the internet. Others expressed concern that this mechanism would not provide the instant response or support they would want from reporting something to the police:

"To me going through the internet would be too long winded, you're not getting that instant response."

(Focus group participant)

"An email is not going to comfort them is it … I'm a person who would rather speak to someone on a phone."

(Focus group participant)

For all participants, it was important that any electronic communication with the police was acknowledged. Some participants would expect a response (and not just an automated response) within a specified timeframe. Other focus group members suggested an automated email system to allow the public to get crime reference numbers would additionally reduce the burden on police dealing with issues where the main concern for the public was a reference number for insurance purposes.

There was even less support amongst focus group participants for expanding 101 to include the use of text messaging (SMS) to inform the police of non-emergency incidents or intelligence. One of the main concerns was that text messaging was unreliable. As with email, the public would want an acknowledgement that their message had been received and acted upon by the police. Participants were also concerned about the limit on the

number of characters that can be sent in a text message and whether this would allow the full details of an issue to be conveyed. Moreover, they felt the lack of two-way conversation would mean that it would be much harder to convey important details to the police:

"On the phone, they can ascertain from you what the problem is, how important it is generally to you, you can try and get some sense out of them about what they're doing about it. You can't say half as much in a text."

(Focus group participant)

As with the case of email, some older participants reported not wanting to use text messaging at all. Others reported that they felt it would take them longer to send a text message than to telephone 101.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The findings from this research into 101 around the key research questions are as follows.

- To what extent is the 101 service operating as intended?

  The evidence from the research suggests that the service is operating as intended in the three forces which were the focus of this study. The set-up of the current 101 initiative was designed to require minimal alterations to forces' existing non-emergency call-handling set-up and processes. The evidence from local members of staff and users suggests that the processes and activities associated with answering non-emergency calls were indeed largely unaffected by the introduction of 101. Users reported to understand the purpose of 101 as an alternative to 999 and were in the main using it appropriately to contact the police about non-emergency matters.

- What are the facilitators and barriers to successful implementation?

  On the whole, the implementation of the 101 service was achieved successfully, without significant barriers being faced. Key facilitators of successful implementation included strong national and local project management and effective partnership working within police forces or between forces, the Home Office and ACPO. A comprehensive communications campaign targeting members of staff was delivered by all forces to ensure internal staff received consistent messages. The barriers that were faced in implementation included difficulties in accurately predicting the demand for 101. Concerns about predicting and managing demand had encouraged forces not to widely publicise the existence of the new number in the first few weeks after launch. This was generally felt to have helped moderating early demand and allowing a smooth introduction. Delays in confirming the telephony contract and late delivery of the communications toolkit for use by the phase 1 areas were also challenging, condensing the planning time available for forces prior to launch date.

- What are users' views of the 101 service and why?

The way in which call handlers answered calls was not in the scope of the 101 project, but is linked to the overall public experience of the 101 service. Users were positive about their interaction with the call handler and their experience of the call. Typically, users got through to a 101 call handler quickly and on their first attempt. There were only isolated examples where users experienced a delay or had a negative experience where calls were not returned after a message was left. In general, users were not aware that there was a charge for calling 101, and very few knew the actual cost of the call. When informed of the cost of the call, users generally felt the cost was reasonable. The feedback from the wider public through the focus groups was, however, more negative with a perception that non-emergency calls should be free of charge, although this was based on a potentially incorrect understanding that existing non-emergency calls did not attract a cost.

The majority of users were found to be satisfied with their experience using 101 with very few users dissatisfied. Where some dissatisfaction was expressed, this usually related to the police response and action following the call rather than being related to the specific initial call to 101. This, alongside some of the views expressed in the focus groups, further served to demonstrate that initial call handling is only one part of a complicated process by which the police are judged in their handling of non-emergency calls.

The focus groups highlighted the existence of some strongly held negative views about how the police deal with non-emergency calls. These views were partly based on prior experience of non-emergency phone contact with the police, but were more often simply myths on the way non-emergency calls were handled (compared with 999 calls). Some focus group members believed that: non-emergency calls were not logged (they are); non-emergency numbers delivered a less localised service to the public than local non-emergency numbers (they do not); and that non-emergency call handlers were less well trained than their emergency counterparts (they are not). These misunderstandings do not all relate to 101 per se (few participants had used the service) but they do pose a threat to maximising the value of its introduction. For some, their views simply made them disinclined to contact the police over non-emergency issues; for others, their

expectations led them to state they would use 999 regardless of what they needed to speak to the police about, as they believed it would simply generate a quicker and more active response from the police than a non-emergency number. Tackling some of these misconceptions should be a theme of future awareness-raising campaigns for 101.

- How do users think call handling of non-emergency incidents could be improved?

Many users suggested improvements to call handling of non-emergency incidents that related to the police response or action after the initial call. The main improvement relating specifically to the handling of the call was to ensure that calls were answered promptly and messages returned in a timely manner. However, this related to the experiences of a relatively small number of users who experienced delays on calling 101.

- What are the perceived benefits of the 101 service to the police and local partner agencies?

There was also evidence that the public found the 101 number easy to remember suggesting the potential for increased accessibility to the police. Partly because of the muted public launch of 101 in the three forces, it was too early to clearly assess any impact on 999 call volumes.

- How could more people be encouraged to report and access support for tackling non-emergency incidents via face-to-face, online or telephony methods?

101 users and focus group participants had a strong preference for making telephone contact with the police in a non-emergency situation due to the perceived speed of the response and the reassurance that can be provided by speaking to someone. There was a clear message from the public that this method of contact must be retained to ensure others are encouraged to report and access support for non-emergency incidents. 101 offers an opportunity to increase the reporting of non-emergency incidents, as there was evidence from focus group participants that now they were aware of the number they would potentially use it. There is a potential need, however, to raise awareness amongst the public of the benefits of reporting incidents to the police for the purpose of intelligence, even if they themselves do not require any specific response.

Some participants were enthusiastic about the potential for using email or online mechanisms to report non-emergency incidents or intelligence to the police – but less so for SMS. However, certain groups, such as older people, were less keen. There was some evidence that putting in place these mechanisms under the brand of 101 would encourage some individuals to contact the police who would not have done so if telephony was the only option. To encourage continued use of these mechanisms it appears to be important that any communication with the police is acknowledged, with a response returned within a specified timeframe.

There was mixed evidence from this research that the cost of contacting the police in relation to non-emergency matters would discourage contact. For the majority of 101 users, the cost was not a significant concern. Amongst the wider public, however, there is clearly a proportion that held more negative views about having to pay to contact the police and who reported a preference to use a charge-free number.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerge from this research.

- Explore the potential to use large-scale or national events as an opportunity to further promote the existence of 101.
- Undertake any necessary and possible improvements to the national or local IVR systems to improve the customer experience.
- The study has identified several misapprehensions amongst the public over the use of 101 and these should addressed in future awareness campaigns:
  - emphasise that non-emergency call handling is done to the same level of professionalism as 999 and accurate records are made for all relevant calls made to the police;
  - emphasise that calling 101 will put you through to your local force;
  - clarify and give examples to the public about the circumstances where non-emergency contact with the police would be encouraged; and
  - reinforce the low cost of 101, highlighting that although a cost is involved it is likely to be cheaper than the cost of calling previous non-emergency numbers.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Inception, development and familiarisation

An initial meeting was held between the research team and the Home Office in June 2011 to refine the approach to the evaluation and confirm the work plan.

Following this meeting the research team undertook a focussed review of background documents relating to the current roll-out of the single non-emergency number. This brief review of documents informed the design of research tools.

The following tools were designed for the study, to ensure consistency in the collection of data across the three research sites:

- interview schedules for interviews with local police staff and officers and Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers staff responsible for managing the roll out of 101;
- interview schedules for semi-structured telephone interviews with users; and
- topic guides for use in focus groups with residents/ communities.

Each draft guide was passed to the Home Office project manager/steering group for approval and comment prior to use.

During the inception stage, the research team organised a briefing meeting attended by all evaluation staff. The meeting ensured all staff were sufficiently briefed to facilitate interviews and undertake data analysis.

Primary data collection

Working with research sites

Good working relationships and communication with key gatekeepers was important to facilitate access to sites and effective undertaking of interviews. Following introduction and consent to participate gained from Chief Constables by the Home Office, the research project manager made an initial telephone contact with the key contact identified for each force area. This served to introduce the research, the fieldwork requirements and the lead researcher responsible for research in each location.

A researcher was then assigned to each research site to act as the main point of contact for subsequent fieldwork arrangements. This researcher also undertook the local staff interviews in each site.

Staff interviews

The first strand of the primary research for the evaluation involved in-depth interviews with key staff at a national/ strategic level with central responsibility for managing and monitoring the 101 roll-out. In total five individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in July 2011. The profile of interviewees was agreed with the Home Office and included Home Office and ACPO project managers and Home Office and ACPO policy leads.

The interview schedules for these interviews covered the following:

- rationale for the current 101 roll-out;
- progress and challenges faced in designing and implementing the service;
- perceptions of service delivery to date and key lessons learnt; and
- aspirations for the service.

The first two to three interviews acted as a piloting exercise.

Local staff interviews

The second strand of the primary fieldwork involved a programme of interviews with key practitioners and police staff in each of the three locations in July and August 2011. The specific profile of interviews varied somewhat between areas, depending on the approach to implementation and call-handling set-up, but interviewees included those who had been involved in the planning, implementation and ongoing operation of 101. In total 27 interviews were conducted, as follows:

Table A1 Interview profile

Interviewee	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Total
Project manager	1	1	1	3
Senior/management staff[4]			3	3
Communications	1	1	1	3
Call-handling staff (supervisors, call handlers)	5	6	5	16
Other (IT/data analyst, neighbourhood policing representatives)	1	1		2
Total	8	9	10	27

Interviewees were identified through consultation with a gatekeeper/key contact in each police force. All interviews were conducted face to face over a one- or two-day period when the lead researchers visited each location.

The following themes were covered in the local staff interviews. There was flexibility so that interview questions and the scope of the interview were tailored to the role and responsibilities of the interviewee:

- staff understanding and expectations of the 101 service;
- planning and implementing 101 and lessons learnt about setting up the 101 service;
- communications and awareness-raising activity around 101;
- handling calls to 101, including outputs and outcomes from calls;
- early benefits and emerging impacts from 101;
- learning from delivery of 101;
- risks or threats to the 101 service; and
- improvements and potential for transferability of what works to other areas.

The first two or three interviews conducted in area 1 were used as a pilot exercise to check the usability of the interview schedules. The schedules were found to work well so no changes were made before progressing with other interviews.

With the interviewees' consent, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed to allow for coding and thematic analysis using qualitative data analysis software (see below).

Telephone interviews with service users

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 41 users of the 101 service drawn from across the three research locations.

The sample was generated between August and October 2011 by call handlers asking users at the end of their call to 101 whether they would be willing to opt into the research. Given data protection, it was not possible to access a full list of 101 callers so an opt-in process was operated to get express permission from users to participate in the research. A recruitment script was provided to call handlers to identify users' suitability and interest in opting into the research. The script focussed on establishing if a user had called 101[5] and following an explanation of the purpose and nature of involvement, whether they would be willing for their details to be passed to researchers. Customer satisfaction staff operated an additional opt-in exercise in one force location to boost the sample of 101 users, as resource capacity limited the extent to which call handlers could undertake the 'live' opt-in process.

Details of users who opted into the research were passed to researchers on a rolling basis and users were re-contacted within two weeks of their initial call to 101. This aimed to ensure that the interview was conducted in a timescale where recall was good, but also that some reflection time was allowed for users to reduce any influence or bias that may have been introduced if interviews took place immediately following the call to 101.

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4 Senior/management staff were not interviewed in all areas: in one area senior staff were less involved in the roll-out and in a second area the project manager role was undertaken by a senior police officer so additional interviews were not required.

5 In some areas, the call-handling system did not allow notification to the call handler of which number (101 or other non-emergency number) a caller had used.

The interviews in each location were conducted by a researcher who was familiar with the structures and telephony systems being used. This allowed researchers to use appropriate prompting and probing to gain a full insight into users' experiences of 101 in a particular area.

As with other strands of the research, the first five interviews with users were conducted as a pilot before progressing with the remainder of the interviews.

The interview schedules for user interviews covered the following:

- reason for call and awareness of 101;
- experience of calling 101;
- outcomes and what happened after the call to 101;
- whether 101 met expectations and suggested improvements; and
- views on preferred/alternative methods for reporting or accessing support.

Focus groups with residents

The final strand of primary research involved focus groups with residents across the three areas. These explored more general issues of reporting and accessing support for non-emergency incidents. Six focus groups (two in each location) were undertaken and in total 60 members of the public were consulted during September and October 2011.

Locations for the focus groups were identified using suggestions from key contacts in each police force, using specific crime data on ASB instances and wider intelligence from neighbourhood policing teams. Typically, neighbourhood or estate areas were identified to avoid too small an area for recruitment. Once an area was defined, a suitable venue was found. Typically, community venues within a neighbourhood were used to increase accessibility and propensity to attend. As far as possible a 'neutral' venue likely to be acceptable to all respondents was selected – i.e. no places of worship.

A combination of on-street and door-to-door recruitment was used within the defined location to find potential participants. Instructions were given to recruiters not to contact more than two or three people from any one location – e.g. a street. Participants were recruited locally using a questionnaire to secure participants who had personal experience or awareness of non-emergency incidents and previous experience of contacting the police. Once a suitable person was

recruited, the group procedure was explained to them and they were left with a letter giving details of the time, venue etc. as well as contact details.

Each focus group was run with between eight and 15 participants. To encourage attendance focus groups were arranged at various times of day, including one in the early evening, hence providing the best possible chance of securing the required sample. A reminder call or text was made or sent by the recruiter the day before the group to encourage attendance. Cash incentives were also paid to further encourage attendance, at a level of £25 per participant. The focus group profile was as follows:

Table A2 Focus group profile

Group	No. of participants	Overall profile	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
1	8	General population	4 female 4 male	18–25 – 1 26–35 – 2 35–49 – 2 50–59 – 2 60+ – 1	All White British
2	10	General population	7 female 3 male	26–35 – 3 35–49 – 4 50–59 – 3	9 White British 1 Asian British
3	15	General population	5 female 10 male	26–35 – 6 35–49 – 7 50–59 – 2	12 White British 2 Asian British 1 Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)
4	10	General population	4 female 6 male	26–35 – 3 35–49 – 7	7 White British 1 Asian British 1 Black British 1 Other
5	7	Younger people	4 female 3 male	18–26 – 7	All White British
6	10	Older people	5 female 5 male	50–59 – 1 60+ – 9	9 White British 1 Other

Each focus group lasted between one hour thirty minutes and two hours and all were digitally recorded with participants' permission. The groups were run by two staff members, one moderating and one note-taking and providing support to welcome participants.

The following themes were covered in the focus groups:

- understanding/awareness of non-emergency incidents;
- experience of contacting the police in relation to non-emergency incidents;
- preferences and views on different methods of contacting the police; and
- awareness of 101 and views on the service.

Analysis

All transcripts and interview notes were entered into a qualitative analysis software package (MAXQDA) for primary analysis. MAXQDA allows sections of text (data) to be coded or tagged using a bespoke coding framework designed for the study.

The second stage of the analysis involved researchers further drawing out cross-cutting findings, identifying key themes, patterns and issues relating to the focus of the research. The secondary analysis for this study was based on different sub-groups and geographical areas to allow reporting of findings common across all areas and members of staff, along with identifying those which were distinctive.

Appendix 2: References

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