

Non-urgent police calls 'go unanswered'

[COMMENTS \(301\)](#)

Hundreds of thousands of phone calls to the new police non-emergency 101 number are going unanswered, figures from forces in England and Wales suggest.

The [number was introduced](#) for people to report crimes such as drug dealing, car theft and property damage.

But people hung up or were disconnected before a reply 496,000 times between January and October 2012 - 4% of calls.

Thirty out of the 43 police forces provided information to the BBC after a Freedom of Information Act request.

But not every force supplied all the details requested.

The other 13 forces were contacted but said they did not collect such data or were only able to provide incomplete data.

Steve White, of the Police Federation of England and Wales, said the figures "demonstrate that members of the public are clearly finding it more difficult to report crime".

He said: "While the government insists that crime is falling, despite the significant cuts to the police service, the high volume of unanswered calls suggests that many offences may be going unrecorded.

"Crime recording is extremely complex in its nature, as these figures highlight."

'Complex review'

Many forces aim to answer 101 calls within 30 seconds but the data shows six - South Wales, Northamptonshire, Dorset, Staffordshire, Greater Manchester and Surrey - took longer than that on average.

The time varied between 35 and 57 seconds but in the case of South Wales Police was 2 minutes, 45 seconds.

In two instances, callers to South Wales and Northamptonshire Police, had to wait more than 50 minutes before someone answered. According to the data provided, the two forces also had the highest percentage of "dropped calls" - those where people hang up or are disconnected.

The data provided shows eight of the forces answered in under 10 seconds on average with Kent, Suffolk, Devon and Cornwall and Merseyside proving to be the fastest.

The UK's largest force - the Metropolitan Police - answered its 101 calls in an average of 14 seconds.

South Wales Police said: "There have been periods where the introduction of new processes and technology have impacted on the number of calls answered and the waiting times.

"Lost calls can be inflated in periods of high demand and therefore inaccurately inflate figures... when we are dealing with major incidents such as Olympic Games, international rugby events, protests and murders we will on some occasions leave a 101 call unanswered whilst we respond."

Northamptonshire Police said the number of calls received "which were answered quickly - or at all - fell well below customer expectations".

The force said its call handling unit had undergone a complex "change review" to achieve savings and improve services which resulted in a breakdown in performance monitoring.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland introduced a single non-emergency number in 2005 - 0845 600 8000.

A 101 non-emergency phone number was introduced in Scotland in February this year.

101 performance by force

Force	Calls answered	Answered within 30 seconds	Calls dropped	Average time taken to answer**	Longest time taken to answer **
Avon & Somerset	594427	84%	1%	00:00:18	00:20:43
Cambridgeshire	339636	90%	Figures not supplied	00:00:12	00:18:52
Cleveland	54677	Figures not supplied	1.2%	00:00:09	Figures not supplied
Cumbria	131720	79%	8.9%	00:00:28	00:27:09
Derbyshire *	559471	Figures not supplied	Figures not supplied	00:00:20	Figures not supplied
Devon & Cornwall *	538438	100%	6.2%	00:00:06	00:06:50
Dorset *	225006	71%	5.3%	00:00:49	00:23:54
Essex *	764339	93%	2.1%	00:00:11	Figures not supplied
Greater Manchester	50637	51%	7.2%	00:00:35	Figures not supplied
Gwent	95808	85%	10.3%	00:00:21	00:14:23
Hampshire *	590755	Figures not supplied	8.6%	00:00:30	00:24:47
Hertfordshire	188408	91%	3.2%	00:00:16	00:32:16
Kent	295889	98%	1.5%	00:00:05	00:14:47
Lancashire	156363	Figures not supplied	0.7%	00:00:14	Figures not supplied
Leicestershire	70249	91%	3.4%	00:00:12	00:14:07
Merseyside	154223	96%	4.1%	00:00:07	00:04:15
Metropolitan *	2413755	89%	2.8%	00:00:14	00:43:00
North Wales *	322498	Figures not supplied	9.1%	00:00:09	Figures not supplied
North Yorkshire	189183	81%	Figures not supplied	00:00:27	00:12:50
Northants	236619	65%	18.9%	00:00:57	00:53:19
Northumbria *	297347	94%	Figures not supplied	00:00:08	00:39:25
Nottinghamshire *	301059	88%	2.3%	00:00:17	Figures not supplied
South Wales *	380342	40%	17.4%	00:02:45	00:52:18
Staffordshire	326676	67%	7.2%	00:00:39	Figures not supplied
Suffolk	122400	Figures not supplied	Figures not supplied	00:00:06	Figures not supplied
Surrey	318238	79%	12.3%	00:00:35	00:28:35
Thames Valley *	828743	91%	1.8%	Figures not supplied	Figures not supplied
West Mercia	159385	70%	6.8%	00:00:28	00:29:48
West Yorkshire	563167	71%	4.6%	Figures not supplied	Figures not supplied
Wiltshire	180835	71%	1.8%	00:00:09	Figures not supplied

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Editors' Picks [All Comments \(301\)](#)

270. Skywatchman

8TH MARCH 2013 - 18:11

0

Called 101, got an initial operator who answered, stated the concern, then the operator said I'll put you through to blah blah

Then waited and waited with a recorded message saying if your call is not urgent please call later

These stats (time to answer) only report the initial operator taking the call not the time we have to wait to actually report the concern

Stats for Sussex please!

236. ken1760

8TH MARCH 2013 - 16:07

+8

I have used 101 twice, on both occasions the person answering was polite, helpful and reassuring.

These call centres handle millions of 101 & 999 calls each year anyone of which could be from people in deep distress...I for one would not want that level of responsibility each every day. I am also sure they have to deal with thousands of time wasters upset because their pizza has not arrived.

155. Graham

8TH MARCH 2013 - 13:44

+7

I find the Devon and Cornwall figures hard to believe. Last year I tried to report the discovery of a stash of ? stolen credit cards in my garden.. Over the course of 2 weeks I tried on 9 occasions to call the 101 number at different times of the day. I sometimes waited on line for 20 minutes and other times got cut off after long waits. I never got through, gave up and never made the report

72. hmu10

8TH MARCH 2013 - 12:24

+25

I suspect some % of those who hung up after no answer then would have dialed 999, rather than have given up. It may also mean in the future they just use 999.

So not answering 101 will be putting more pressure on 999

65. UKStinks

8TH MARCH 2013 - 12:17

+20

I tries to call the police (non urgent) a couple of years ago as i saw a kid take a post office bike. After 20 minutes on hold i gave up. From then i dont bother to report small offences. I'm sure so do many others hence why crime is falling!!!!

The police force in this country has degraded to much that its a joke. Police stations closed and sold but Council tax still rising.

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