

999 calls up as public tire of waiting for 101

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Calls to the 101 non-emergency number fell by 3 per cent last year, after people complained of long waiting times and a charge of 15p MAX NASH/PA

The number of 999 calls surged last year as the public lost confidence in the service's non-emergency number, according to a watchdog report.

Emergency calls to police rose by 5 per cent while those to the 101 non-emergency number dropped by 3 per cent.

Earlier this week the victims' commissioner complained that people reporting antisocial behaviour to 101 gave up when faced with lengthy waiting times and a charge of 15p a call.

The loss of confidence in the 101 service is disclosed in a report that also found that officers on the beat were investigating burglaries, thefts and assaults amid a shortage of detectives and a fall in police numbers.

High-volume crimes were being resolved over the telephone, allocated to officers without necessary experience or screened out even if there are potential lines of inquiry.

A quarter of victims in a sample of thefts and 24 per cent in a sample of assaults received an inadequate police investigation, the report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services said.

The report, based on an inspection of 14 forces in England and Wales, found that 999 calls rose by 5 per cent from 9.3 million to 9.7 million between 2016-17 and 2017-18 while those to 101 fell by 3 per cent from 22.7 million to 22.1 million.

Matt Parr, one of the inspectors, said: "Most of the forces we inspected reported an increase in the number of 999 calls they received. We think the reason 101 has gone down is because people get a bit fed up waiting for someone to answer it and they call 999 instead."

Inspectors examined the effectiveness and efficiency of a third of police forces in England and Wales as part of a rolling programme of inspections.

Crimes were being screened out even where there were "clear investigative opportunities and potential perpetrators identified", Mr Parr said.

He added: "It used to be that you would have your CID, your response force, your community policing and they all had very discrete jobs. Response officers didn't do investigations. Now they do. They don't have the same accreditation, they don't have the same experience."

In Norfolk inspectors found neighbourhood patrol officers investigating high-risk domestic abuse crimes.

One station in Essex had a rule that detectives investigated grievous bodily harm offences if there were injuries requiring 11 stitches. As a result, one uniformed officer with less than three years' experience was dealing with an attack resulting in seven stitches.

Inspectors reviewed 2,608 randomly selected files from crimes recorded in the first three months of last year. They found that 75 per cent of theft offences and 76 per cent of common assaults had "effective" investigations. The report inspectorate said: "This means a quarter of these complainants aren't getting the service they should expect."

The report added that police were delivering a good level of service with "dwindling resources", but warned that "cracks in the system" were widening.

A Home Office spokesman said: "We recognise new demands are putting pressure on the police and we are committed to ensuring they have the resources

they need. This is why we have provided more than a £1 billion increase in police funding compared to last year, including council tax, and funding to tackle serious violence.”

Martin Hewitt, chairman of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, said: “Police chiefs, along with many others working in policing, have been very clear that the service is under severe pressure and requires additional long-term funding. I agree with the inspectorate’s assessment that, without change, this strain will see our service to the public deteriorate.”

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