

# POLICE CONTACT MANAGEMENT: **DEMAND ANALYSIS**

Examining trends and performance in UK call handling and online reporting



## Credits



DATA ANALYSIS

**Gavin Hales**

Independent researcher, policing commentator and former Deputy Director at the Police Foundation



PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND COMMENTARY

**Ian Wiggett**

CoPaCC Director and former Assistant Chief Constable at Greater Manchester Police



EDITORIAL AND EDITING

**Keith Potter**

Freelance editor and Policing Insight contributor



REPORT DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION

**Ian Barrett**

CoPaCC Director of Publishing and Product Development



DESIGN AND LAYOUT

**David Devonport**

Freelance designer

Many thanks to our researcher **Natalia Kappos** for sourcing and managing the Freedom of Information requests (FOIs).

### Special thanks

**We would like to take the opportunity to thank the police forces that responded to the FOIs in time to be featured in the analysis.**

## About CoPaCC

**CoPaCC** was established shortly after the first PCC elections in November 2012 to monitor policing governance in England and Wales. CoPaCC now has a portfolio of services, working together to help organisations meet their governance and management challenges and opportunities. These include:

- **Consultancy** CoPaCC works with police and criminal justice organisations to improve policy and practice
- **Communications and social media** CoPaCC publishes [PolicingInsight.com](http://PolicingInsight.com), the UK's foremost online magazine focusing on governance, management and politics in policing and criminal justice
- **Information and insight** CoPaCC produces thematic reports and expert events covering key issues of policy and practice in the policing and criminal justice sectors
- **Monitoring standards** CoPaCC monitors standards in policing governance, assessing OPCC performance and awarding quality marks in key areas of accountability

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Get in touch at [office@copacc.org.uk](mailto:office@copacc.org.uk)

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Contact Policing Insight:

[enquiries@policinginsight.com](mailto:enquiries@policinginsight.com)

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CoPaCC Ltd, 128 Brunel Drive, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 8BJ United Kingdom

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# These are unprecedented times

There are insights here that we judge could be useful now in the policing response to Coronavirus



**Bernard Rix**  
Chief Executive of CoPaCC

I'm writing this Foreword on the Sunday before our publication of this CoPaCC *Police Contact Management: Demand Analysis Report*. The content is fascinating, insightful and useful. And yet, my thoughts are not wholly on the report, but instead preoccupied with the global response to the still-emerging Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

So, why publish now, just as the pandemic is about to do its worst? For three key reasons.

Firstly, there are insights here that we judge could be useful now, in the policing response to Coronavirus. During last week's Home Affairs Select Committee, two of the UK's most senior police officers – the Lead for Civil Contingencies at the National Police Chiefs' Council, and the Strategic Lead at the National Police Coordination Centre – gave evidence on the UK's preparedness for Covid-19. In their evidence, they stated that the approach to call handling was amongst the most critical elements in police forces' response to the pandemic. This call handling report, perhaps, could only have been better timed if – with hindsight – we had been able to publish it a little earlier.

## Learn lessons

Secondly, there are insights here that will undoubtedly be useful once the very worst of the pandemic has passed. Forces, both here in the UK and globally, will want to review their approaches and learn lessons from what has happened, strengthening and improving how call handling is organised. The forces – and the public – will want reassurance that key areas, such as call handling, are able to withstand any similar future shocks. The data and analysis from this report should again help here, providing a baseline for call handling 'Before Coronavirus'.

And thirdly, publishing this first document now allows key

members of our team more time to look afresh at the core data, to see what specific insights we ourselves can offer on call handling, that might in some way contribute to the two elements above.

Let me now turn to what I might have written in this Foreword, were it not for the extraordinary global position in which we now find ourselves.

Since its establishment in late 2012, CoPaCC has published a number of thematic reports focusing on key topics in policing. These have included early insight on the likely implications of Brexit for policing and security; an examination of the potential impact of drones on policing; and a look at the UK police's use of body-

**Call queues have lengthened and the public is waiting longer to get through; with fewer officers to deploy, the ultimate response has been less satisfactory**

worn video. We have also run a regular survey comparing user experiences of the police ICT made available to them.

This CoPaCC *Police Contact Management: Demand Analysis Report* is the first in a two part series. This first report sets out the picture of call volumes, call handling and online reporting, which will then feed into a subsequent thematic report. This second report will look at the work by forces on new call handling policy, practice, technology and resources.

Our decision in early 2019 to commission this call handling thematic was influenced by several factors. There had been much press coverage over previous years highlighting a supposed variable quality of 999 and 101 policing services. These media reports provided superficial analysis only of dropped or unanswered calls, without any further context. We felt there was good reason to source a wider evidence base, seeking Freedom of Information data covering 2016 to 2019, supplemented by HMICFRS Peel Efficiency

data for earlier periods. In this way, we felt we could consolidate and present the data so as to stimulate and inform debate.

We sent out our call handling Freedom of Information (FOI) request in April 2019, to all UK forces including British Transport Police, and the police forces for the States of Jersey and Guernsey – a total of 48 forces. A further Freedom of Information request was sent to the same forces in August 2019, covering online reporting of crime: 36 of the 48 forces responded to the "call handling" FOI and 26 to the online reporting request.

## Available to all

We are making this report available to all those forces, organisations and individuals with a current subscription to Policing Insight. If you or your organisation does not have a current subscription, or you are uncertain as to whether you do, you should contact us before proceeding any further in this report, so as to obtain or confirm your subscription.

Anyone, regardless of subscription, is welcome to contact us for more information, whether on the raw data or to discuss any bespoke analysis.

I'd like to place on record my thanks to all those who have contributed in some way to this thematic report: the primary authors, Ian Wiggett and Gavin Hales, along with Keith Potter; our primary research analyst, Natalia Kappos; those in force responding to our Freedom of Information requests; our backroom team, and many more. I'd additionally like to place on record my particular thanks for another outstanding job to Ian Barrett, who conceived and has project managed this CoPaCC thematic from start to finish.

I hope you find this report useful and if so, look out for the follow up thematic report which will look at the progressive innovations being implemented to improve contact management in policing." Do please contact me or any of my colleagues with any comment or feedback you might have.

Stay safe at this most challenging of times.

# This policing Cinderella is crucial to public confidence

Call handling – often the public’s only point of contact with police – is under ever-increasing pressure, and deserves more attention



**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director

Call handling can feel like the Cinderella of policing. Overshadowed by the force control rooms and frontline response teams that are far more visible within the service, it’s an area of police business that is not well understood unless you have actually worked within it. For the public, however, it’s their initial, and often only point of contact with ‘the police’.

When the public call police, whether to pass information, report a problem, ask for advice, or in an urgent crisis, they will first speak to a call handler. It’s a function that is almost wholly civilianised, usually located away from local teams in a central location, yet call handling staff are the unseen frontline of policing.

Police contact centres may look much like any other call centre, and use the same performance metrics – waiting times, length of queues, speed of answer, call duration, ‘quality’ and ‘satisfaction’ scores. The work is rather different, though. Handlers never know what the next call entails, and must deal with and switch between the range of emotions and challenging scenarios that confront officers on the street. They have to manage the caller, secure the right information, make the right decisions – and do this all quickly. It’s a difficult and critical role, that can literally make the difference between life and death.

## A difficult trade-off

Recent years have been peppered with critical media reports about police call handling, highlighting delays in answering calls or poor decisions. As the cuts spread through the service, including in police contact, call volumes haven’t reduced. Call queues have lengthened and the public is waiting longer to get through; with fewer officers to deploy, the ultimate response has been less satisfactory. Several forces have had to re-invest in call handling as a result of local pressures – a difficult trade-off against the clamour for more visible policing.

Some forces have undertaken end-to-end reviews, trying to understand the connection between contact, deployment, response, and problem solving. Many have recognised that investment of time at the front end of call handling can save time in deployment. Other forces have conducted separate reviews of each of these functions, but perhaps have ended up playing ‘whack-a-mole’ as new demand pressures have emerged elsewhere.

Resource levels are a big factor, of course – but it is also about that end-to-end view, working processes, technology, and changing public behaviour and expectations. In a world where more and more business is routinely done online, policing still relies on phone conversations. ‘Channel shift’ is a term that’s often mentioned as both the solution to demand pressures, and as the unavoidable change that must happen. How feasible and achievable is that channel shift?

In this thematic report we aim to shine a light on how contact management has been managing over recent years. Surprisingly and disappointingly, the service holds little central information about police contact and call handling. Not every force was able to respond to our information request in time, and several could not answer all the questions we asked. It’s a key function for public confidence, and a rich source of data that should help the service understand and manage

**Call queues have lengthened and the public is waiting longer to get through; with fewer officers to deploy, the ultimate response has been less satisfactory**

demand. There are major investments going into the business area, such as Single Online Home: is it really clear what the public want or need? How well will new digital offerings meet the demand?

Day in, day out, police call handlers do an outstanding job, dealing with whatever comes down the line, making decisions professionally, with empathy and reassurance. We are seeing shifts in demand, with more 999 calls. Some forces have highlighted that calls are taking longer to deal with as a result of more vulnerability demand and awareness. We see a connection between incoming call volumes and the ‘failure demand’ through poor and delayed service responses. We see significant seasonal pressures and resulting fluctuations in service levels.

We also see wide ranges in the data patterns between forces, which are hard to explain without more detailed examination. These are important trends that drive overall workloads and broader performance. Why do some forces receive far more calls than others? Why does the urgency of those calls appear to be so different? Why do service standards vary so much?

We hope this report will prompt further discussion and exploration of such a critical business area.



## Researching the report

In 2019, Policing Insight submitted two separate Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to 46 UK police forces plus Guernsey and States of Jersey, to request data on 999 and 101 call handling and online crime reporting for the three financial years from 2016/17 to 2018/19.

A total of 36 forces replied to the FOI requests in time to be included in the analysis presented here, but not all were able to answer or provide data for all questions for the full three years.

The first FOI was focused on call volume, call handling and grading of emergency incidents.

The second FOI asked about online crime reporting.

Due to some questions generating incomplete data not all of the questions could be used in the report.

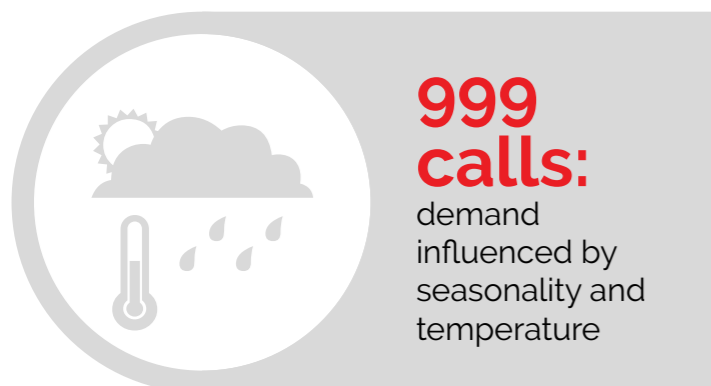
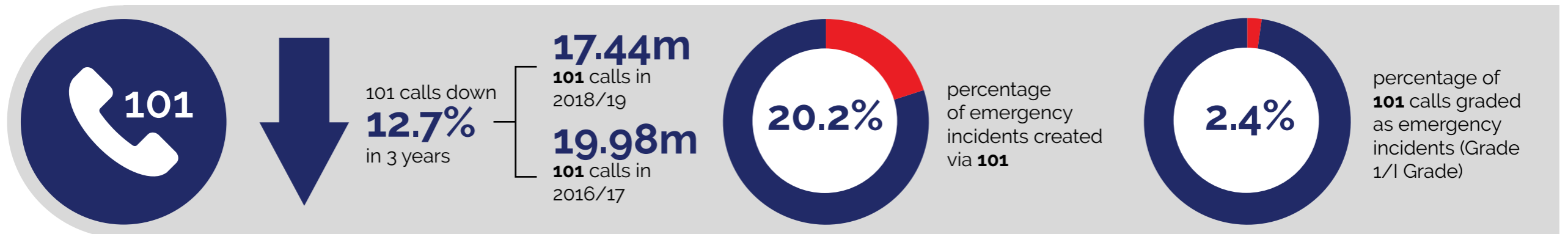
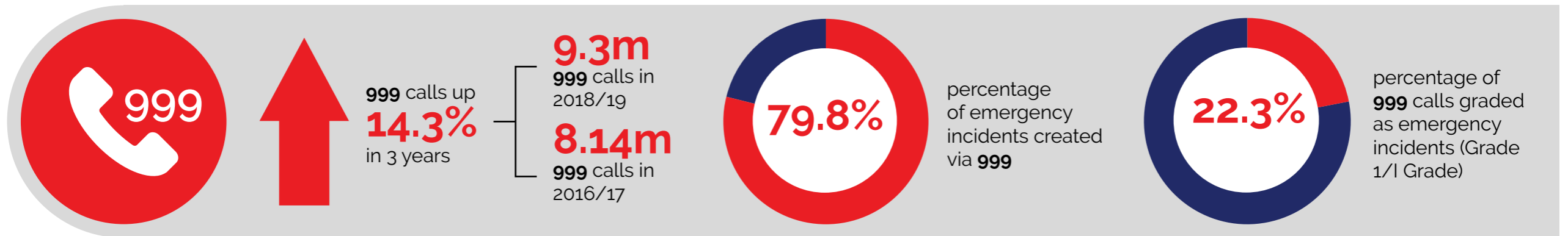
The questions asked in the FOI requests can be found in the appendices [here](#).

The analysis and reporting of the data has been led by Gavin Hales, an independent researcher, police commentator and former Deputy Director of the Police Foundation.

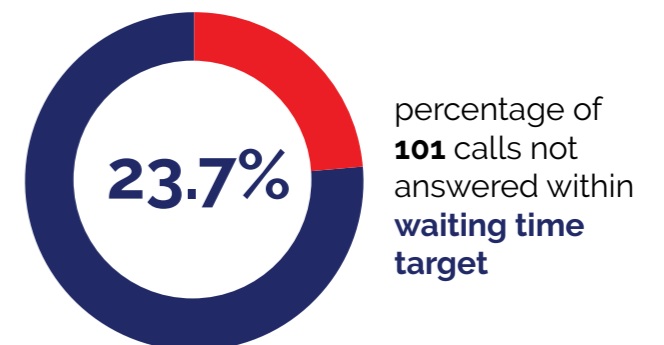
CoPaCC Director and former Greater Manchester Police ACC, Ian Wiggett has provided further commentary and policing context.

# UK police call handling and online reporting 2016/17 to 2018/19

Data from 35 police forces except call waiting (30 forces), emergency grading (29 forces) and online reporting (26 forces)



Only West Yorkshire and Met Police are receiving significant online crime reports



# Forces are answering the call – but we need to know more

Policing has responded well to rising 999 call volumes, but lack of research and understanding could hinder improvement in contact management



**Keith Potter**  
Policing Insight

With the vast majority of public-initiated contact with police now made by phone – a trend matched by fewer opportunities for face-to-face interaction, as the level of foot patrols has fallen and station closures have increased – the need for effective and efficient handling of both 999 and 101 calls has never been greater.

Its importance as a function is well recognised by the service itself, and as the demand on policing has increased, it's no surprise that call handling accounts for the largest share of staff employed by most forces.

What is more surprising, and what Policing Insight's Police Contact Management Demand Analysis highlights quite clearly, is how little we really know about the range of reasons why people contact the police when they do, why they choose one route of contact over another, and how the contact affects outcomes and satisfaction.

This analysis was compiled from Freedom of Information (FOI) requests made in 2019 to all police forces in the UK, Guernsey and Jersey, asking for data on 999 and 101 call handling and online crime reporting for the previous three financial years. A total of 36 forces replied to the FOI requests, although not all were able to provide data for all questions for the full three years. The statistics will form the basis of a thematic report on contact management to be published later in the year.

The headline figure – a 14 per cent rise in 999 calls nationally over the last three years – was largely anticipated, and reflects that much-discussed rising demand on policing. However, behind this is a considerably more nuanced and at times confusing picture. While 999 calls have increased overall, non-emergency 101 calls have fallen. At the same time, for a small minority of forces, the opposite is true. The trend for call volumes varies significantly between forces – including those of similar sizes, and in neighbouring locations – for little or no

obvious reason. Yet the fluctuations in those trends would suggest that daily and seasonal patterns do exert a common influence on police contact.

So what is the real story when it comes to police contact management, and where are the knowledge gaps?

## Who is calling who?

In 2018/19, the total number of 999 calls across the 36 forces that supplied data rose to 9.3 million, compared to 8.14 million in 16/17. By contrast, over the same period the volume of 101 calls fell, from 19.98 million to 17.44 million – in turn, bringing the combined total down by around five per cent.

## “A 14 per cent rise in 999 calls nationally over the last three years was largely anticipated, and reflects that much-discussed rising demand on policing”

The overall number of calls varied greatly between forces, with the Met (4.9 million) and the West Midlands (2 million) some way ahead of others, and North Yorkshire (166,000) and Jersey (35,000) at the opposite end of the scale.

But these figures only tell half the story; when call volumes per 100,000 of the population are explored, a different picture starts to emerge. For example, while the Met and West Midlands remain at the top of the list for 999 calls per 100,000 of the population, the figures for total police calls (999 and 101 combined) per 100,000 of the population see Lancashire, Bedfordshire and Northumbria move to the top of the pile, with the Met much closer to mid-table. And while Essex has one of the lowest rates of total calls per 100,000 of the population (only North Yorkshire has fewer), it is ahead of every other force when it comes to the ratio of 999 to 101 calls, with 48 per cent of

calls to the force coming via the emergency number.

So while call volume figures give an idea towards general trends – an increase in 999 calls, a fall in 101 calls in most (31 out of 36) forces – closer inspection of the statistics prompts more questions than answers. Does the growth in 999 and fall in 101 calls reflect a greater demand for a response to more serious incidents, a change in public perception of what requires an emergency response, or a lack of confidence in the 101 number? Why does the ratio of 999 to 101 calls vary so much between forces? And how (if at all) do force funding arrangements reflect or influence the level of demand and overall contact?

Unfortunately, despite the acknowledged importance of call handling to the service, and size of the function within each force, very little information is gathered and analysed centrally, so developing an evidence-based response to demand is difficult, to say the least.

## Whatever the weather

Although there are major variations in call volumes and 999/101 ratios, there are also striking similarities across forces in relation to patterns of demands and seasonal trends. So whether you're a call handler in Somerset or South Yorkshire, you are likely to see increased demand during office hours, busier shifts when there are busier streets, and more people making a call when the sun's out.

Yet while those working in contact management will recognise those patterns and fluctuations, the service doesn't seem to be collating or analysing this rich source of information, which is a major missed opportunity. Without a better understanding of the drivers of 999 demand, policing at both a force and national level will be unable to plan more effectively to meet that fluctuating demand. Given the fixed numbers of staff, and the challenges that seasonal changes inevitably bring (such as staff holidays and sickness levels), effective planning could be the key to maintaining the right levels of performance year-round.

### Call handling

Overall, given the volume of emergency calls, the performance of handlers was still very impressive; less than one per cent of 999 calls were 'not answered or dropped' – so either automatically reverted to BT to be re-directed to another force, or ended by callers before they were answered – across the 34 forces over the three-year period.

On average, more than 85 per cent of 999 calls are answered within force target times (10 seconds for all but two of the forces – Avon and Somerset, and Dyfed Powys – who have a 15-second target time), and seasonal pressures again account for many of the poorest monthly performances.

By contrast, there was a much wider spread in the 101 call performance, with just below a quarter of calls nationally not answered within the target times – and those times themselves vary widely between forces.

This data again prompts more questions than it provides answers. For example, how much of a factor is 'failure demand' – in other words, how many extra calls are generated either as a result of failing to answer the original call promptly, or by a slow or poor local policing response?

Does poorer performance on 101 call handling lead to increased use of the 999 service, as callers give up on one number and switch to the other? If so, that could explain the results for Essex and Greater Manchester Police, the forces which missed their 101 targets most often (more than half of calls); by 2018/19, they were the two forces receiving the largest percentage of 999 calls (48 and 45 per cent respectively).

And what's more important when it comes to reducing the number of 999 dropped calls – the amount answered within the target time, or the overall time taken to answer 999 calls?

It's also essential to remember that effective contact management is not only about speed and hitting time targets – the way calls are dealt with is just as crucial. While delays and poor responses will quickly damage confidence, cutting calls short to jump to the next one can increase risk, pass unnecessary work to response teams, and leave a caller unhappy.

### What's your emergency?

While less than a quarter (23 per cent) of 999 calls across all forces over the three years were graded as emergency incidents, there were significant variations between forces, from as few as 10 per

cent in Humberside, to more than half (52 per cent) in Dyfed-Powys. And once again, the reason for these variations isn't obvious.

Around one in five emergency incidents arise via calls on the 101 number, although again, there are significant variations between forces. And while for most forces, between 70 per cent and 90 per cent of emergency incidents are received via the 999 number, the individual figures range from 97 per cent in Staffordshire to 51 per cent in Bedfordshire. Whether these variations are down to different behaviour by the public in different areas, forces using a different criteria to grade emergency or non-emergency calls, or the public's reticence to use the 101 number – preferring instead to opt straight for 999 – is unclear.

## “ With as many as 20 per cent of emergency incidents arising from 101 calls, forces can't afford to drop the ball when it comes to handling the supposedly 'non-emergency' inquiries

What is clear is that with as many as 20 per cent of emergency incidents arising from 101 calls, forces can't afford to drop the ball when it comes to handling the supposedly 'non-emergency' inquiries.

Reassuringly the level of misuse of 999 remains comparatively low; it is evident that while relatively few 999 calls require an emergency response, the vast majority do require a police response, having been made in good faith.

### Online reporting

Although 26 forces responded with data about online crime reporting, two – West Yorkshire Police (166,173 reported crimes) and the Met (110,068) – received at least four times as many online reports as any other in 2018/19 (Kent, the third placed force, received 27,550). However, any thoughts that introducing online crime reporting would help to significantly reduce the call-handling burden is yet to be borne out by the figures.

Forces face something of a dilemma regarding online contact. It's clear that the public generally have become increasingly accustomed to carrying out much of their daily life online – from banking to buying goods and booking holidays – and it's fair to assume that

most would be comfortable using online tools to contact the police. They would also expect such interactions, including social media platforms, to get a swift and hopefully effective response. But providing that response could require significant resource, and understanding how to tailor that resource relies upon knowing what type of contact people will make online, and what they hope to achieve by initiating contact – something which, just as with telephone contact, appears to be the subject of very little research or evidence gathering.

### Where next?

While there is a considerable amount of data collated for this analysis – enough to draw some accurate and important conclusions regarding overall trends and performance – one of the key takeaways is the clear lack of in-depth, research into police contact management, either at a force or national level.

That lack of knowledge has not gone unnoticed. In a paper on contact management to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) in May 2018, 'Demand analysis – in-depth understanding' and 'Chief officer scrutiny' were put forward as two of six steps to mitigate risk and ensure quality assurance.

And the ongoing Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic highlights both the public's willingness to go to the phone for essential but non-emergency advice, as well as how unexpected events can seriously impact on call-handling capacity. In the first six days of the launch of a new coronavirus special service on the NHS 111 number, there were more than one million calls – up by over a third on the same time last year – with a record high of 210,000 calls in a single day. During the same period, at least one force had to appeal to the public not to call the police 101 number for coronavirus advice, as call handlers were being swamped with health enquiries.

While such extraordinary times will lead to extraordinary challenges, the capacity to deal with much more regular fluctuations in demand will rely on preparation and planning, based on evidence and knowledge. Without understanding why volumes are changing, why the 999-101 ratios are so variable, the impact of failure demand, how the introduction of new technology affects performance, and a whole host of other contact-related issues, policing will struggle to develop solutions or deliver a service that meets the public need, now and moving forward.



# The key figures behind the contact management headlines

While 999 calls have risen, total call volume and non-emergency contacts have dropped, suggesting a much more nuanced overall picture



**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director

Amongst the wealth of data in this thematic report on contact management, I've picked out three charts which may surprise you.

**Chart 1** shows the overall trend in 999 and 101 call volumes. We've heard a lot about demand going up and the pressure on call handling – Chief Constables' Council was briefed about this last year. However, the picture is more nuanced. Based on the 35 England and Wales forces who supplied data, which includes the major metropolitan forces, there are two main trends:

- the volume of 999 calls has been going up. Between 2016 and 2019, total 999 calls increased by 14.3%
- the volume of 101 calls has actually been falling. Between 2016 and 2019, total 101 calls fell by 12.7%
- the combined volume of 999 and 101 calls fell by just under 5% between 2016 and 2019

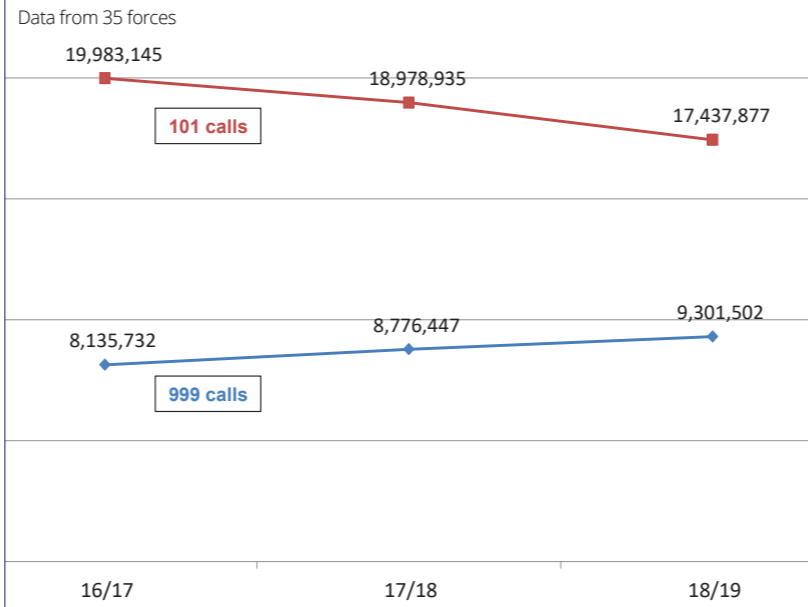
A few forces have bucked these trends, but most follow the same pattern. It raises important questions about why this shift is happening. Are there more emergencies? Are the public losing confidence in 101? Are delays in answering 101 prompting callers to switch to 999 instead?

It also brings practical operational challenges. 999 calls understandably take priority, which requires more handlers to be available; the calls are likely to be more difficult to deal with, which requires more experienced staff.

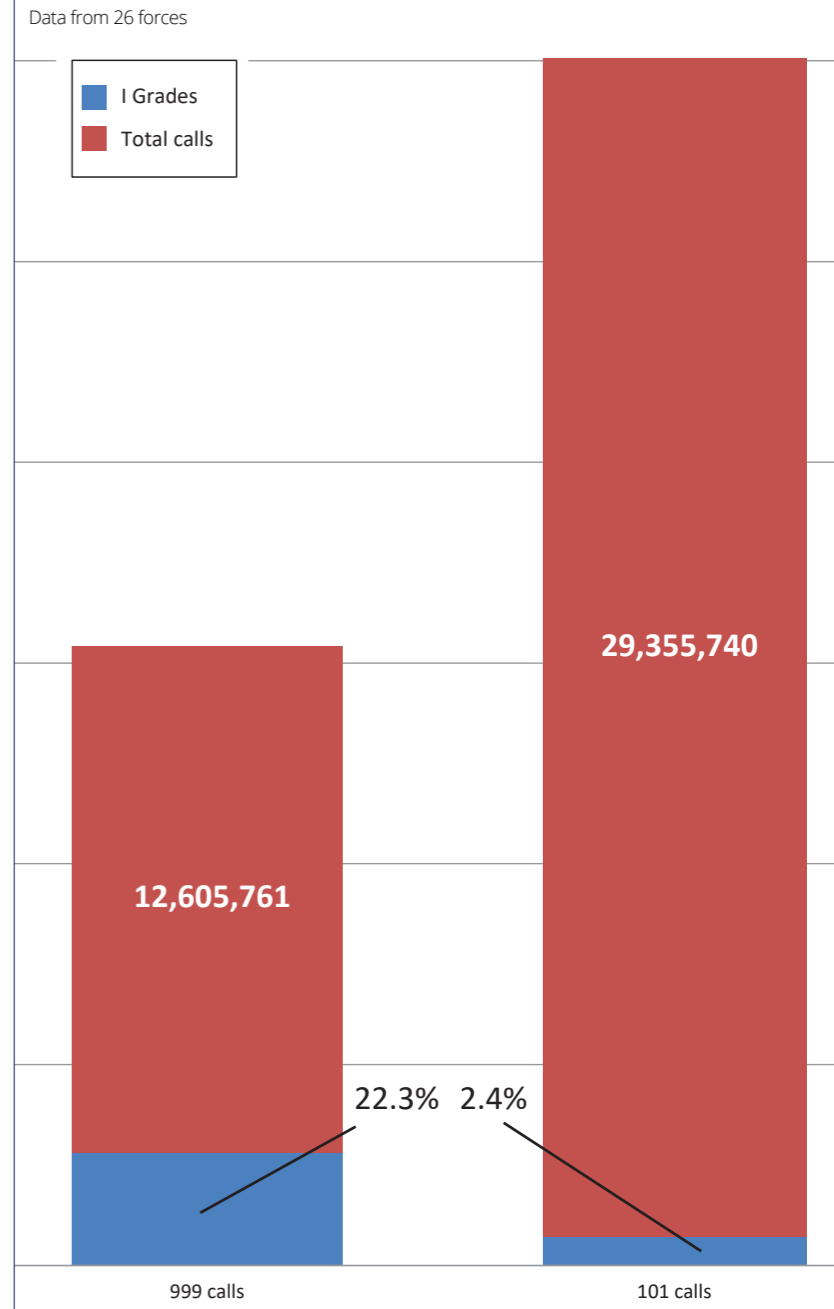
It's well known that many 999 calls are not emergencies. Despite years of public education campaigns, nationally just 22.3% led to an emergency grade incident. At the same time, 2.4% of 101 calls also led to an emergency incident (**Chart 2**). When those numbers are played back, it means that over 20% of emergency incidents were created as a result of a 101 call (**Chart 3**). That has important implications for the way forces view their non-emergency call demand – there is a significant level of risk in the 101 queue.

Despite years of public education campaigns, nationally just 22.3% [of 999 calls] led to an emergency grade incident

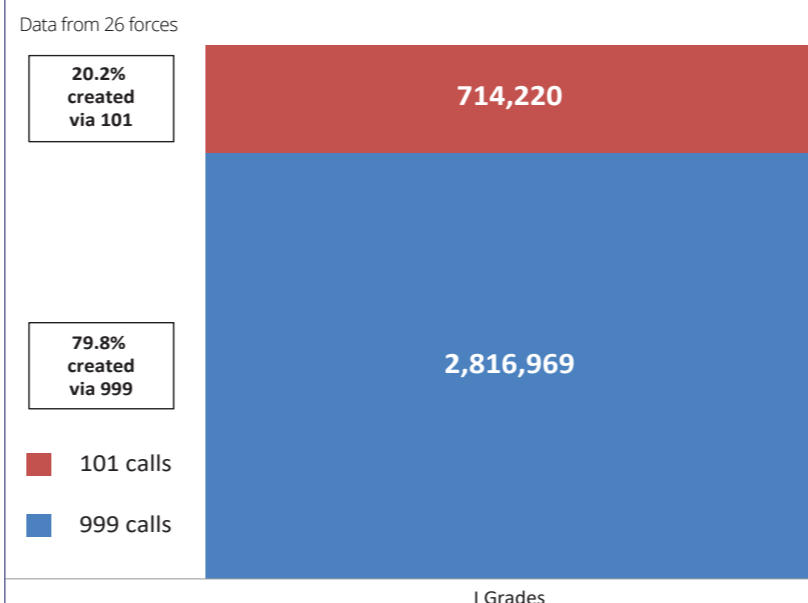
**Annual total 999 and 101 calls, 2016-2019** 1



**Emergency incidents as share of 999 and 101 calls, 2016-19** 2



**Emergency incidents from 999 and 101, 2016-19** 3



# 999 and 101 call volumes and changes over time

Overall the volume of 999 calls has increased, while 101 calls have fallen; but the reasons for wide variations between forces are unclear



**Gavin Hales**  
Independent researcher

## Key points

- 999 call volumes have been increasing in recent years while in most forces 101 volumes have been falling.
- Call rates vary widely between forces, as does the 101:999 mix, but the reasons are unclear.
- The highest rates of calls (per 100,000 population) are received by Lancashire and Bedfordshire, while the lowest are received by Essex and especially North Yorkshire.

A combination of published HMICFRS data (covering 2010/11 to 2016/17) and FOI data for 2017/18 and 2018/19 allows us to examine 999 call trends over the medium term, indexing the data to 2010/11 (that is, looking at changes compared to 2010/11) (see **Figure 1**).

While the picture varies by force (42 territorial forces, excluding City of London), and not all forces have data for the full nine years, there are signs of a general upturn in volumes from around 2014/15 and 2015/16, being especially marked in forces such as Cleveland, Essex, the West Midlands and Wiltshire.

It is also striking that while some forces finish the period with 999 volumes well above 2010/11 levels – for example, Bedfordshire, Cleveland, Dorset, Essex, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Thames Valley Police (TVP) – others end up at a similar level and in a few cases – Devon and Cornwall, Durham and especially Northumbria – below 2010/11.

It is striking that while some forces finish the period with 999 volumes well above 2010/11 levels, others end up at a similar level and, in a few cases, below 2010/11

999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11)

CLICK CHARTS TO VIEW LARGE VERSIONS

Fig.1

Sources: 2010/11 to 2016/17, HMIC Peel Efficiency Data 2017; 2017/18 and 2018/19, FOI requests



**Call volumes by force**

Examining the middle year of data covered by the FOI request (2017/18) (see **Figure 2**) – avoiding some unusual looking data in 2018/19<sup>1</sup> – we can see that for the 36 forces from which data was received, total call volumes ranged from 4.9 million in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and 2.0m in the West Midlands to 166,000 in North Yorkshire and 35,000 in Jersey. There is a clear step-change in volumes between the top 12 and subsequent forces (visible between South Yorkshire and Sussex).

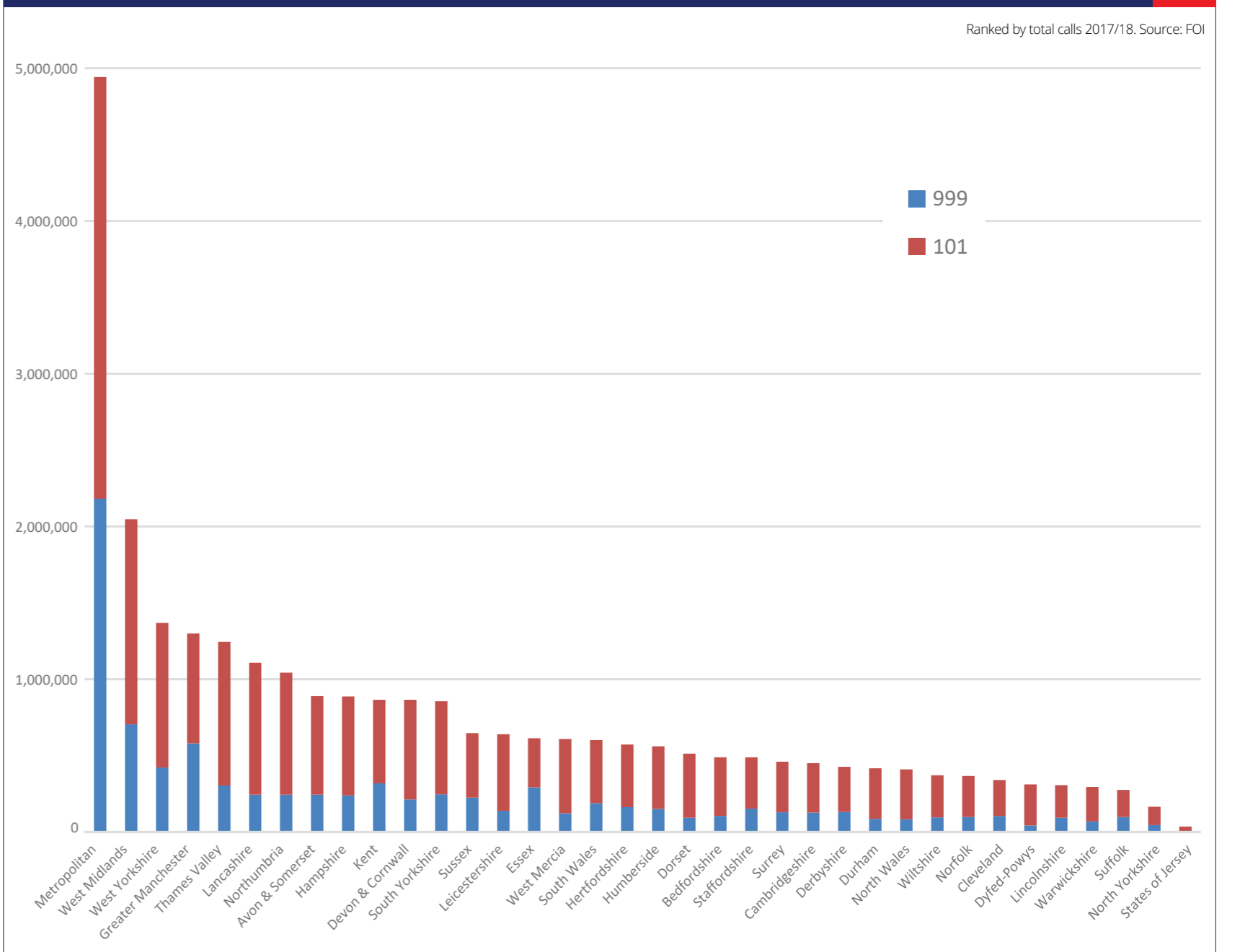
**REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> Especially 101 call volumes for Norfolk and Suffolk, which are notably low and suggest incomplete data.

Total 999 and 101 calls received by force

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.2**

Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI

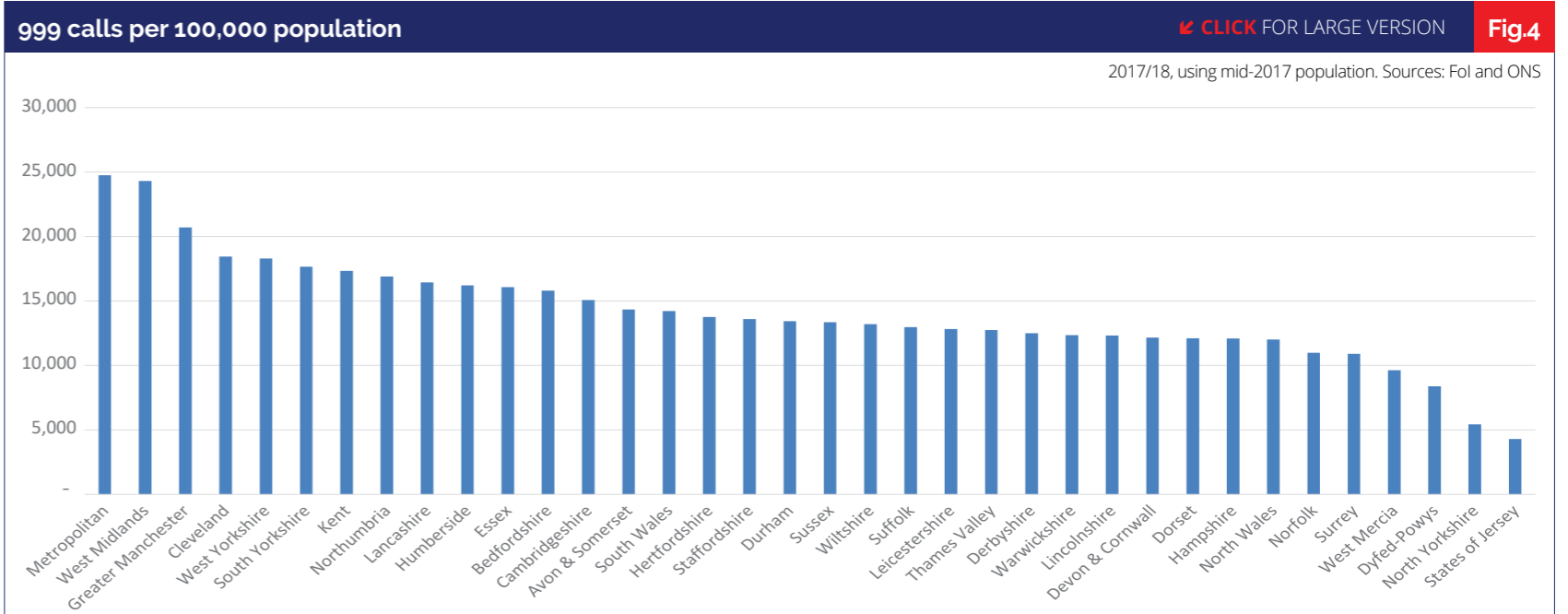
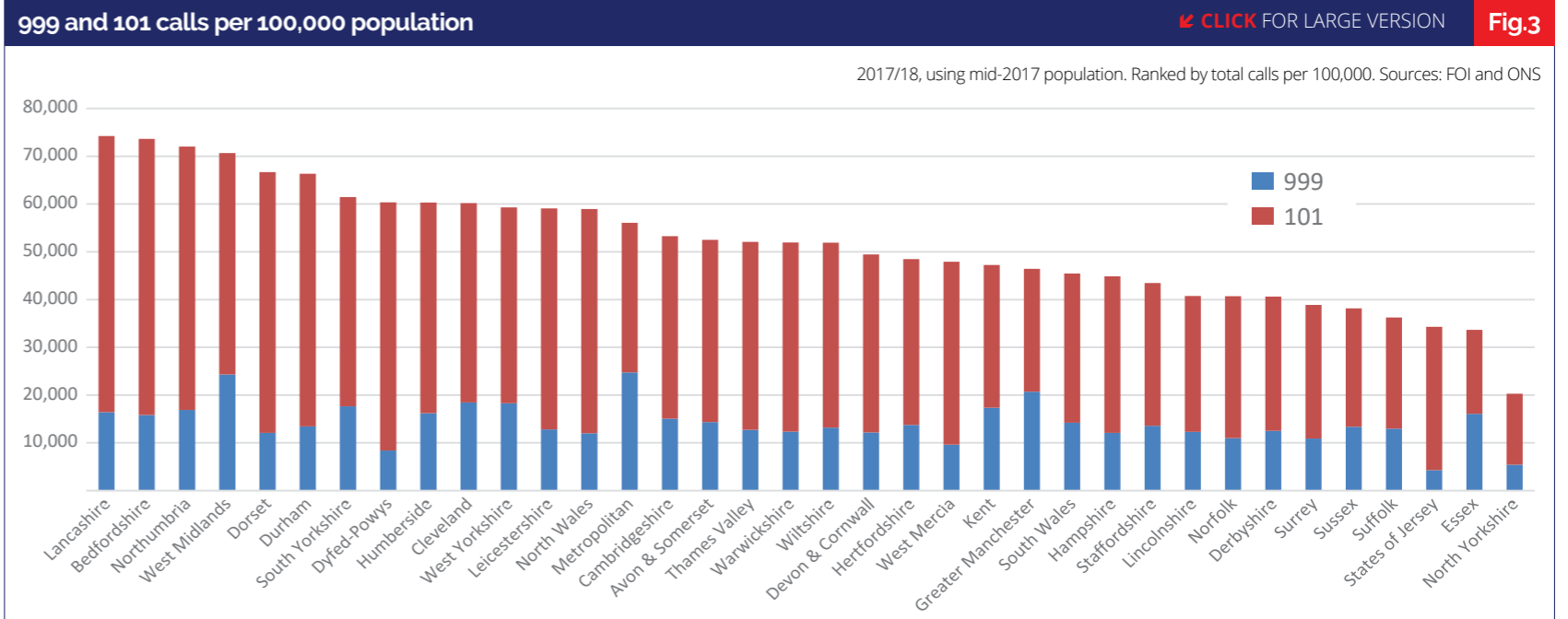


It is notable that Lancashire and Bedfordshire, which receive very high rates of calls overall, receive a very large proportion of those calls via 101

**Call volumes per 100,000 population**

Viewing the call volumes as a rate per 100,000 population (see **Figure 3**), however, a different picture emerges, with the overall call volume rate being highest in Lancashire, Bedfordshire and Northumbria, with the MPS around the middle of the distribution. Overall call volume rates are notably low in Essex and especially North Yorkshire (where the rate of calls is only one-third of the equivalent figure for the neighbouring forces of West and South Yorkshire).

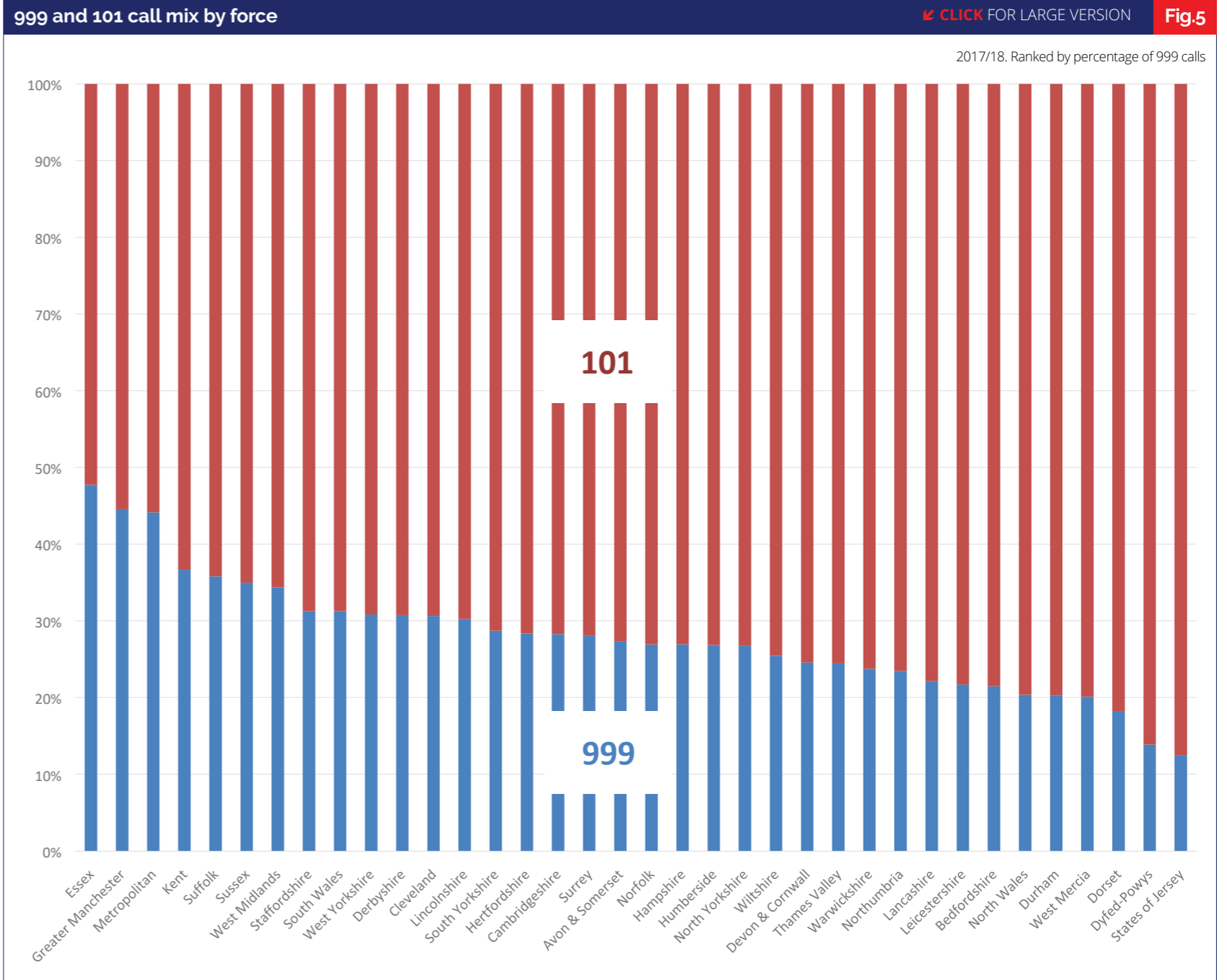
Viewing 999 call volumes alone (see **Figure 4**), however, we see that 999 call rates per 100,000 population were highest – indeed almost the same, and both notably above the other forces – in the MPS and West Midlands, with Essex now in 11th place out of the 36 forces that provided data.



“Overall call volume rates are notably low in Essex and especially North Yorkshire (where the rate of calls is only one-third of the equivalent figure for the neighbouring forces of West and South Yorkshire)

**A varying mix of 999 and 101 calls**

These observations hint at the varying mix of 999 and 101 calls (see **Figure 5**), which is borne out by the data that show a very wide range from 48 per cent of calls being received via 999 in Essex, down to 14 per cent in Dyfed-Powys and 12 per cent in Jersey. The degree to which this reflects different demand profiles rather than different local public calling practices or police force call handling resourcing decisions is unclear. It is notable, for example, that Lancashire and Bedfordshire, which receive very high rates of calls overall, receive a very large proportion of those calls via 101 rather than 999 (78 and 79 per cent respectively).



It is notable that Lancashire and Bedfordshire, which receive very high rates of calls overall, receive a very large proportion of those calls via 101

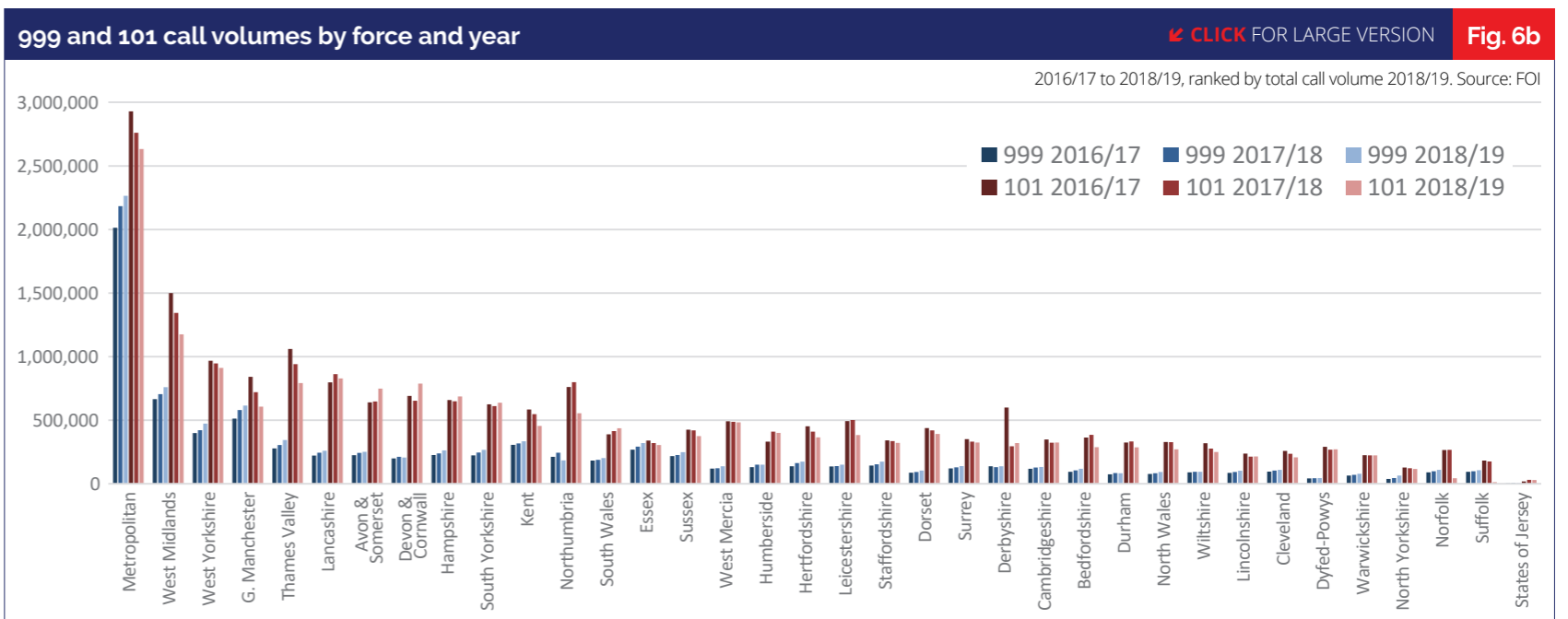
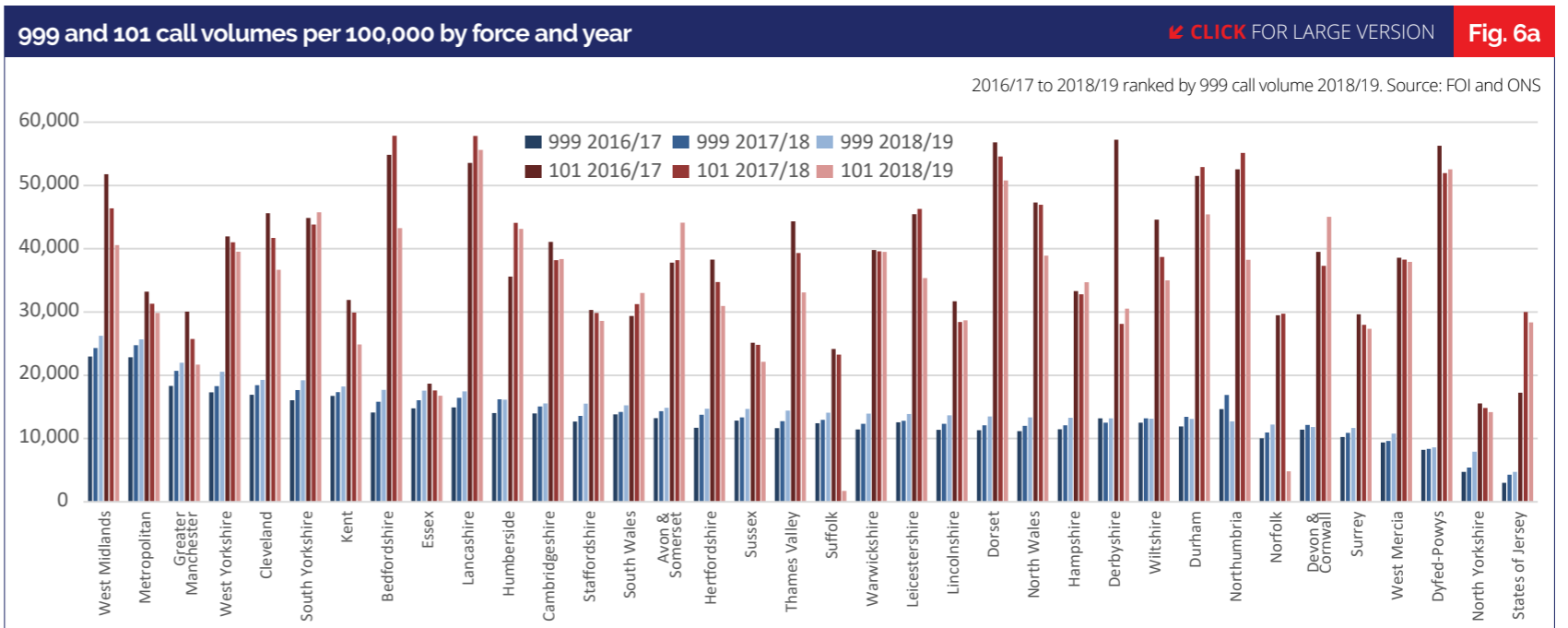
**A shift from 101 to 999?**

When we examine how call volumes (again per 100,000 population) have changed over the three years, two interesting points emerge (the forces are ranked by 999 call volumes in 2018/19) (see **Figure 6a**).

First, we see that the general trend is for 999 call volumes to have been rising while 101 call volumes have been falling, with the former trend being clearer than the latter. It is notable, for example, that South Wales and Avon and Somerset have seen both 999 and 101 call volumes increasing.

Second, reflecting the evidence highlighted previously about the relative mix of 999 and 101 call volumes, we see that Essex has an exceptional call profile (out of the 36 forces shown), with a strikingly small proportion of calls being received via the 101 service (Greater Manchester Police is perhaps closest to this profile from the other forces).

For completeness the next chart (see **Figure 6b**) shows the actual total call volumes by force and year for the three years ranked by the 2018/19 total call volume.



It is notable that South Wales and Avon and Somerset have seen both 999 and 101 call volumes increasing

## Questions arising

The data received from 36 forces give us initial insights into the scale of police call demand. The sheer range across forces is striking, both in terms of call rates but also the varying mix of 999 and 101 calls. Discovering that Lancashire and Bedfordshire have had the highest overall call rates was a surprise, as was the discovery that almost half of calls received by Essex arrive via the 999 service; that the MPS and West Midlands have the highest 999 call rates was more expected.

The kinds of questions that arise include:

- Does the shift from 101 to 999 reflect changing demand towards more serious incidents, or changing public behaviour in how they contact police forces?
- Is the public increasingly using 999 in preference to 101, and if so, why might that be?
- Why does the relative mix of 999 and 101 calls vary so much by force? The Crime Survey for England and Wales shows, for example, that reported use of the 101 service is twice as high in areas with high levels of perceived ASB as those where it is low.<sup>2</sup>
- To what extent do current funding arrangements reflect relative demand at force level, including accounting for changes over time?

Later sections of this report will start to offer some clues. The next section, however, we will look at monthly 999 call trends across the three years, including a brief consideration of seasonality and weather effects.

### REFERENCES

<sup>2</sup> See Table S21 in ONS (2019) Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables. <https://bit.ly/3cC7Nia>

“The sheer range across forces is striking, both in terms of call rates but also the varying mix of 999 and 101 calls

## Comment

**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director



The first thing that stands out is the sheer volume of 999 and 101 calls. There are nearly 5 million 999 and 101 calls a year in London, and 2 million in the West Midlands. That is a lot of work – and risk – to manage.

Call handling is a large business function, where you will find the main share of police staff employed by a force. It's had to endure its share of the cuts to police staff over the past decade – but workloads have certainly not been falling. Several forces have had to re-invest staff in the function in recent years after realising they had cut too far. It has meant a difficult choice between officers on the streets or staff to answer calls.

Having been to a number of police control rooms overseas, my sense is that police forces in the UK seem to receive more calls than their international counterparts. It's only a sense, based on resource and population comparisons – data is hard to obtain and compare. Let's just say that police call centres are busy places. What drives these call volumes? To what extent is demand being displaced from other agencies? In-force studies often highlight other agencies as being high-volume generators of calls to police: simple changes to policy and practice can have a big impact on the workload.

Despite the critical importance of call handling, and the size and cost of the function, there is little information gathered and analysed centrally. The issue was

recently discussed by the NPCC Chief Constables' Council, where the 'continued pressure' on 999 and 101 was noted. Chief constables were told that 999 calls have been increasing at around five per cent a year 'for several years', with abandoned 999 calls up by 14 per cent. There was recognition of long waits and the range of service standards across forces (NPCC presentation on contact management, 2018).

“Our report has shown that across England and Wales, there are notable differences in the level of 999 and 101 calls made to each force a year

Our report has shown that across England and Wales, there are notable differences in the level of 999 and 101 calls made to each force a year, from around 70,000 such calls per 100,000 population in Lancashire to around 34,000 calls in Essex.

Why does Lancashire receive twice as many calls as Essex? Why do call volumes vary so much between forces? Is the service aware of these differences? Maybe some forces are offering other forms of contact which help reduce the need to call 101 or 999 – but we don't know.

What's surprising is that call levels (and 101 in particular) are not strongly related to crime levels. There must be other factors

affecting why the public call police. Are these explained by socio-demographics, or perhaps linked to the local policing model or the local policing challenge?

The data shows a general reduction in 101 calls, and a general increase in 999 calls, although there are exceptions. The service acknowledges that it doesn't understand why this is happening, although plenty of theories have been suggested. Without understanding why volumes are changing, the service will struggle to develop solutions or a service offer that meets the public need.

One possible explanation is that the public are losing confidence in the 101 service. Answering 999 calls understandably takes priority over 101 (referred to as “protecting the 9s”): it requires staff with high skill (possibly of a higher grade) and ‘protected’ availability to ensure, as much as possible, that there is a call handler kept free to answer the next 999 call. That will mean longer waits for 101 callers at busy times. If a 101 call is not answered, do callers try 999 instead? If resourcing doesn't match the volume of calls, then 999 callers will have to wait too.

Are there simply more emergencies, reflecting a wider change in the environment? Does it perhaps reflect less visible policing presence on the streets? Are people calling police about different matters? Does this show when the impact of austerity started to hit? Looking into the past for answers to current problems is interesting, but the business area keeps moving on and there are many factors which affect call volumes.

# Trends across the three years and seasonality

Despite differences in call volume, similar fluctuations over time and seasons indicate common factors are driving demand



**Gavin Hales**  
Independent researcher

## Key points

- Patterns of monthly 999 call volumes suggest common factors driving volumes across forces, including seasonal pressures and climatic factors.
- Monthly 999 call rates are highest – and rates and patterns almost identical – in the Metropolitan and West Midlands forces.

In this second section we examine how 999 call volumes vary from month to month across the three years of data, including examining whether there are seasonal trends. In order to aid legibility, here we will only examine 999 calls received by the 10 forces with the highest 999 call volumes (putting all 36 on the same charts makes it very difficult to see the detail). In order to control for the different lengths of individual months, data are presented as average calls per day per month.

## Monthly trends

Indexing the data to April 2016 (the start of our FOI data), we see clear signs of consistency across the 10 forces in terms of seasonal patterns, in-year variations, and overall increases across the three years (see **Figure 7**). In general, 999 call volumes go up and down at the same time across multiple forces.

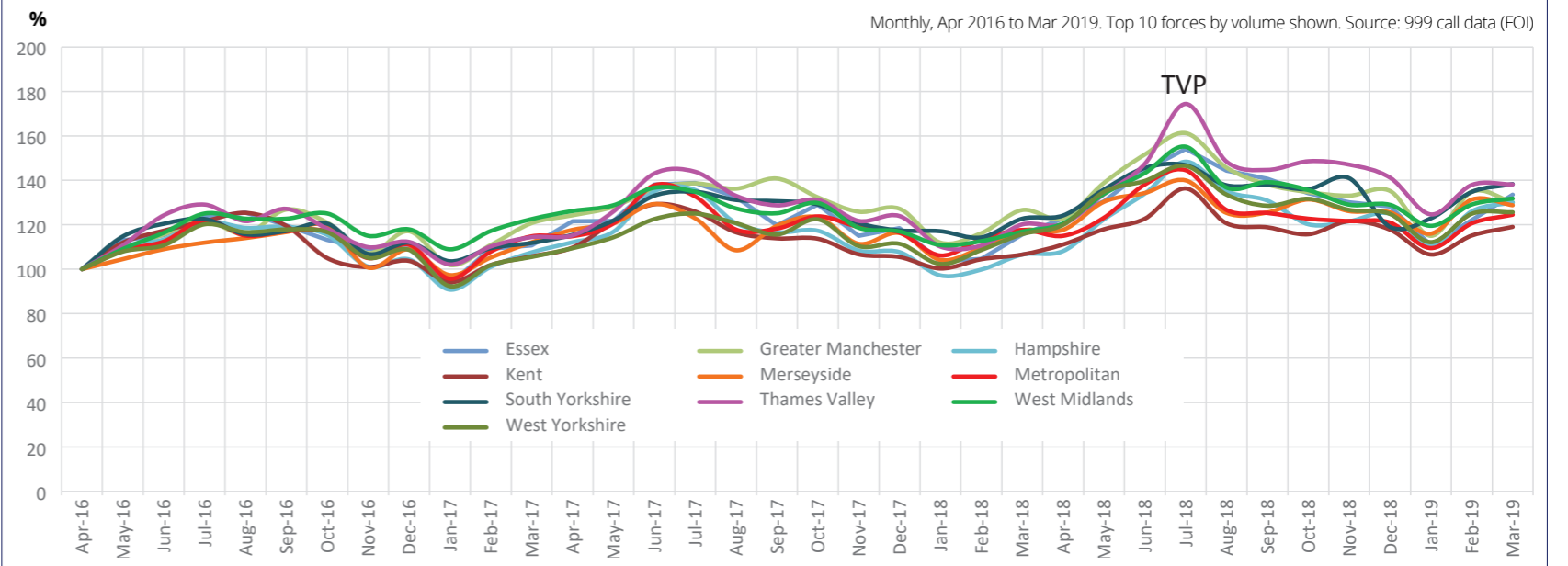
Examining the same underlying data, but as a rate per 100,000 population (see **Figure 8**), these consistencies are again apparent – and if anything even clearer – while we can see more clearly how 999 call demand varies by force.

It is striking that the level and trend of 999 calls (by rate per 100,000 residents in mid-2017) is identical in the MPS and West Midlands Police forces, and also (at a lower level) in Thames Valley and Hampshire.

The common trends suggest that the drivers of 999 demand (the things that explain the variance from month to month) are consistent across force areas and therefore operate at a macro level, without being influenced by the actions of the forces themselves. That may have important implications in terms of resource planning, suggesting

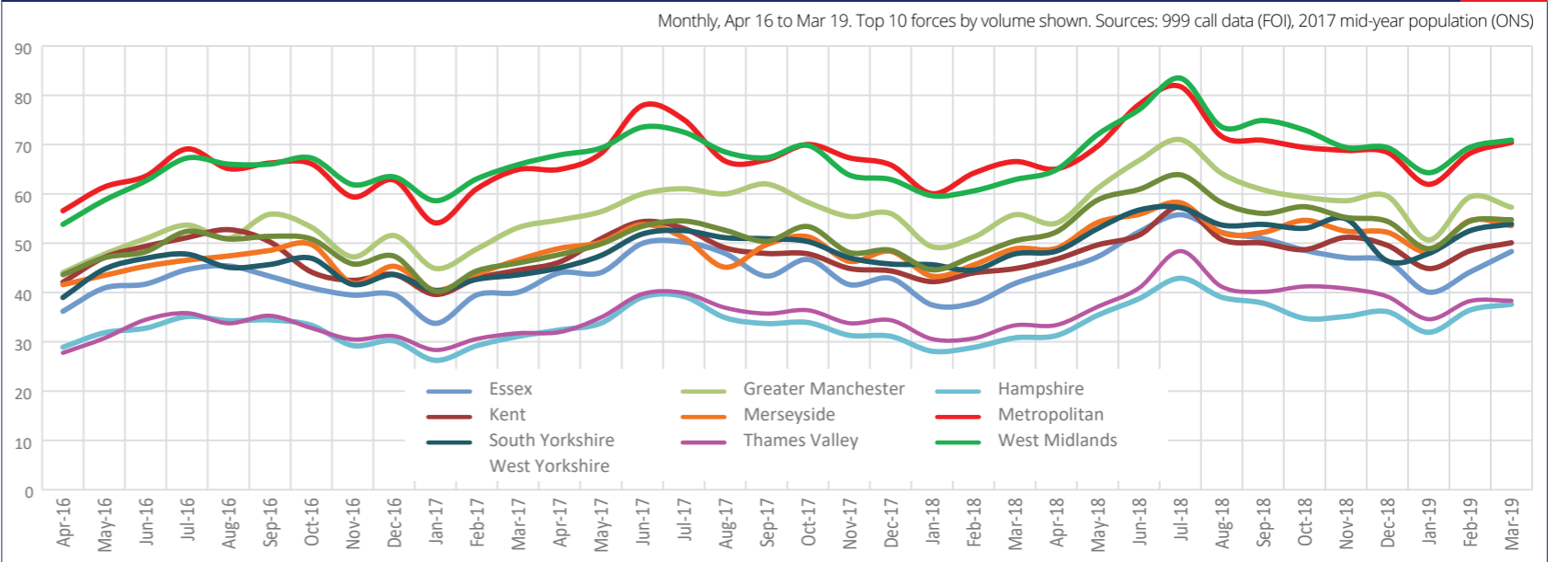
Average daily 999 calls received indexed to April 2016

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig. 7**



Average daily 999 calls received per 100,000 population

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig. 8**





that forces might usefully pool their call demand analytical capacity, or that some kind of demand forecasting could take place at a national level (informed by a much deeper understanding of what drives call volumes at force level than is possible here).

Finally, we can take a superficial initial look at the potential role for climatic factors to drive 999 call demand, examining call volumes received by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and West Midlands Police (WMP) alongside data on the monthly average central England temperature<sup>3</sup> (See **Figure 9**).

This analysis underlines both the overall seasonal nature of demand, being higher in the summer, but also hints at the influence of temperature fluctuations – noting how the shape of the calls trends seen in each of the three years seems to partly reflect the shape of the temperature data, especially in 2018/19.

### Questions arising

Looking at the ten forces with the highest volumes of 999 calls, it is striking that they experience such consistent trends: across the three years, seasonally, and from month-to-month. That suggests many (if not all) of the drivers of 999 demand operate at a macro level, and the temperature data hint at the role of climatic factors as one possibility.

It is also striking that 999 call demand expressed as a rate is identical between the Metropolitan and West Midlands Police areas, strongly suggesting that there are important commonalities between the two.

The kinds of questions this analysis gives rise to include:

- What is being done to understand the drivers of 999 demand?
- What potential is there to forecast 999 demand to allow forces to better plan?
- Given that demand is seasonal, how do forces scale their resources up and down to reflect levels of demand throughout the year?
- To the extent forces don't/can't vary their resources throughout the year, what are the knock-on effects on the service forces can offer to the public, particularly during the busier months of the summer?
- How well is relative demand reflected in police force funding allocations?

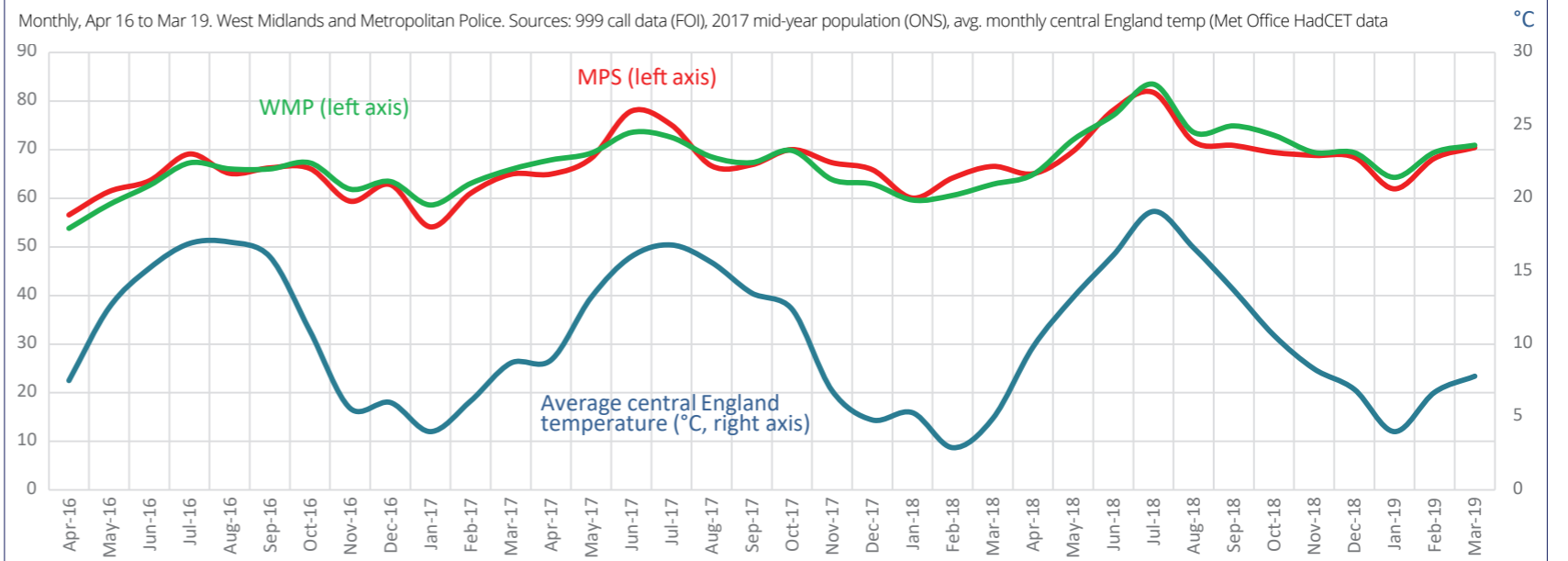
### REFERENCES

<sup>3</sup> Met Office Hadley Centre Central England Temperature Data, <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/hadobs/hadcet/cetml1659on.dat>

**Average daily 999 calls received per 100,000 population and average temperature**

CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION

**Fig. 9**



### Comment



**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director

There is clearly a seasonal and temporal factor in call demand. The busiest periods of the day in call handling are during normal office hours: the switchboard comes to life as the general population start to wake up, and then builds during the working day. However, when it's busy on the streets, it will be busy in call handling too – and a warm evening during the Summer will usually mean a lot of calls for police. There are other events, some foreseeable, that trigger high call volumes – major events, adverse weather, and new year's eve, for example. Forces have invested

in standard call industry tools to help resource planning, using past and recent demand data to predict future staffing requirements. With fixed numbers of staff, there are few options to supplement the numbers on duty at busy periods. Overtime is the main option, the other is flexible shift rostering. These peak times will often be the times when staff want to take holidays too. In a function where most staff are women, often on part-time contracts, childcare and school holidays can bring further restrictions on resource planning.

How do forces plan resources efficiently and effectively with such a wide variation of work volumes through the year? With such a rich source of data, are forces taking full advantage

of the potential to forecast demand? This seems an obvious opportunity, where a central resource could really help all forces

Call handling is skilled work, and it is hard to draft in people for short periods. Are there better options to prepare for peaks, and to divert demand or manage peaks in cleverer ways? Are there options for more flexibility in working hours and contracts, and more support for those with caring responsibilities?

Wellbeing is important too. The call centre industry generally has high sickness and turnover levels – which can also apply in police contact centres. Can the workplace environment be improved, and can the role be made more attractive?

# 999 and 101 call handling performance

Less than one per cent of 999 calls are not answered or dropped, but performance against targets and on 101 calls is much more variable



**Gavin Hales**  
Independent researcher

## Key points

- Call handling performance varies widely across forces and there is clear evidence of seasonal pressures.
- There is a weak positive correlation between 999 calls not answered within targets and calls dropped, but the contrasting experiences of Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and Bedfordshire suggest that the total time taken to answer 999 calls may be more important than whether the target is hit (more data would be needed to explore this further).
- There are hints that 101 performance problems lead to greater pressure on the 999 service.

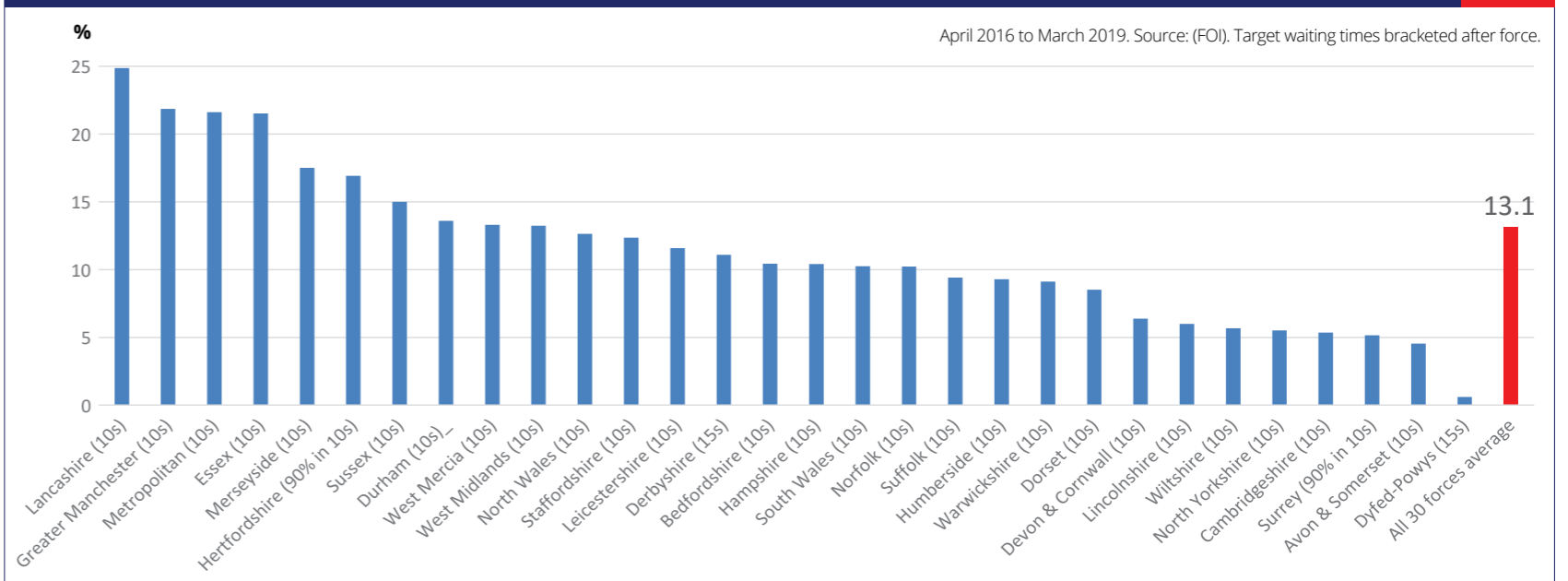
Here we examine 999 and 101 call handling performance by the thirty forces that were able to provide data in time for inclusion in our analysis.

## 999 call handling

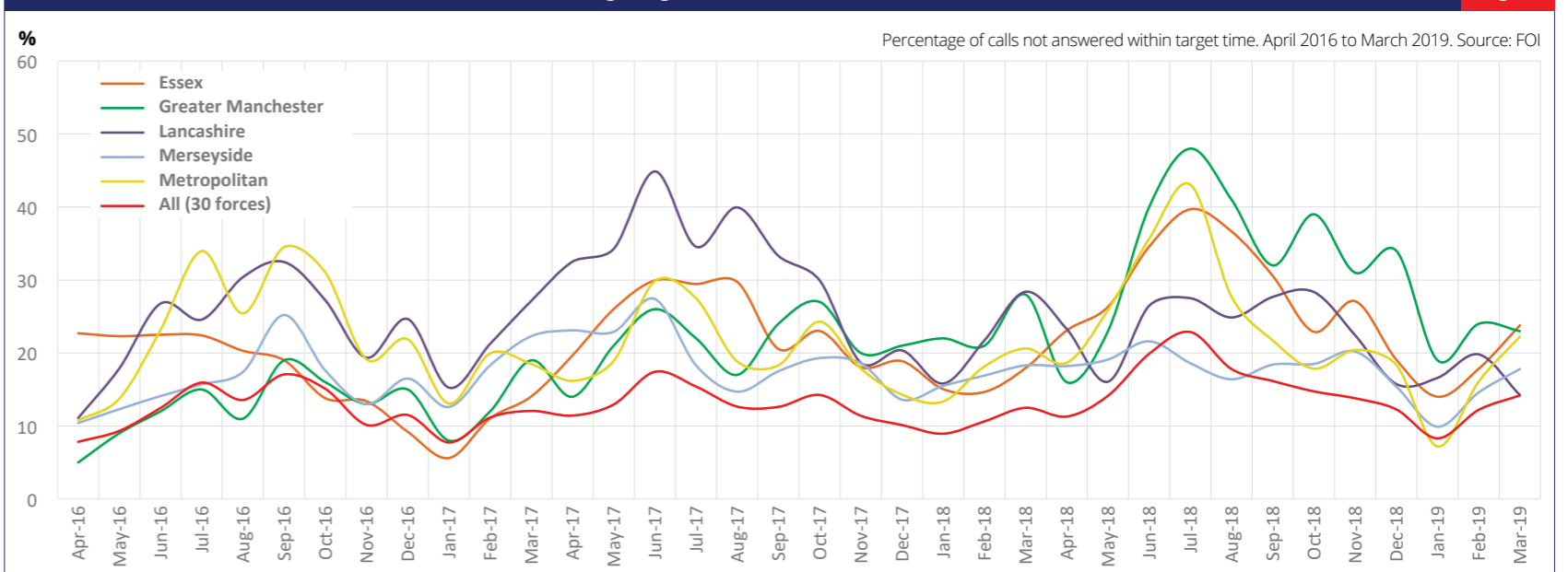
Thirty forces provided us with data on their 999 call answering targets and the percentage of 999 calls (per month) that were answered within those targets. On average, across the three years from April 2016 to March 2019, 13.1 per cent of calls were not answered on time, ranging from less than five per cent in Avon and Somerset and Dyfed-Powys (one of only two forces with a 15s rather than 10s target), to more than 20 per cent in Essex, the Metropolitan Police, GMP and especially Lancashire (see **Figure 10**).

With monthly data, we can examine how the performance of forces varied across the three years covered by the FOI data. For the five forces with the worst performance (and across all 30 on average – the red line), there are clear signs of seasonal pressures, most acutely in Lancashire’s case in June 2017 when up to 44.9 per cent of calls were not answered on time. In July 2018, GMP missed their 10 second target in almost half of the 999 calls they received (48.0 per cent), while in London in the same month, the MPS missed their 10 second target in 43.1 per cent of calls (see **Figure 11**).

**Average monthly percentage of 999 calls not answered within the waiting time target** [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.10**



**The five forces that missed their 999 call answering target most often** [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.11**

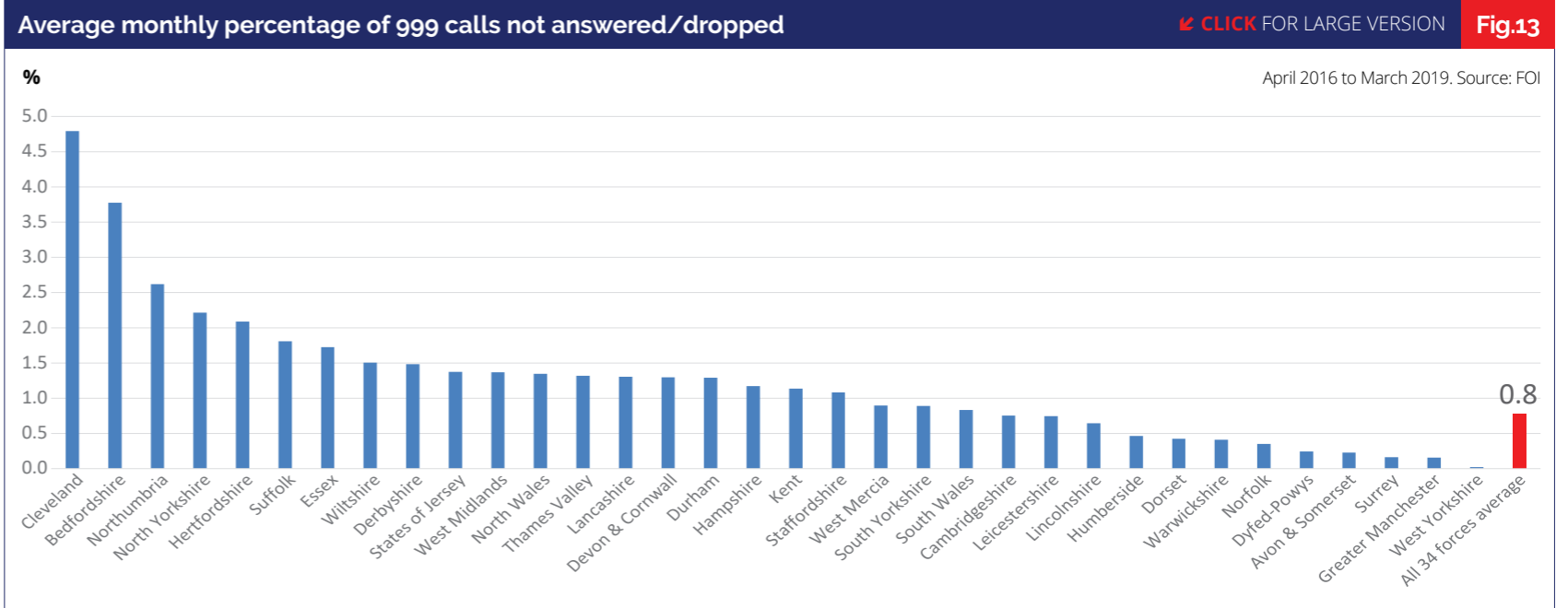
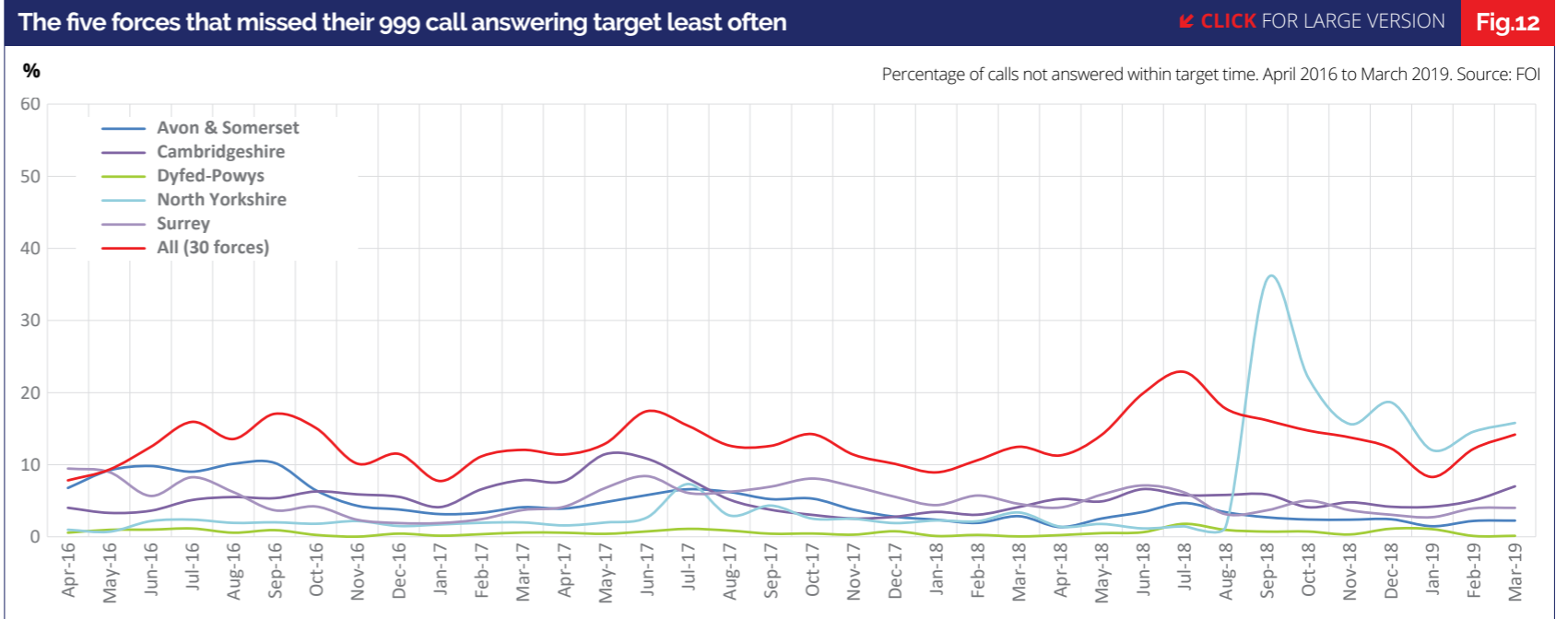


By contrast, the five forces that missed their 999 call answering targets least often show relatively few signs of seasonal pressures (see **Figure 12**), although something unusual happened in North Yorkshire in September 2018 (was there, for example, a change of call handling system/software?).

A slightly different pattern can be seen with 999 calls not answered or dropped (see **Figure 13**), which averaged 0.8 per cent of calls across 34 forces over the three years. While previously we saw that GMP missed their call answering target relatively often, this does not seem to have translated into not answered or dropped calls. Cleveland, where 4.8 per cent of 999 calls were not answered or dropped, did not provide data on missed targets, but Bedfordshire (3.8 per cent) did. The data beg the question whether, for example, GMP frequently only just missed their call answering target (i.e. just outside of 10 seconds), while Bedfordshire missed theirs more often by much longer, resulting in callers more often giving up (or perhaps hanging up and redialling). Without more detailed data on call answering times we can't be sure at this point.

*Note: Calls referred to as 'not answered or dropped' do not refer to the force ending the call. Instead either the call was not answered and automatically reverted to BT to be re-directed to another force or the caller ended the call before it was answered.*

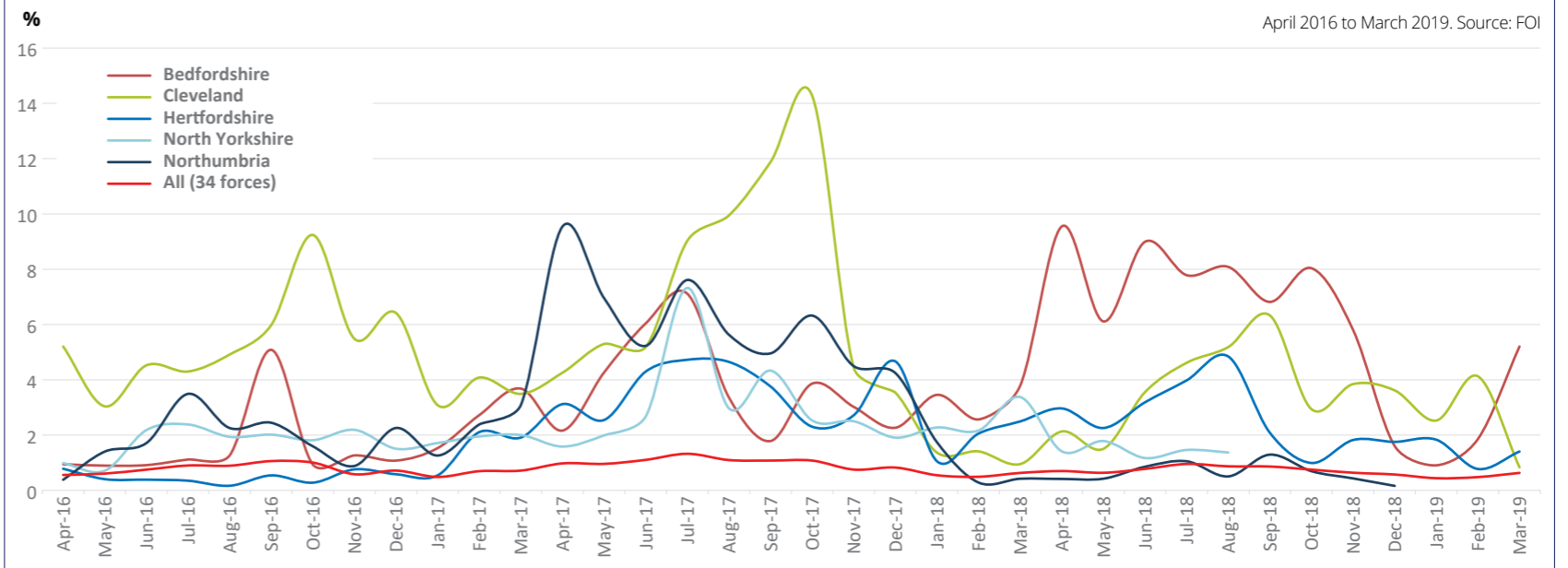
“ GMP frequently only just missed their call answering target (i.e. just outside of 10 seconds), while Bedfordshire missed theirs more often by much longer



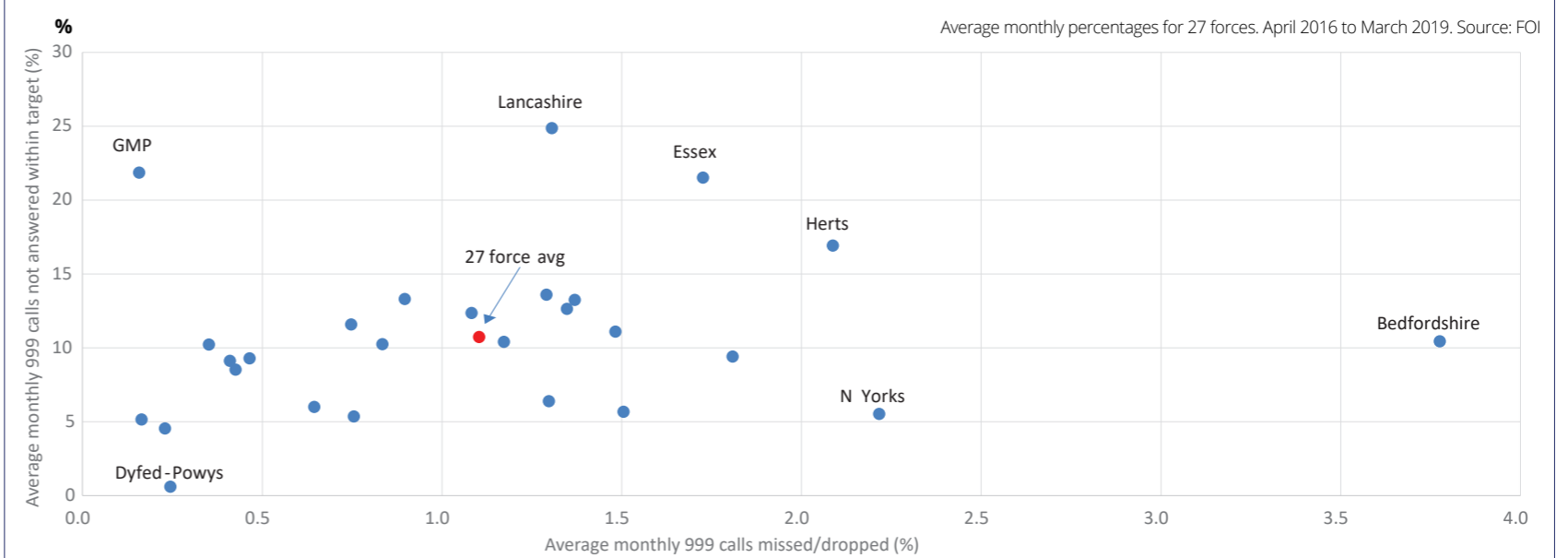
Looking at the five forces where the greatest percentage of 999 calls were not answered or were dropped (see **Figure 14**), we can see that Cleveland had an especially big issue in October 2017 (when 14.3 per cent of 999 calls were not answered), Northumbria had a particular issue during 2017, and Bedfordshire during 2018.

These data can be presented differently, looking at the relationship between missed 999 call answering targets and calls dropped for the 27 forces that provided data on both (see **Figure 15**). While there is a positive correlation it is not especially strong ( $Rsq=0.3$ ). As discussed above, we can see that GMP and Bedfordshire were clear outliers, but in different directions.

**The five forces where the greatest percentage of 999 calls were not answered/dropped** [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.14**



**The relationship between missed 999 call answer targets and not answered/dropped 999 calls** [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.15**



“While GMP missed their call answering target relatively often, this does not seem to have translated into not answered or dropped calls”

**101 call handling**

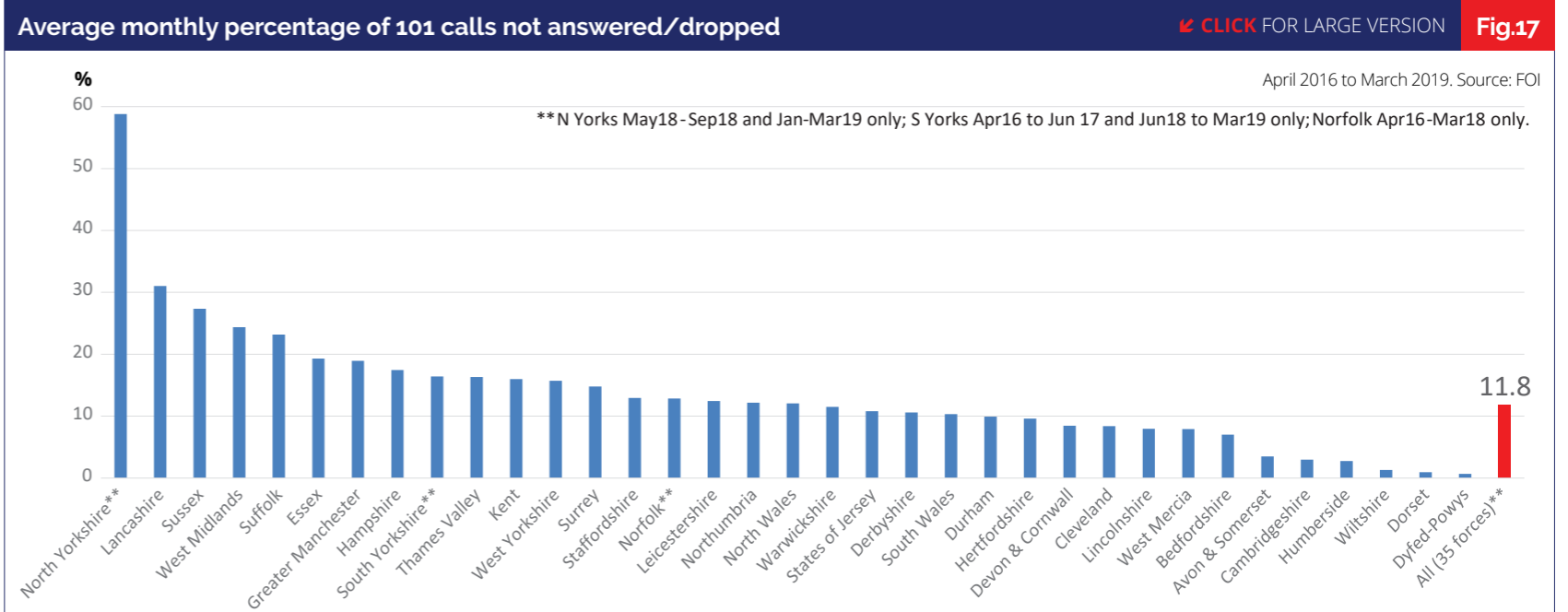
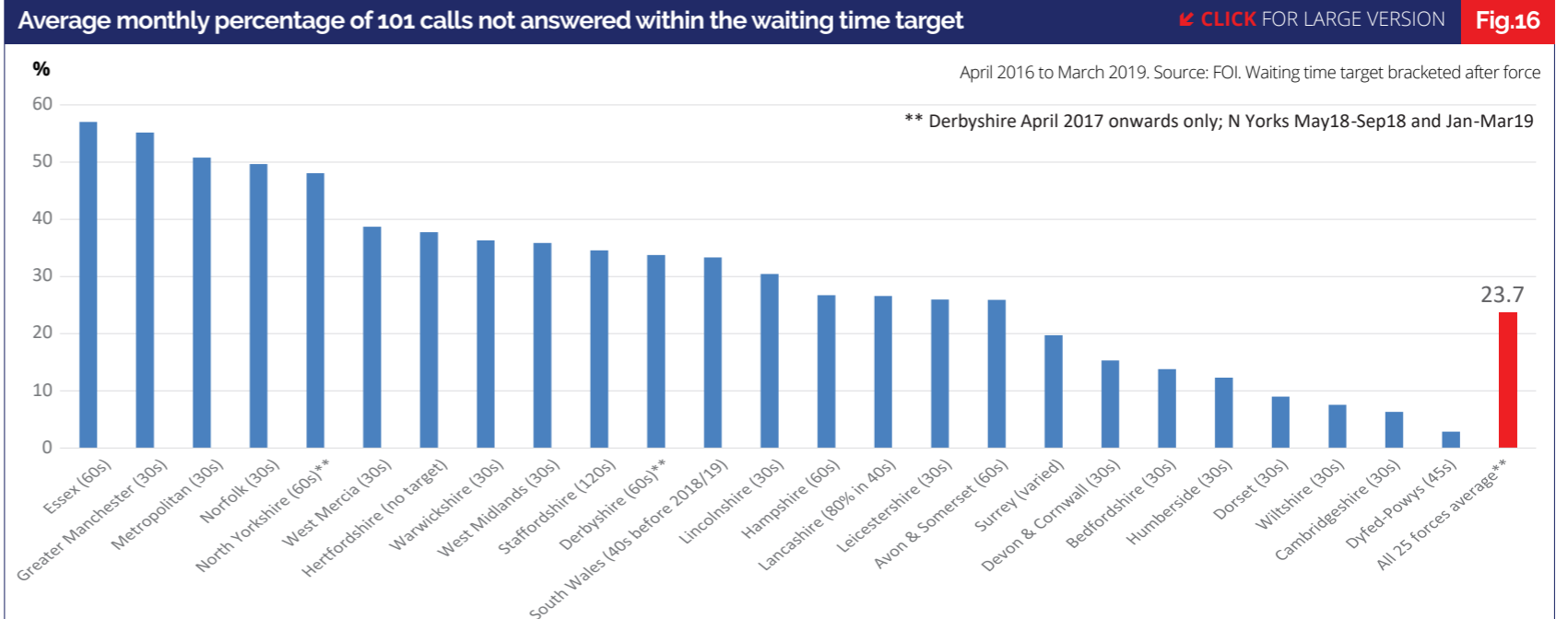
Turning our attention now to the equivalent 101 data (see **Figure 16**), we can again see a wide spread in the percentage of calls not answered within the target time, averaging 23.7 per cent across 25 forces.

Here, it is notable that Essex and GMP missed their 101 targets most often, and that by 2018/19 they were the two forces receiving the largest percentage of calls via 999 (47.7 and 44.6 per cent respectively – see **Figure 5**). That might suggest that some callers (more than is typical) are giving up on the 101 service when it is not answered and dialling 999 instead.

We can also look at the percentage of 101 calls not answered or dropped across the three years (see **Figure 17**). North Yorkshire is the clear outlier, but based on only eight months of data, while the five next worst performers were Lancashire, Sussex, West Midlands, Suffolk and Essex. In the case of Lancashire, in the first section of this report looking at call volumes we saw that they received exceptionally high levels of calls overall – but especially 101 calls – compared to other forces.

*Note: Calls referred to as ‘not answered or dropped’ do not refer to the force ending the call. Instead either the call was not answered and automatically reverted to BT to be re-directed to another force or the caller ended the call before it was answered.*

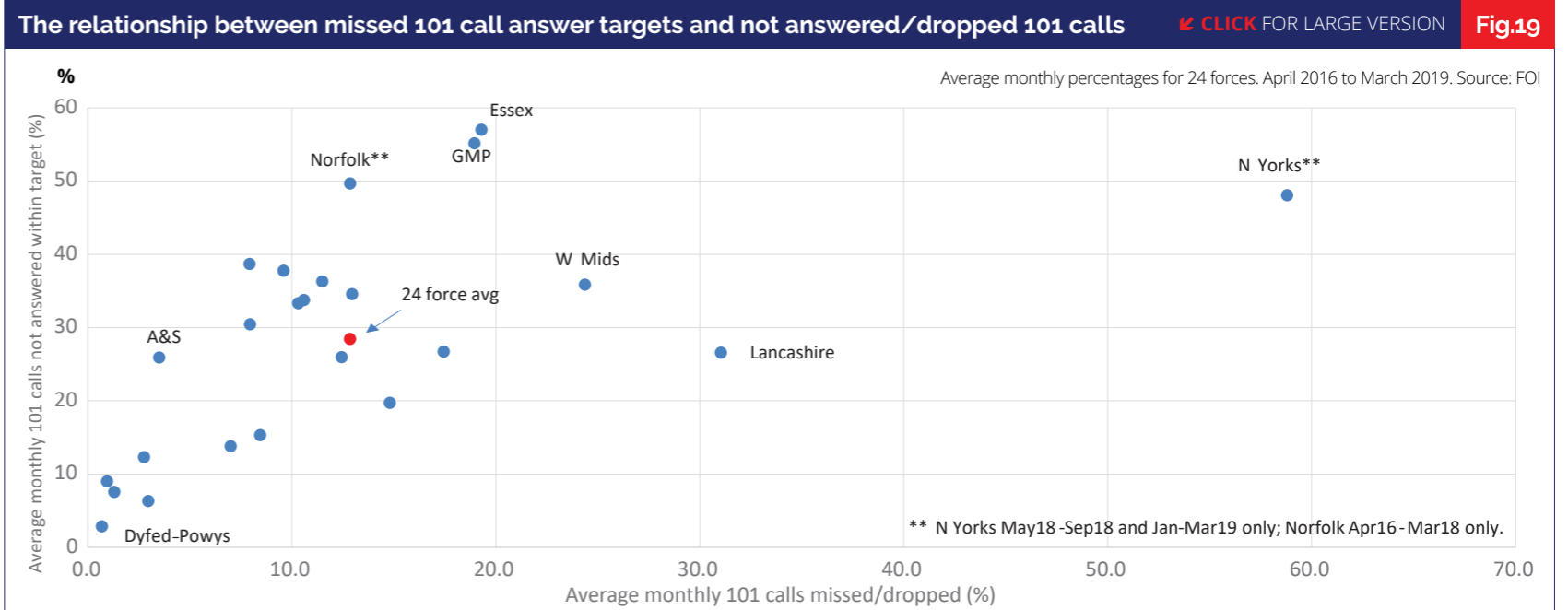
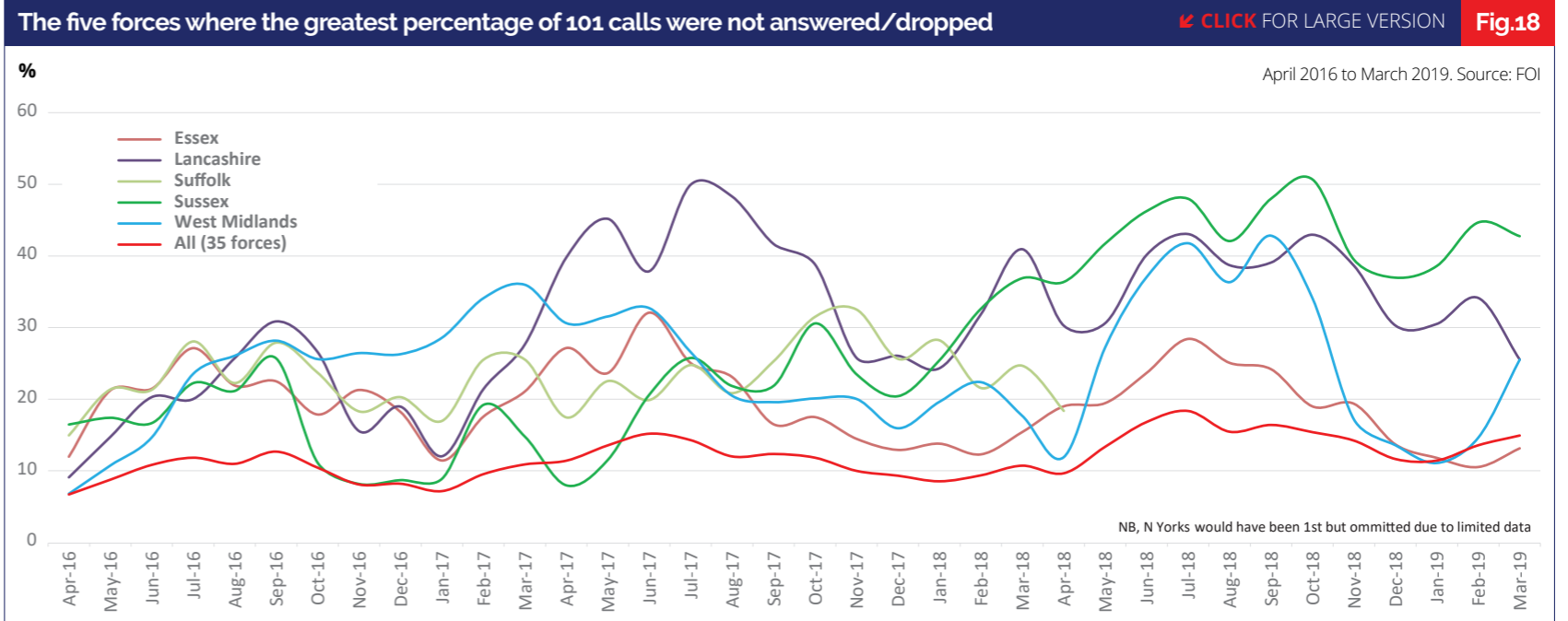
“ It is notable that Essex and GMP missed their 101 targets most often, and that by 2018/19 they were the two forces receiving the largest percentage of calls via 999



As with the 999 data, seasonal pressures on the 101 service can be seen when we look at the five worst performing forces (excluding North Yorkshire) (see **Figure 18**) – although less obviously in the case of West Midlands Police where there were issues in early-2017 and the summer of 2018. Problems in Sussex got progressively worse from the end of 2016.

Again, as with the 999 data we can examine the relationship between missed targets and not answered or dropped calls for the 101 service (see **Figure 19**), and again we see a weak positive correlation ( $Rsq=0.3$ ) and a number of outliers, notably Lancashire (and North Yorkshire, but on the basis of incomplete data).

As with the 999 data, it seems likely that average call answering times would add important context to this data. This would allow us, for example, to explore why Avon and Somerset and Lancashire, which have almost identical rates of missed call answering targets, have such different rates of calls dropped or not answered. Given that we know Lancashire experiences very high rates of 101 usage, it may be that they more often miss their 101 call answering target by a lot, resulting in callers giving up (or perhaps calling 999).



Given that we know Lancashire experiences very high rates of 101 usage, it may be that they more often miss their 101 call answering target by a lot, resulting in callers giving up

## Questions arising

In keeping with the data analysed in earlier sections of this report, the wide range of call handling performance figures seen across forces is striking.

The kinds of questions that arise from the data include:

- Is there an optimum level of call handling resourcing for a given level of demand?
- To what extent is the capacity of call handling functions, including to answer calls in a timely manner, driven by resource levels, call complexity, or call handling processes?
- To what extent is the percentage of calls that are dropped/not answered driven by overall call answering times rather than missed targets?
- Where calls are being dropped, are those callers trying again (via which route?) or giving up, and if the latter, what are the risks that are being missed?
- What is the relationship between 999 and 101 call handling performance?

In the next section, we will look at the creation of emergency incidents from 999 and 101 calls.

*Note: Calls referred to as 'not answered or dropped' do not refer to the force ending the call. Instead either the call was not answered and automatically reverted to BT to be re-directed to another force or the caller ended the call before it was answered.*

“To what extent is the capacity of call handling functions... driven by resource levels, call complexity, or call handling processes?”

## Comment

**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director



The speed of answer and the quality of the way the call is dealt with are important factors in public satisfaction and confidence. 'Every contact leaves a trace', whether it's an emergency call or a more mundane enquiry.

### High expectations

In a world where business is routinely done online or through call centres, public expectations are high. Delays and poor responses will quickly damage confidence. Police contact centre managers pay close attention to standard industry performance measures – calls in the queue, speed of answer, call duration, handler availability. The live picture may even be displayed on screens in the call centre, so that all handlers can see the current position – although that's widely seen as placing unnecessary pressure on staff and encouraging poor responses. There's an important balance between answering calls quickly and answering calls properly. Cutting calls short to jump to the next one can increase risk, pass unnecessary work to response teams, and leave a caller unhappy.

Nationally, nearly a quarter of 101 calls during 2016-19 were answered outside the target time ('missed'), or else not answered before the caller hung up ('dropped'). The rate of missed and dropped 101 calls was higher in some forces.

Headline performance data can be misleading, though. Some forces may miss their stated service levels for long periods of the day, but answer most calls before the caller gives up – performance looks poor, but the calls are answered. Other forces may have shorter periods when performance falls considerably, and many calls are dropped – but the overall

“There's an important balance between answering calls quickly and answering calls properly. Cutting calls short to jump to the next one can increase risk, pass unnecessary work to response teams, and leave a caller unhappy

performance looks fine. Which, in reality, is worse for the public?

At pressured times, there can be delays in answering 999 calls too – although more rarely, with less than one per cent of 999 calls dropped over that three-year period. However, a 'dropped' 999 creates a further problem of trying to identify whether the caller is at risk. What was the call about? Was there a genuine emergency? Is the caller location traceable?

There is also a range of service standards between forces. Forces have set their own

targets for various percentages of calls to be answered within five, 10, 15, or 20 seconds, for example. Whilst these are local matters to be negotiated between the force and its PCC, it's difficult to understand why the service standards should vary so much.

It's not just a matter of managing public expectations about answering their phone calls. My experience was that reducing service levels in answering 101 just led to more 999 calls. If callers cannot get through on 101, some will try 999 instead. Incidents can also escalate, while a slow response on the ground can lead to more people calling about the same incident. There can be a 'tipping point', where the call handling resource is overwhelmed by a combination of fresh demand and failure demand.

### Answer and response

It also highlights the close connection between capacity to answer calls and capacity to respond to incidents. If there is no resource to attend, people will keep calling. The link between incoming demand (primarily through the 999 and 101 system) and the service response (primarily the response and local policing teams) is crucial. More calls mean more jobs for local teams. More calls may reflect more 'problems' that are not being tackled. More calls may arise from 'failure demand' – for example when the public have to call back, when the promised response does not happen, or an inability to make contact with police in other ways.

# Emergency Incidents created from 999 and from 101

Fewer than a quarter of 999 calls require an emergency response, although the overwhelming majority are made in good faith



**Gavin Hales**  
Independent researcher

## Key points

- There is a very wide range of the percentage of 999 and 101 calls graded as emergency incidents, and only weak signs of seasonality.
- On average, more than three out of every four 999 calls are not graded as emergency incidents.
- Most forces receive between 70 and 90 per cent of emergency incident reports via 999, but at 50.8 per cent Bedfordshire is an outlier (along with Jersey at 41.3 per cent).

Here we examine the creation of emergency incidents from 999 and 101 calls.

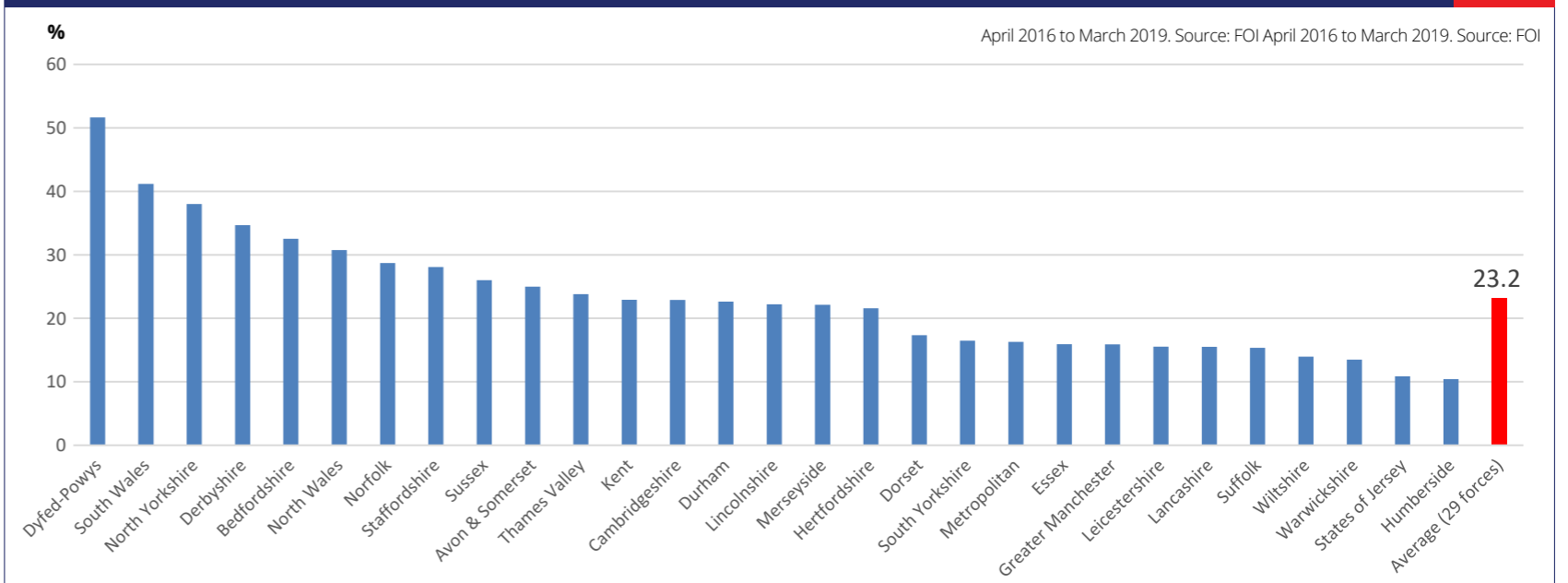
## 999 calls graded as emergency incidents

Across the three years covered by the data from 29 forces, an average of 23.2 per cent of 999 calls were graded as emergency incidents (see **Figure 20**), but at force level this varied greatly from only 10.4 per cent in Humberside to 51.6 per cent in Dyfed-Powys. As so often when examining these data, the reasons for the wide range are unclear.

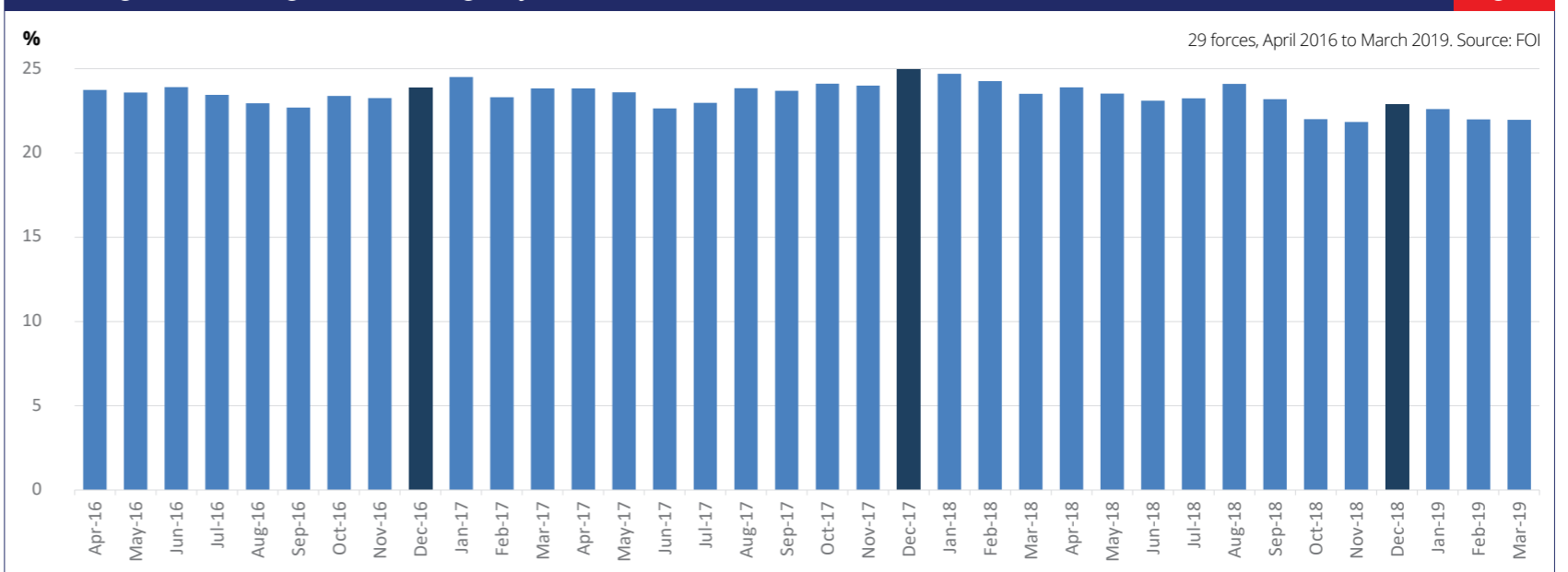
Looking at the monthly data for all 29 forces across the three years (see **Figure 21**), we can see that the percentage of 999 calls graded as emergencies has tended to be highest in the winter (the December data is highlighted), but also that it fell somewhat from 2017/18 to 2018/19 (when 101 calls were falling and 999 calls rising).

“ We can see that the percentage of 999 calls graded as emergencies has tended to be highest in the winter

Average monthly percentage of 999 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1 / I Grade) [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.20**



Percentage of 999 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1 / I Grade) [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.21**



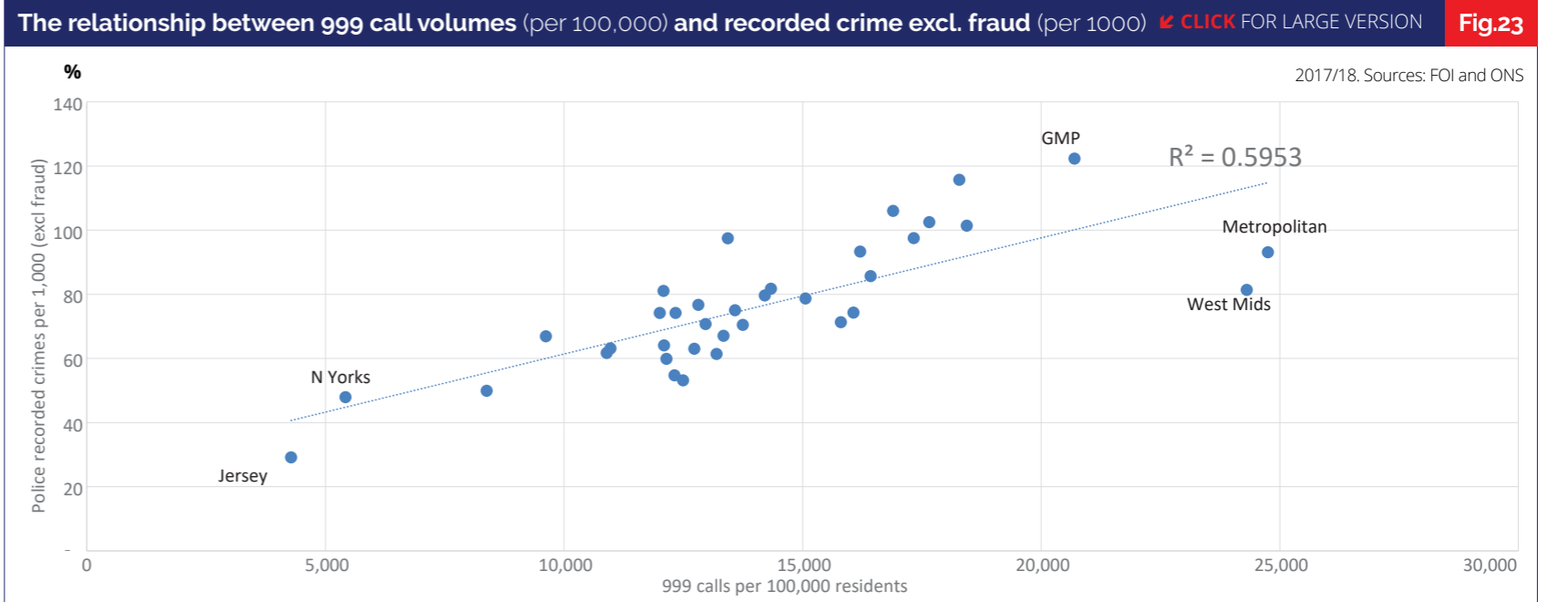
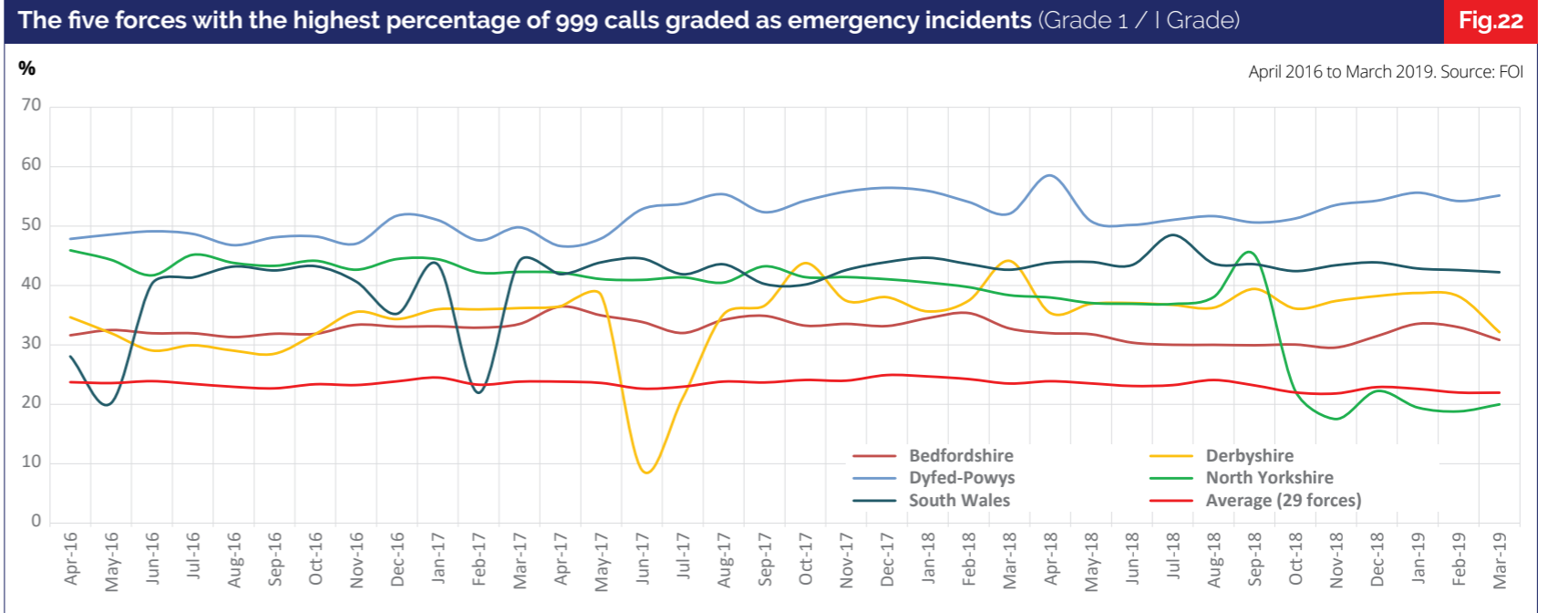


**Trends and relationships**

Looking at the monthly data for the five forces with the highest percentage of 999 calls graded as emergencies (along with the 29-force average), there are few signs of seasonal trends (see **Figure 22**). There are, however, some interesting discontinuities in the data, including in South Wales (March 2016 and February 2017), Derbyshire (June and July 2017) and North Yorkshire (from September 2018 – when earlier in the report we saw that there was a sharp rise in the percentage of 999 calls not answered on time by the force - see **Figure 12**).

Finally, on the 999 data, we can examine the relationship between call and recorded crime rates (see **Figure 23**). Overall, we see a strong positive correlation – as we would expect – but with the MPS and West Midlands as distinct outliers, with unusually low crime rates for the 999 call rates (or conversely, unusually high 999 call rates for the crime rates).

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#)

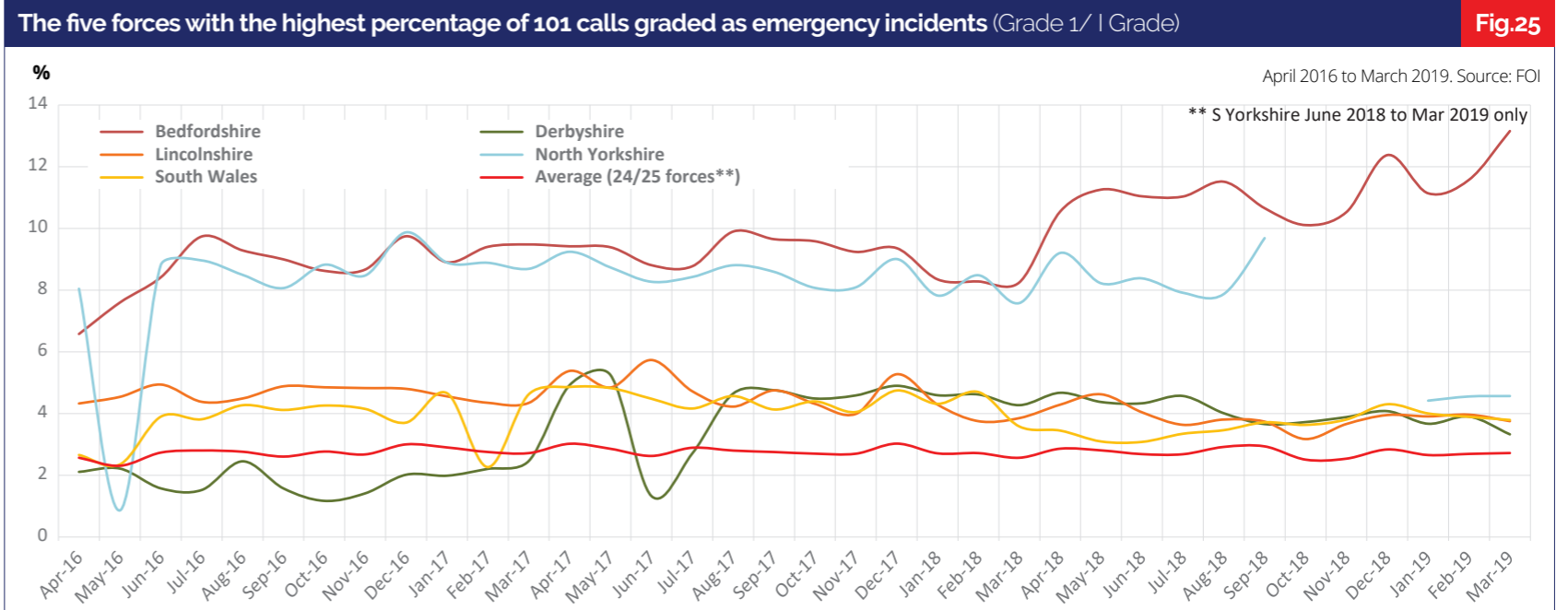
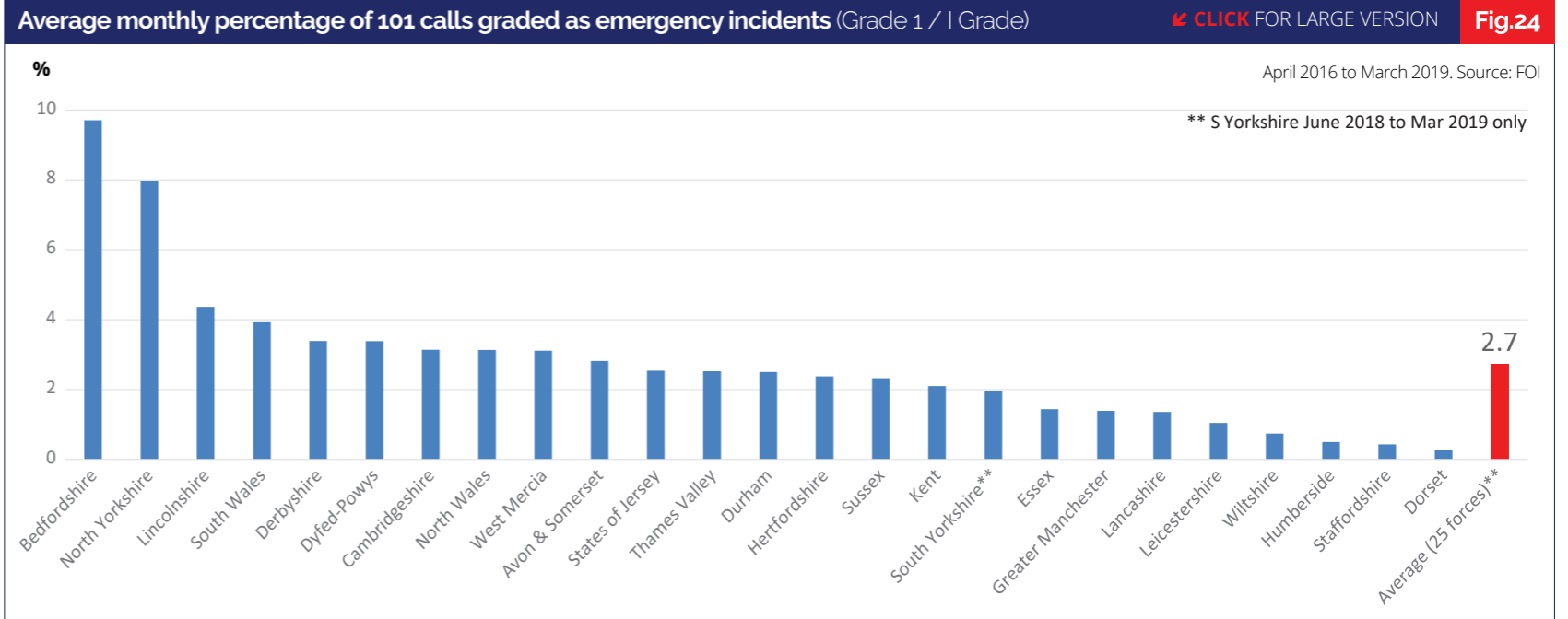


“MPS and West Midlands... [are] distinct outliers, with unusually low crime rates for the 999 call rates (or conversely, unusually high 999 call rates for the crime rates)”

**101 calls graded as emergency incidents**

Turning to the 101 data (see **Figure 24**), we again see a wide spread in the percentage graded as emergencies around the average of 2.7 per cent, with North Yorkshire and especially Bedfordshire exceptionally high.

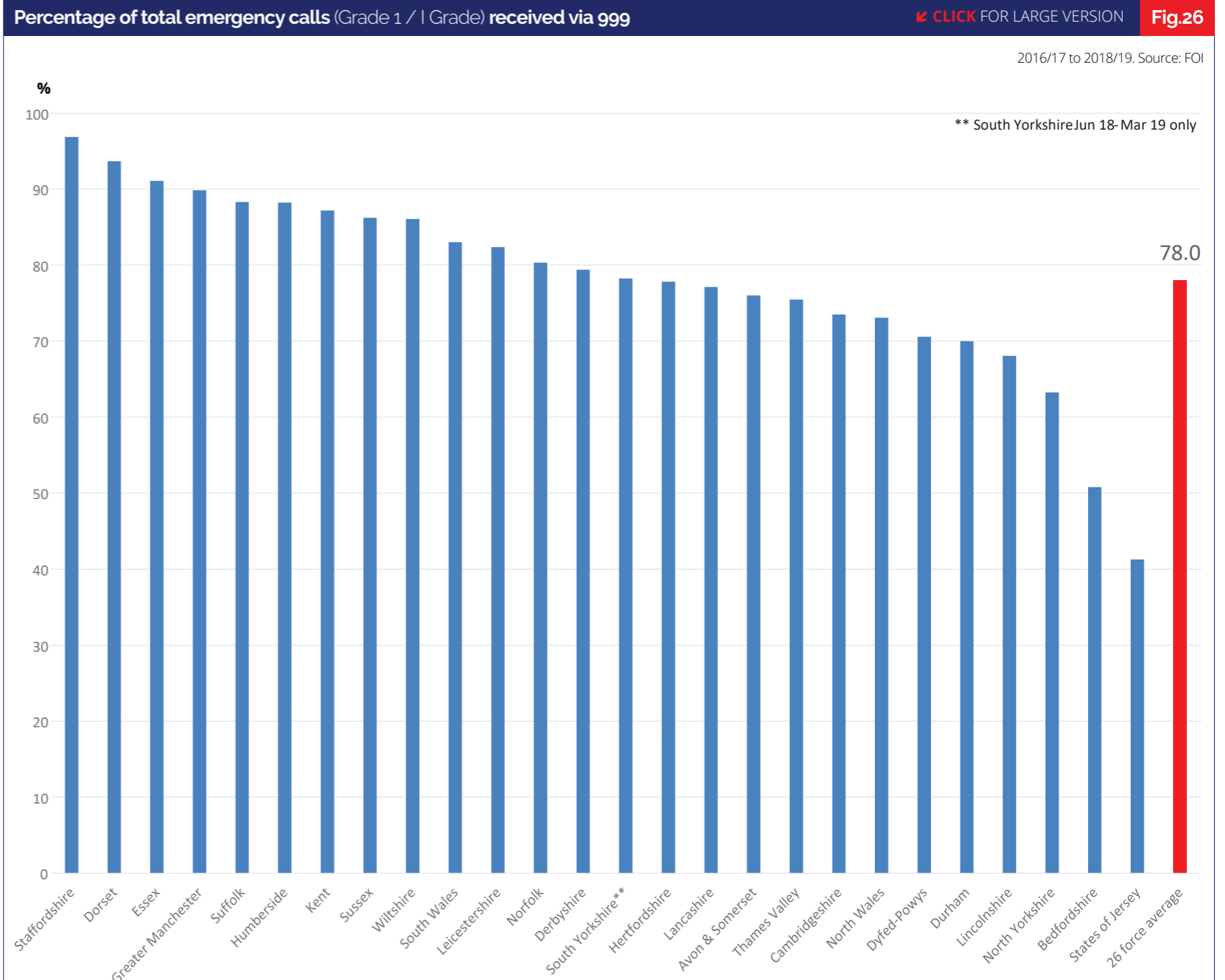
Looking at the five forces with the highest percentage of 101 calls graded as emergency incidents (see **Figure 25**), we can see that in the case of Bedfordshire it increased from around March 2018, while in North Yorkshire there was a step change down somewhere between September 2018 and January 2019 (there was a gap in the data the force provided). The evidence suggests that North Yorkshire introduced some kind of change to their call handling systems in or around September 2018.



“ We again see a wide spread in the percentage [of 101 calls] graded as emergencies ...with North Yorkshire and especially Bedfordshire exceptionally high

**Percentage of emergency calls via 999**

Next, we can look at the percentage of total emergency calls received via the 999 service (see **Figure 26**), averaging 78.0 per cent across 26 forces, but ranging from 96.9 per cent in Staffordshire to only 50.8 per cent in Bedfordshire and 41.3 per cent in Jersey.



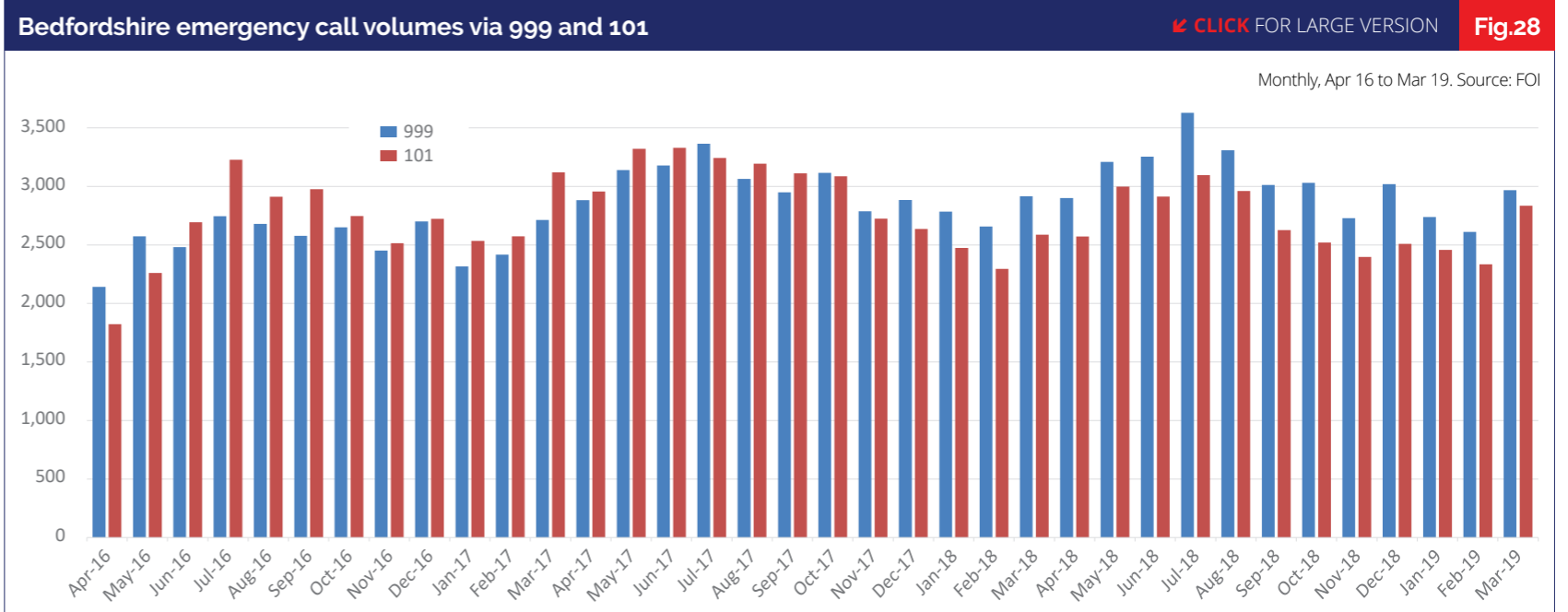
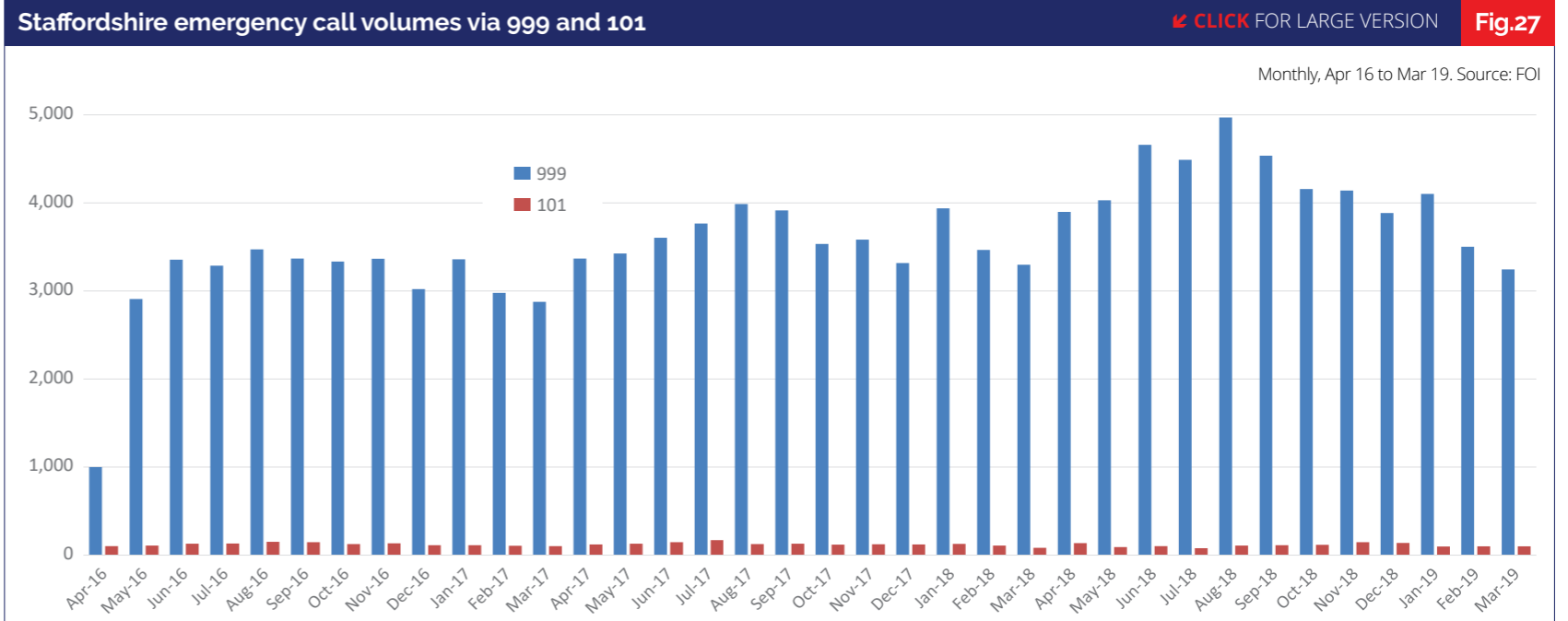
“ The percentage of total emergency calls received via the 999 service averaged 78.0 per cent across 26 forces

**Staffordshire and Bedfordshire**

The comparison between Staffordshire and Bedfordshire is particularly stark – and consistent right across the three years of monthly data (see **Figures 27** and **28**). Here, first, is Staffordshire, where almost no emergency incidents were created from 101 calls.

While in the case of Bedfordshire, we can see that from June 2016 to June 2017 a majority of emergency incidents came via the 101 service, followed by a slight reversal from December 2017.

It is important that these analyses rely on data sourced directly from the police forces themselves via a Freedom of Information request. It is possible that these extreme examples are a result of human error and/or technical failure of the data. The aim of this report is just to present the data and raise questions to prompt debate.



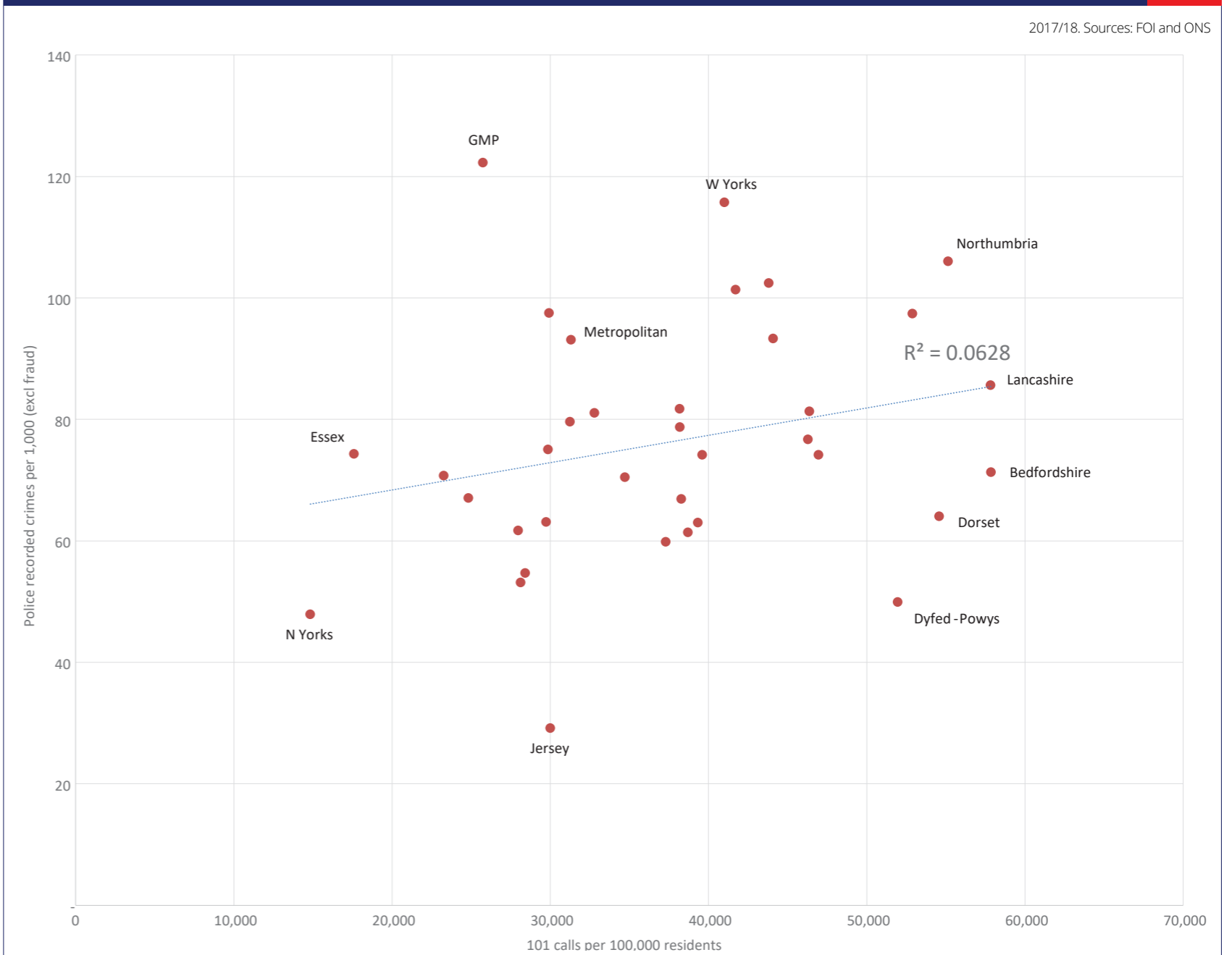
“The comparison between Staffordshire and Bedfordshire is particularly stark – and consistent right across the three years of monthly data

**Volumes and recorded crime**

Finally, a quick look at the relationship between 101 call volume and recorded crime rates confirms that there is none (see **Figure 29**). This suggests that at least at the macro level, there is no relationship between 101 and crime, which in turn perhaps suggests it would be interesting to understand how the issues reported via 101 vary by force area, and what the reasons for that might be.

**The relationship between 101 call volumes (per 100,000) and recorded crime excl. fraud (per 1,000)** [CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.29**

2017/18. Sources: FOI and ONS



It would be interesting to understand how the issues reported via 101 vary by force area, and what the reasons for that might be

**Questions arising**

The data suggest either wide variations between forces in the kinds of incidents being reported via the 999 and 101 services, or wide differences in the way forces grade incidents – or perhaps more likely, some combination of the two.

Some questions that arise from the analysis include:

- To what extent do the differences between forces reflect differences in the behaviour of the public or in the grading of calls by forces?
- Does the fall in the percentage of 999 calls being graded as emergencies reflect demand shifting from the 101 service?
- To what extent does the channel used to report emergency incidents – that is, whether they are reported via 999 or 101 – reflect the relative health of those services, measured in things like call answering times?
- At the extremes, what explains the differences in call grading between Staffordshire and Bedfordshire?
- How does the use of the 101 service vary between force areas, reflected in things like the reasons for calls, and what might be the explanations?

In the final section, we will look briefly at online call reporting, with a focus on West Yorkshire and the MPS, the two forces with the greatest volumes of online crime reports in recent years.

“To what extent is the capacity of call handling functions... driven by resource levels, call complexity, or call handling processes?”

**Comment**

**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director



It's well publicised that many 999 calls are not emergencies. Our report shows that less than a quarter of 999 calls result in an incident requiring an emergency response. However, that doesn't mean that three-quarters of 999 calls represent misuse of the system or a waste of police time.

**Calls made in good faith**

The vast majority of these 999 calls that do not result in an emergency incident are made in good faith and generally require a police response, even if that is not on the 'hurry up'. Data released by the Metropolitan Police indicated that less than half of one percent of 999 and 101 calls were misuse. That equates to around 65 misuse calls a day out of a total

“More could be done to help understand what is really driving call demand, and how the workload could be reduced or managed better

of around 13,400 calls a day.

While there are regular stories about misuse of the 999 system, and frustrating as they are, these are still relatively few in number. A Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) news release, reported in the Guardian (30/12/19)

said that “Call handlers identified 22,491 hoax 999 calls to the Metropolitan police in the first 11 months of 2019. There were also 2,912 hoax calls to the non-emergency 101 police number. Overall, the MPS received 2,157,080 calls to 999 between 1 January and 30 November this year (2019). Over the same period in 2018, call handlers took more than 2 million 999 calls, but 21,733 of these were unnecessary.”

That's around less than 0.5% of total 999 and 101 calls.

The simple reality is that what most people understand to be an 'emergency' is often not a precise match to police incident grading policy.

**101 calls that become emergencies**

What's largely overlooked, however, is that a significant number of 101s result in emergency incidents – around 22% of emergency incidents originate from a 101 call. There are large variations between forces, which are hard to understand. In Staffordshire, almost all emergency incidents originate from a 999 call, whereas in Bedfordshire, it's just over half.

That variation brings challenges for resource management within call centres, and for a wider ambition to shift demand onto other channels, such as online reporting, or using call-backs to manage pressure on the 101 system. There may be considerable risk in that 101 queue and in the online reports, which will only get picked up later.

There is still little organisational understanding of what people are actually calling about, and why. Incident grades and

incident types provide basic information, but not every call will be converted into an incident.

The codes don't provide much help with analysing root causes or what the caller wants – not everyone wants or expects a response. It appears that little is being done nationally with

“That variation brings challenges for resource management within call centres, and for a wider ambition to shift demand onto other channels

the available information anyway. More could be done to help understand what is really driving call demand, and how the workload could be reduced or managed better.

A good example is the switchboard function – a unit that filters calls and routes them to the right place. Several forces removed their switchboard to make savings, reckoning that it was an unnecessary step, but re-introduced them after finding that call handlers were swamped with extra work. This knowledge and experience needs to be captured.

**National-level analysis**

The NPCC has recently discussed the need for national-level analysis and collation of performance data. The National Strategy for Contact Management may need to be revised, while the 101 contract needs to complement the digital strategy and the roll-out of Single Online Home.

# Online crime reporting: focusing on West Yorkshire and the MPS

Few forces attract significant levels of online crime reporting; a better understanding of public expectations is key



**Gavin Hales**  
Independent researcher

## Key points

- Only the MPS and especially West Yorkshire Police are receiving material volumes of online crime reports.
- In both West Yorkshire Police and the MPS, the number of online crime reports is rising.
- There is no clear evidence yet that online crime reporting is impacting on 999 or 101 call volumes.
- Further investigation would be needed to understand if the material volumes of online reports in West Yorkshire Police reflect an increase in overall reporting, or a shift from other channels.

Here we examine online crime reporting trends for any evidence they have impacted on call volumes.

## Online crime reporting volumes by force

Twenty-six forces provided data on the volumes of online crime reports they have received. Looking only at the most recent year, 2018/19 (see **Figure 30**), we can see that West Yorkshire and the MPS are way ahead of other forces in the use of online channels. Online crime reporting appears to be rising at a similar rate in West Yorkshire and the MPS (see **Figure 31**), but with greater monthly variation in the former.

Relative to call volumes, there are still relatively few online crime reports in either force, and the volumes seem unlikely to account for the reduction in 101 calls, particularly between 2017/18 and 2018/19 in the MPS. On the other hand, the West Yorkshire Police's online crime reporting numbers do closely track call volumes, while the MPS data are suggestive of a shift from 101 to 999 (see **Figures 32 and 33 overleaf**).

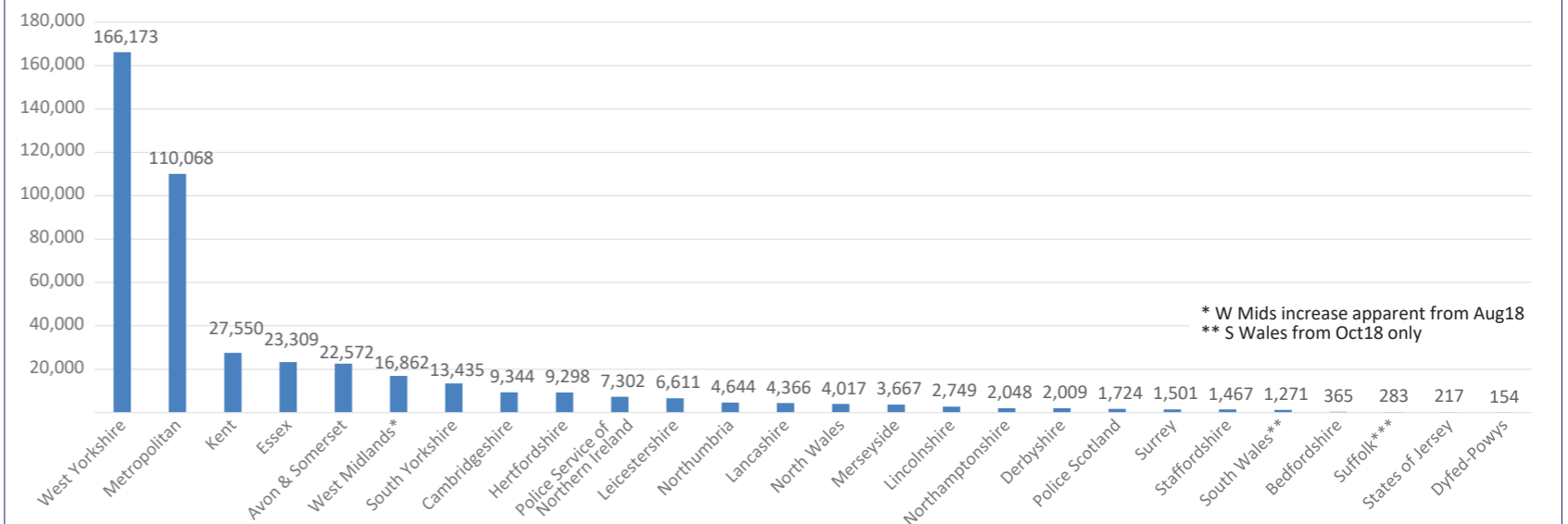
## Questions arising

- Has the additional channel resulted in more demand, rather than shifting demand away from the 999 and 101 services?

Total crimes recorded via online reporting

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.30**

2018/19. Source: FOI

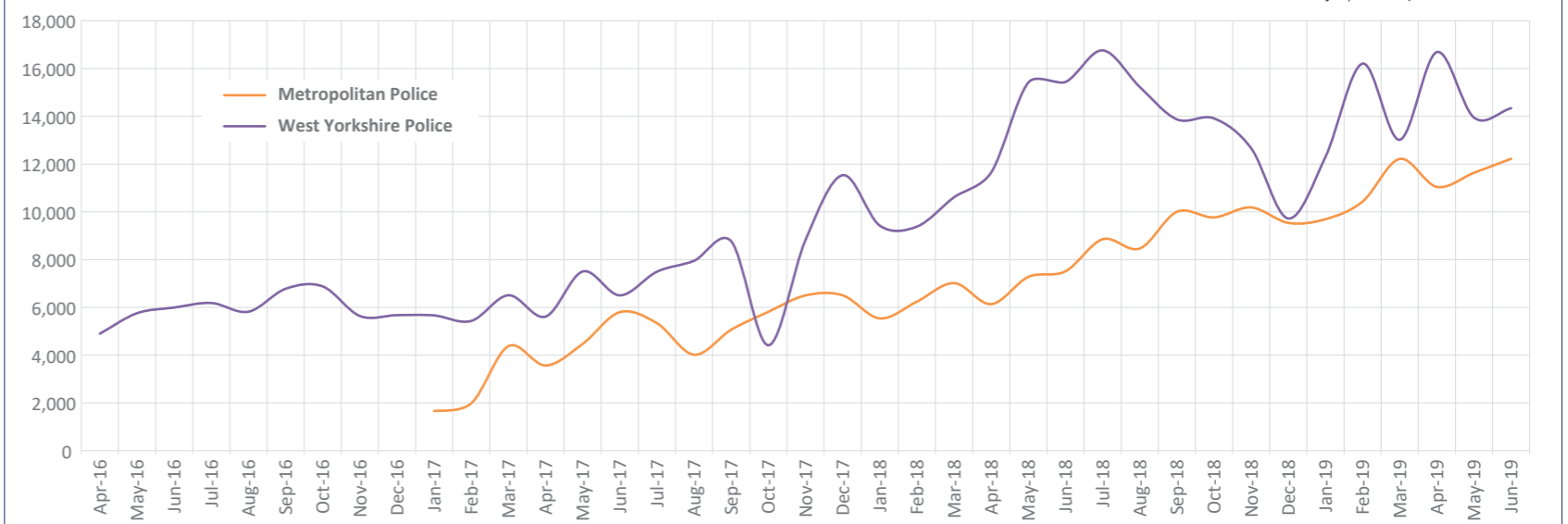


\* W Mids increase apparent from Aug18  
\*\* S Wales from Oct18 only

Crimes reported online: West Yorkshire and Metropolitan Police

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.31**

Monthly Apr 16 to Jun 19. Source: FOI



**Comment**

**Ian Wiggett**  
CoPaCC Director



Online crime recording has been promoted as one step towards transformation in call handling. Policing is still reliant on the public making phone calls to report incidents and conduct business, when many other organisations have long since moved to online interactions and self-service. It can be easily forgotten that most of the public only contact the police very rarely, if at all. It can feel strange and old-fashioned to have to visit a police station in person (often a long way away, open at limited times only), or to have to wait a long time for a phone call to be answered, only to be asked a lot of odd questions. Sometimes it's just to obtain a report number. Sometimes advice is what is really wanted.

Forces also handle online reporting in different ways. Only certain crime and incident types may be accepted for an online report. Some forces may require callers to leave details to be called back later – which can then create further challenges in managing the 'call-back' queue.

A good understanding of why people call police will help develop a service offer that meets the public's needs. That is more than a list of incident reports by code and grade. There are usually other underlying factors which lead a person to choose to visit their local police station, or phone 101 or 999; these factors often do not end up on the record of that contact.

Unless those underlying factors are understood, introducing alternative systems of diverting calls to other channels may have limited impact on call demand. In fact, there is a risk that it will simply add to the workload.

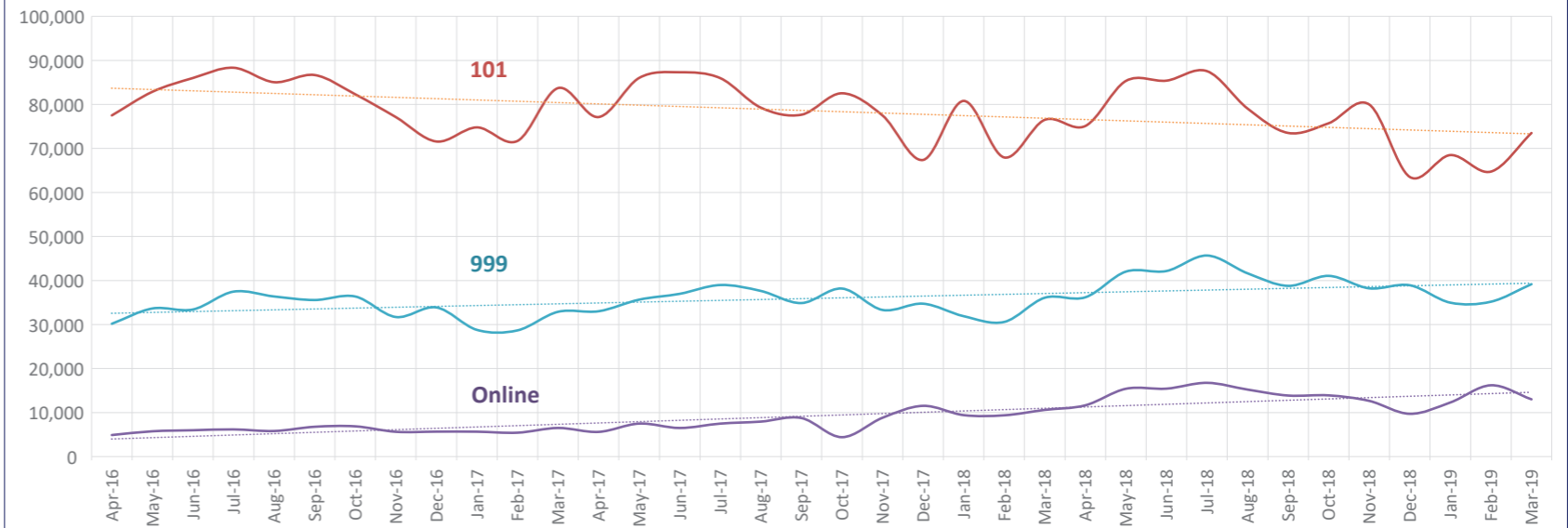
At the same time, the public increasingly expect to conduct business online. There is also an expectation that social media accounts are monitored – particularly when these are increasingly being used to tell the whole world that you are not happy with the service you are receiving.

Data is limited, but there is some sign that 101 calls reduce as online crime reports increase. However, with the increase in 999 calls, any net gain in relieving pressure on call handling is limited.

**Crimes reported online and 101 and 999 calls received: West Yorkshire**

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.32**

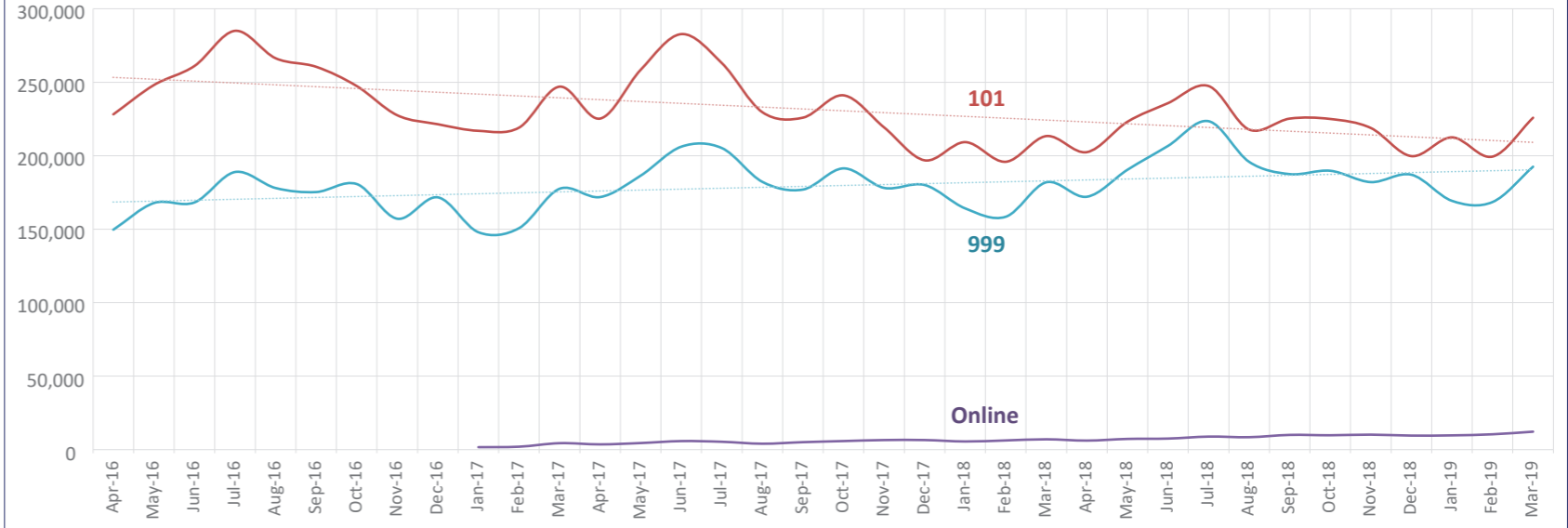
Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI



**Crimes reported online and 101 and 999 calls received: Metropolitan**

[CLICK FOR LARGE VERSION](#) **Fig.33**

Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI

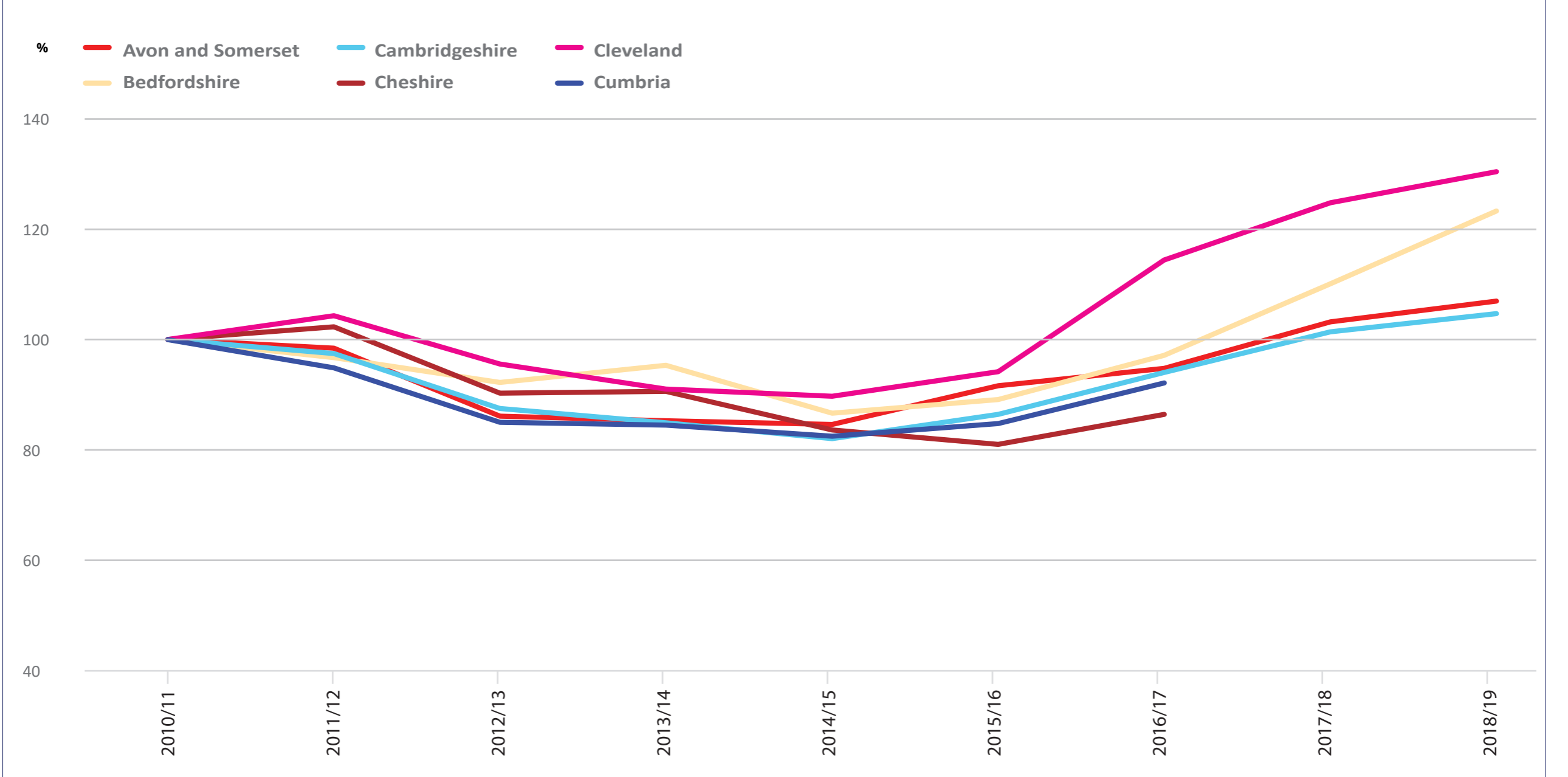




999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 1 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1a**

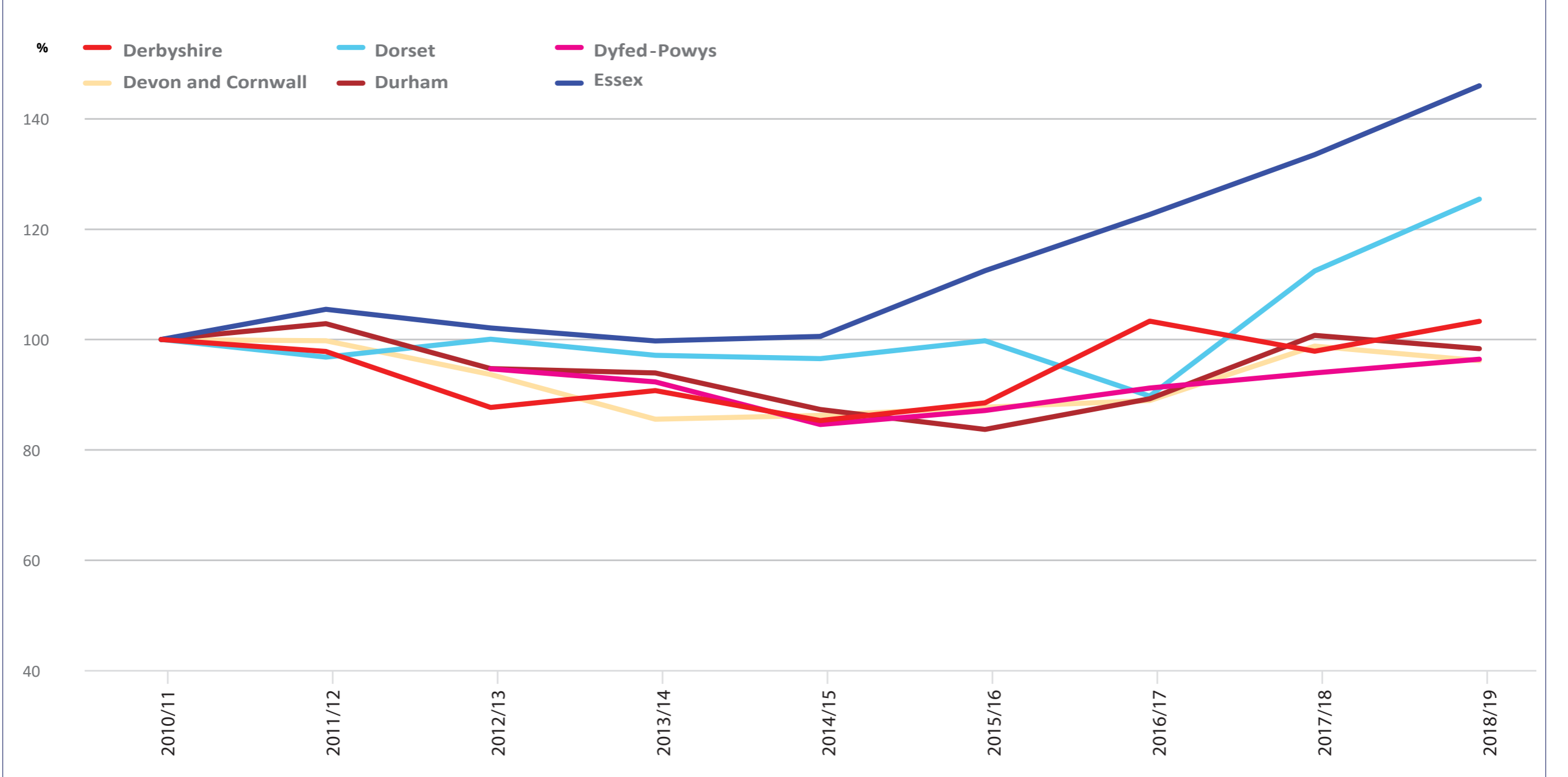
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI



999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 2 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1b**

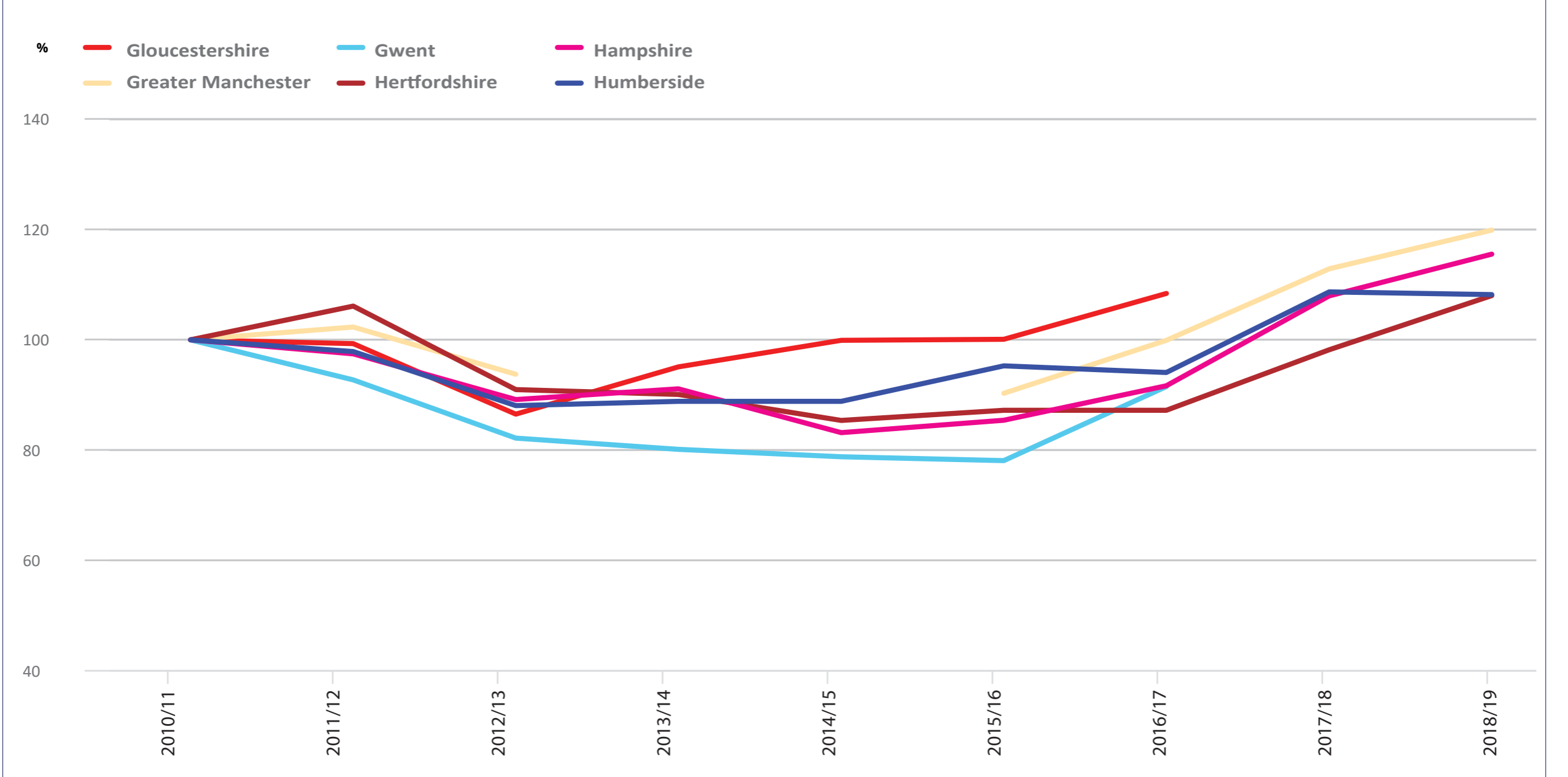
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI



999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 3 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1c**

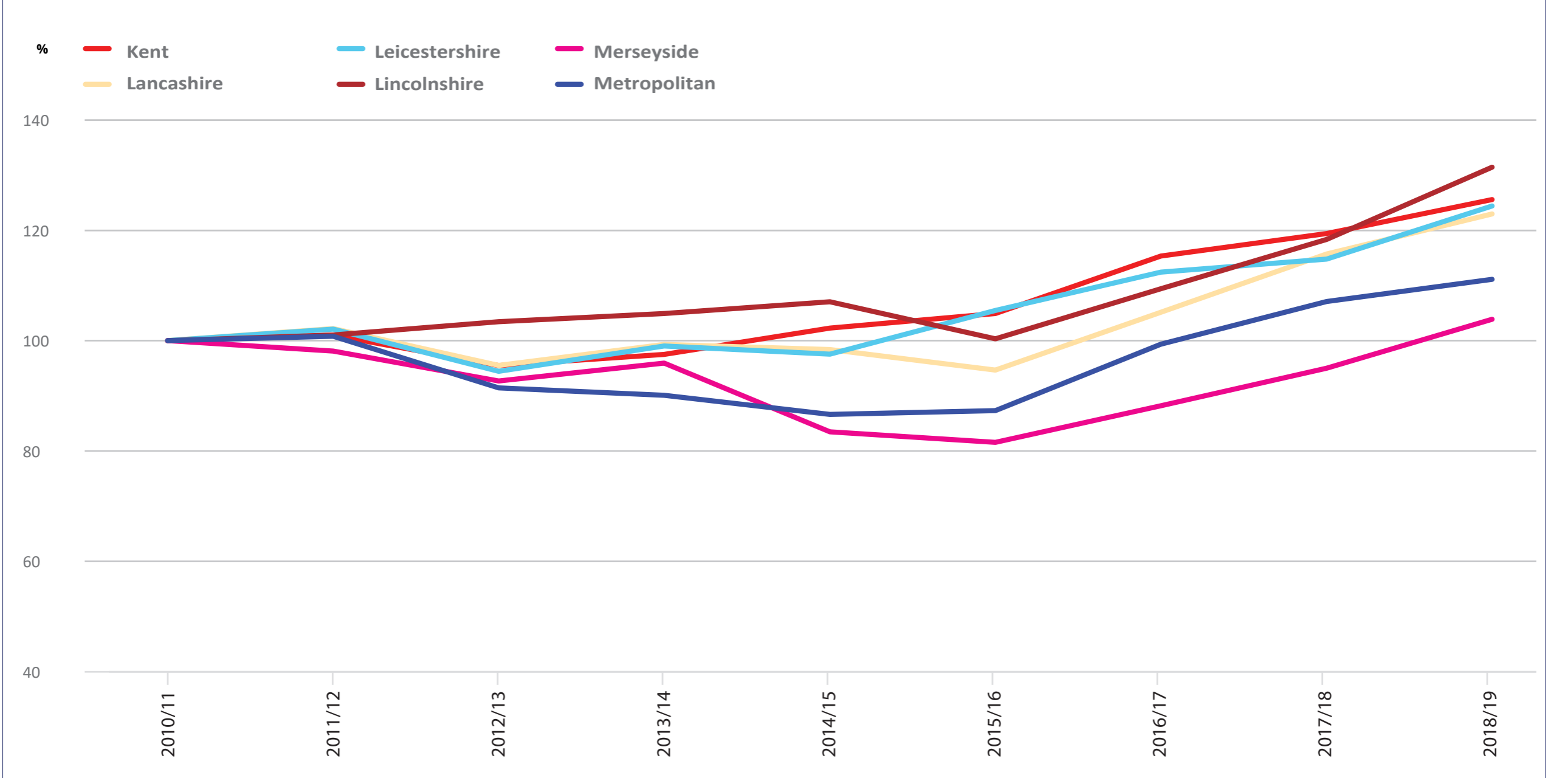
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI



999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 4 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1d**

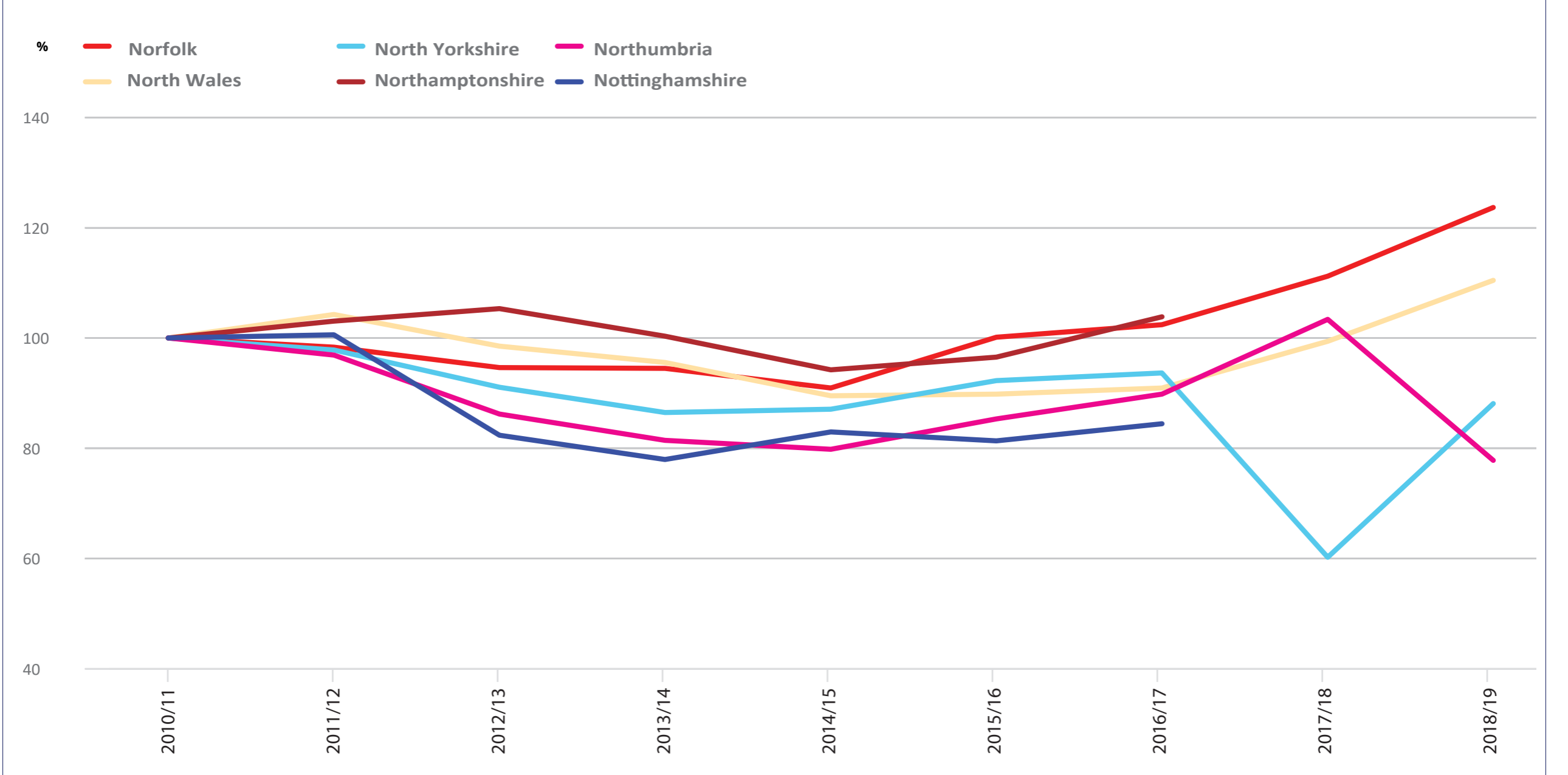
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI



999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 5 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1e**

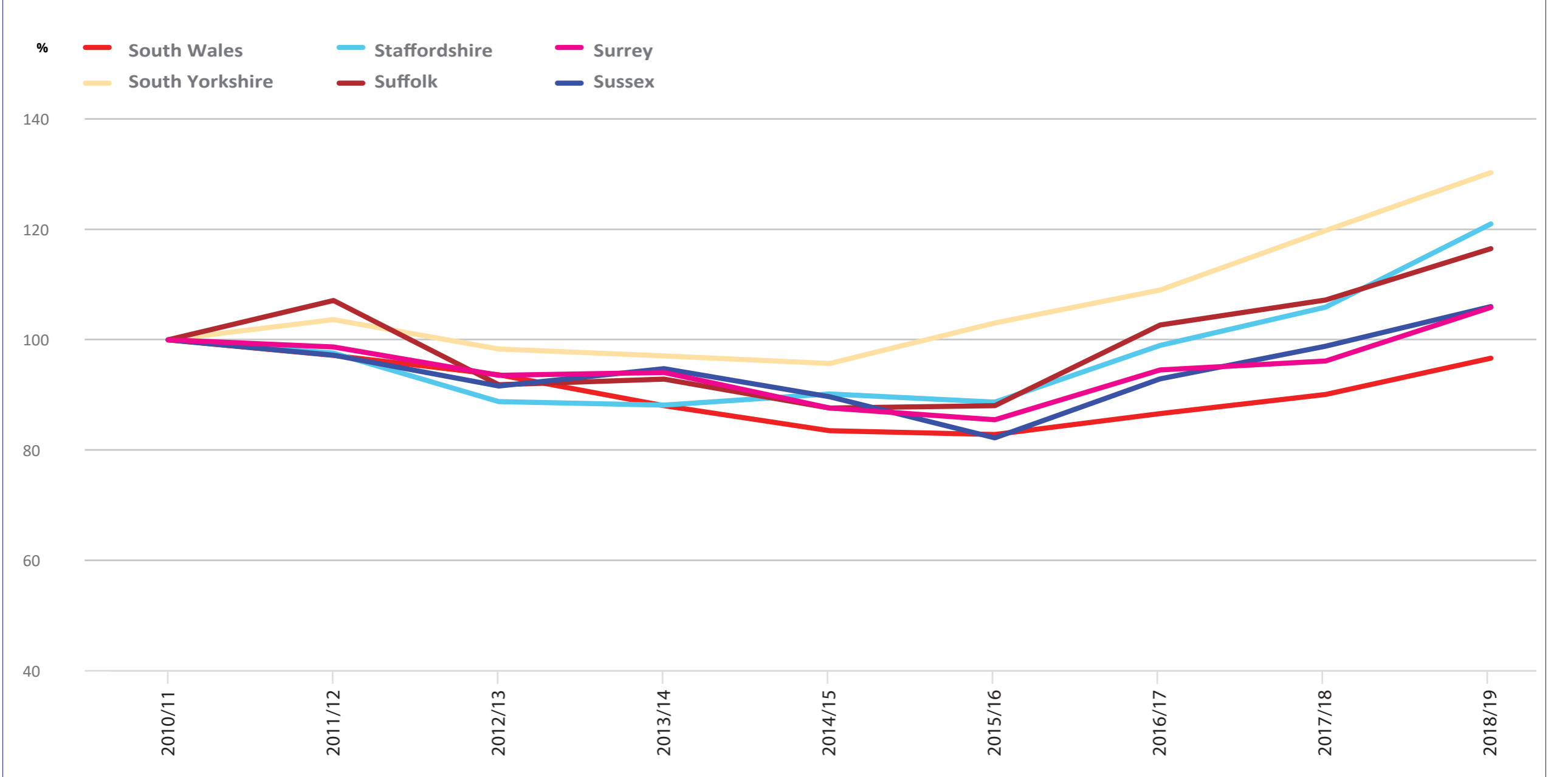
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI



999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 6 of 7

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.1f**

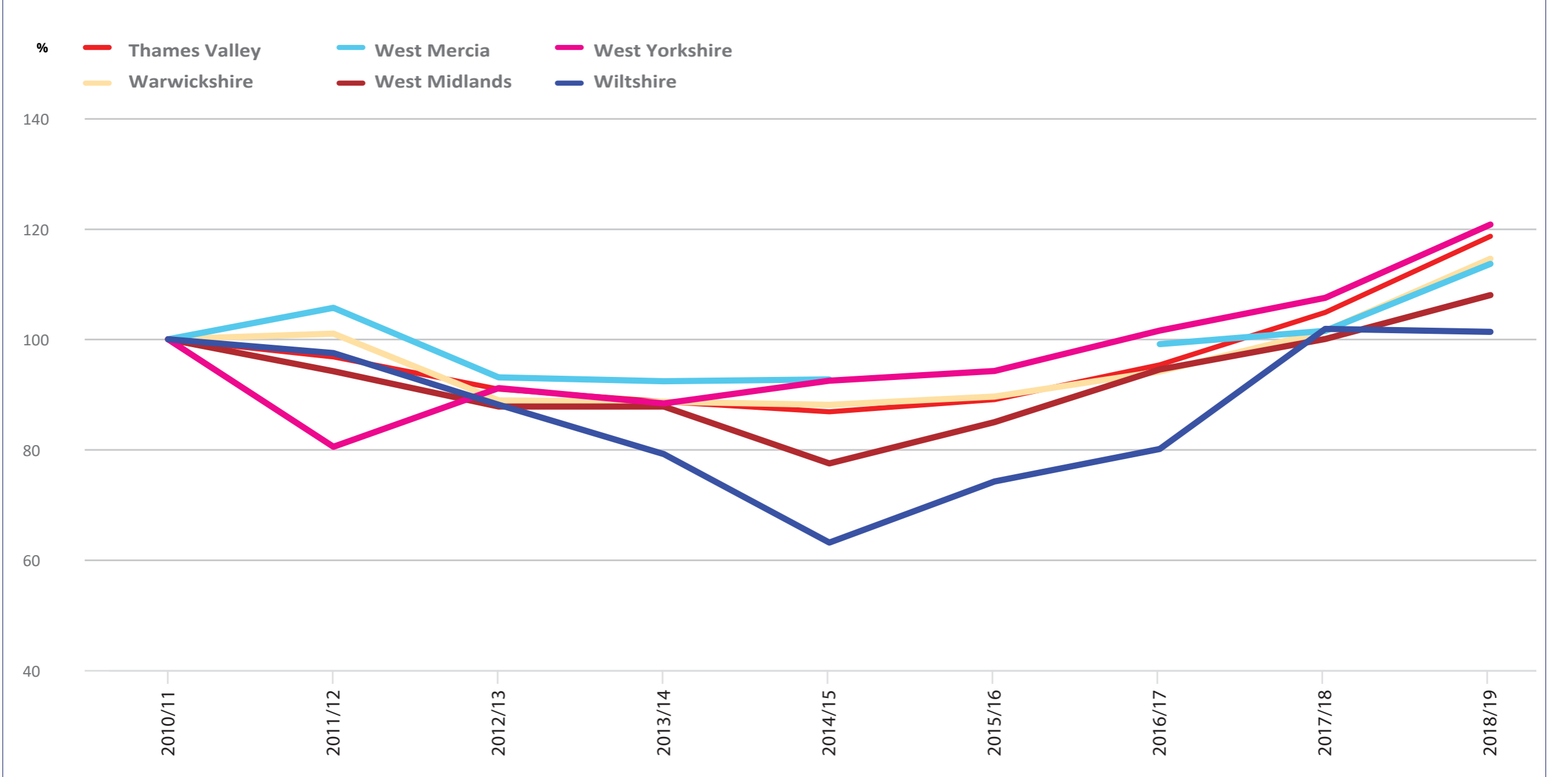
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI

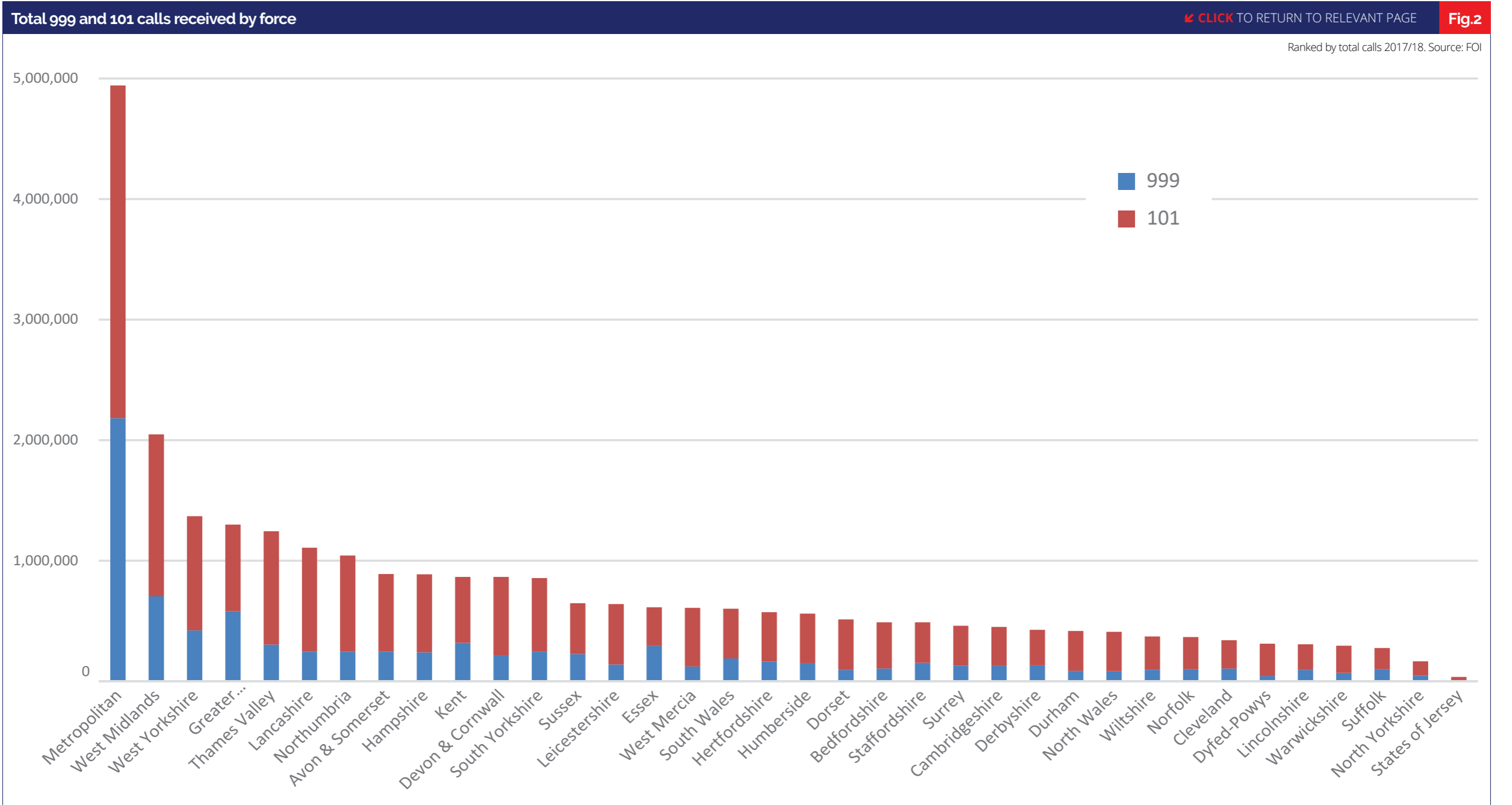


999 call volumes from 2010/11 to 2018/19 (indexed to 2010/11): Part 7 of 7

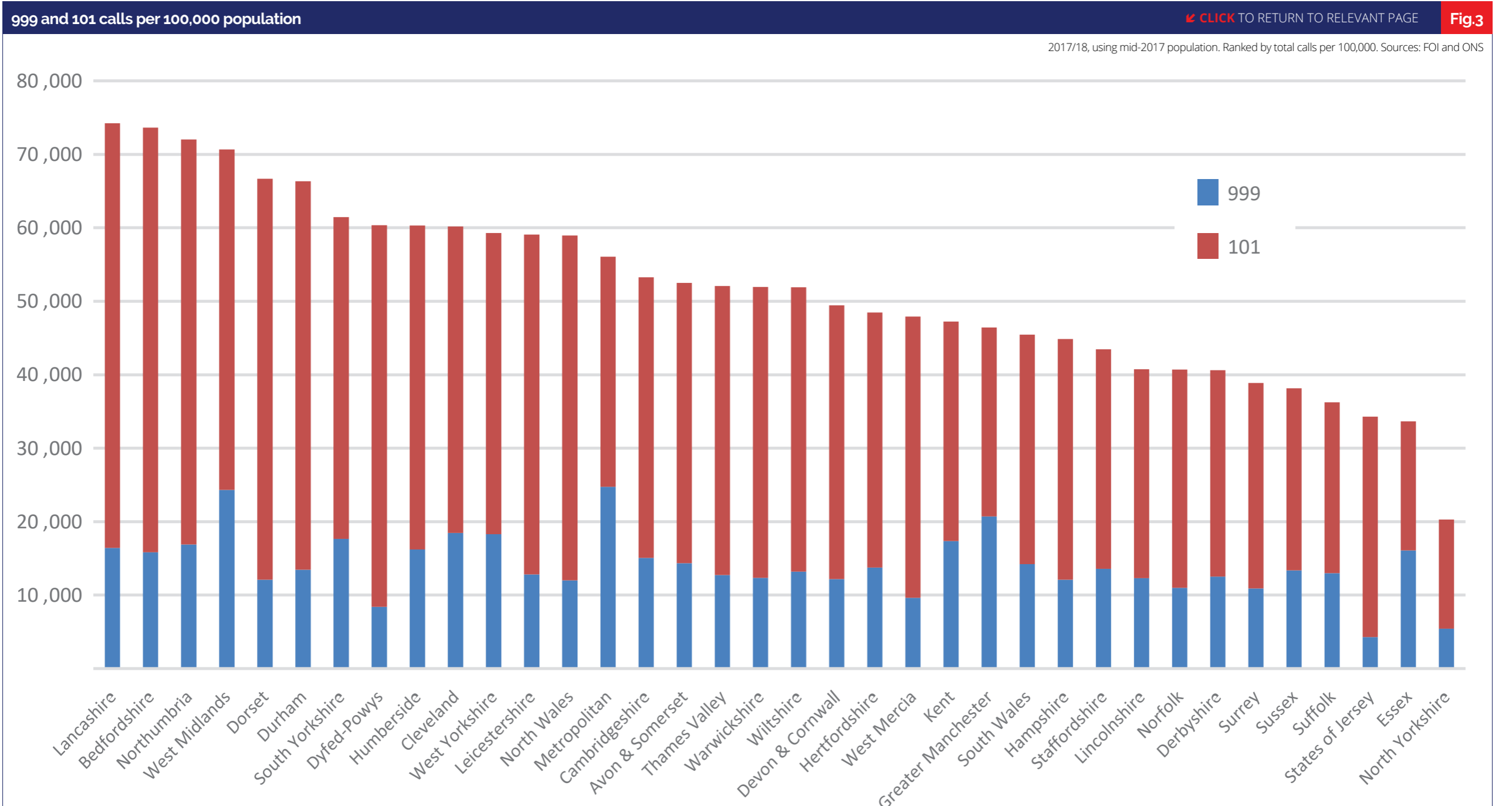
[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.19**

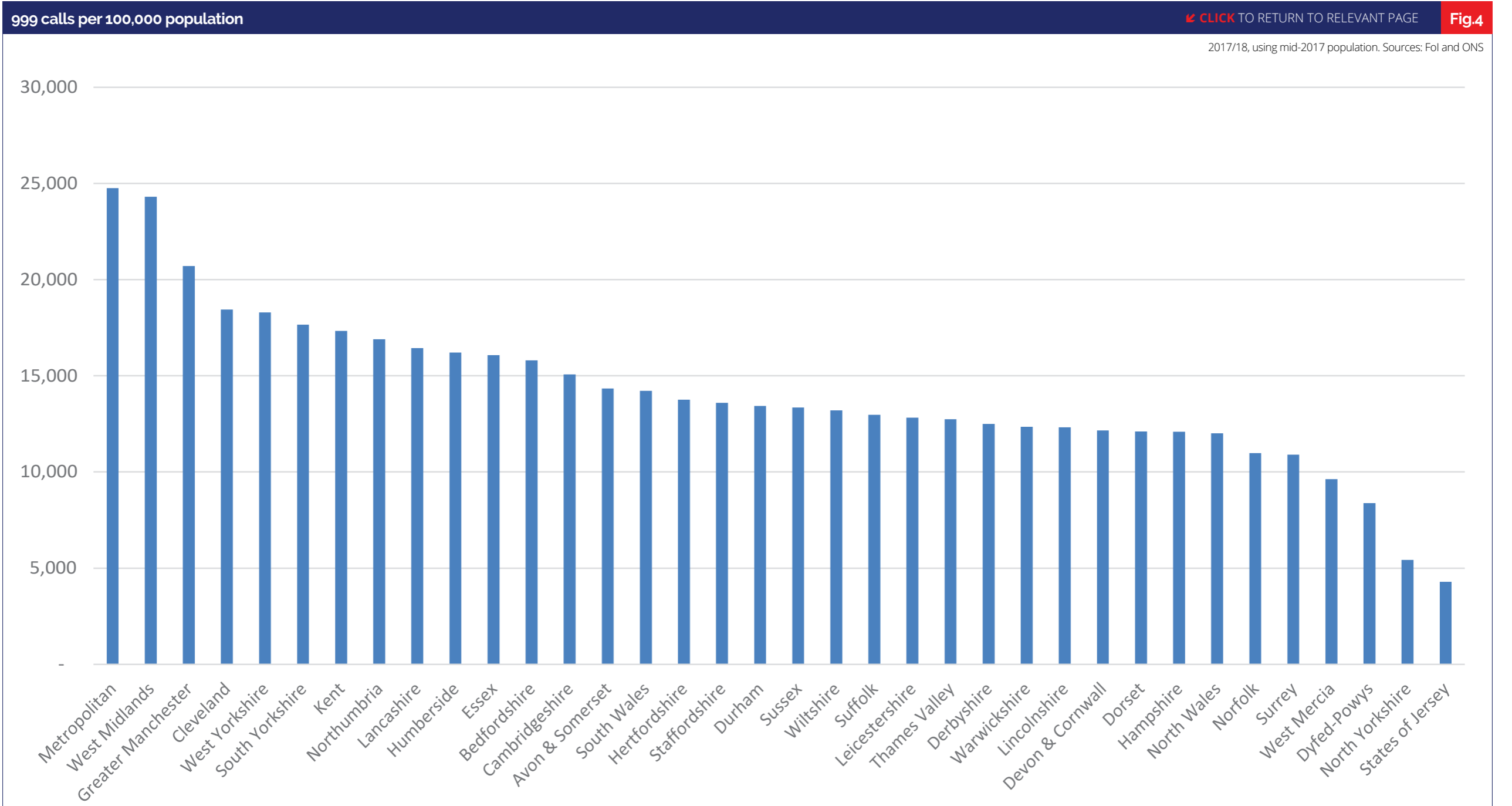
Ranked by total calls 2017/18. Source: FOI

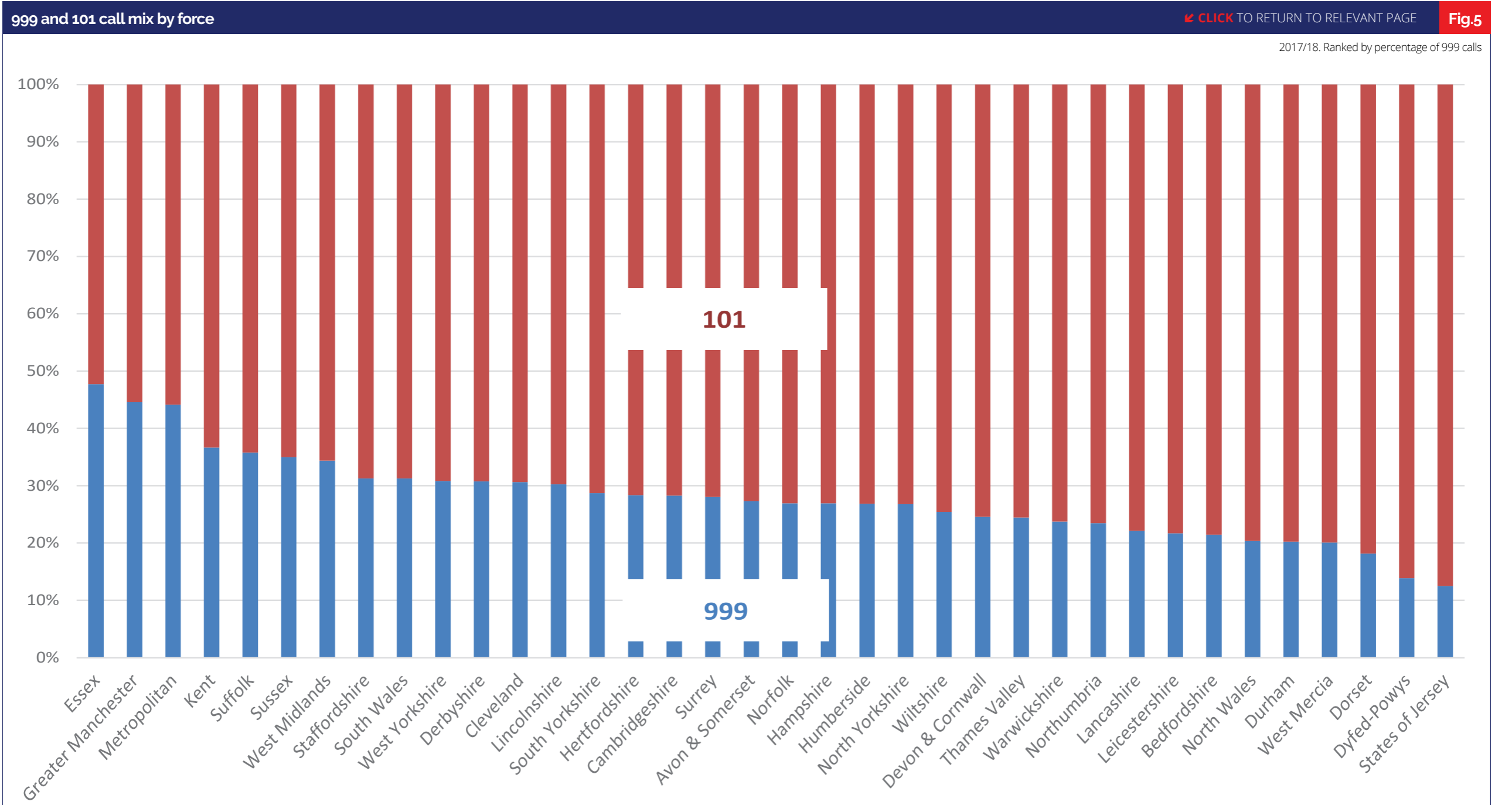








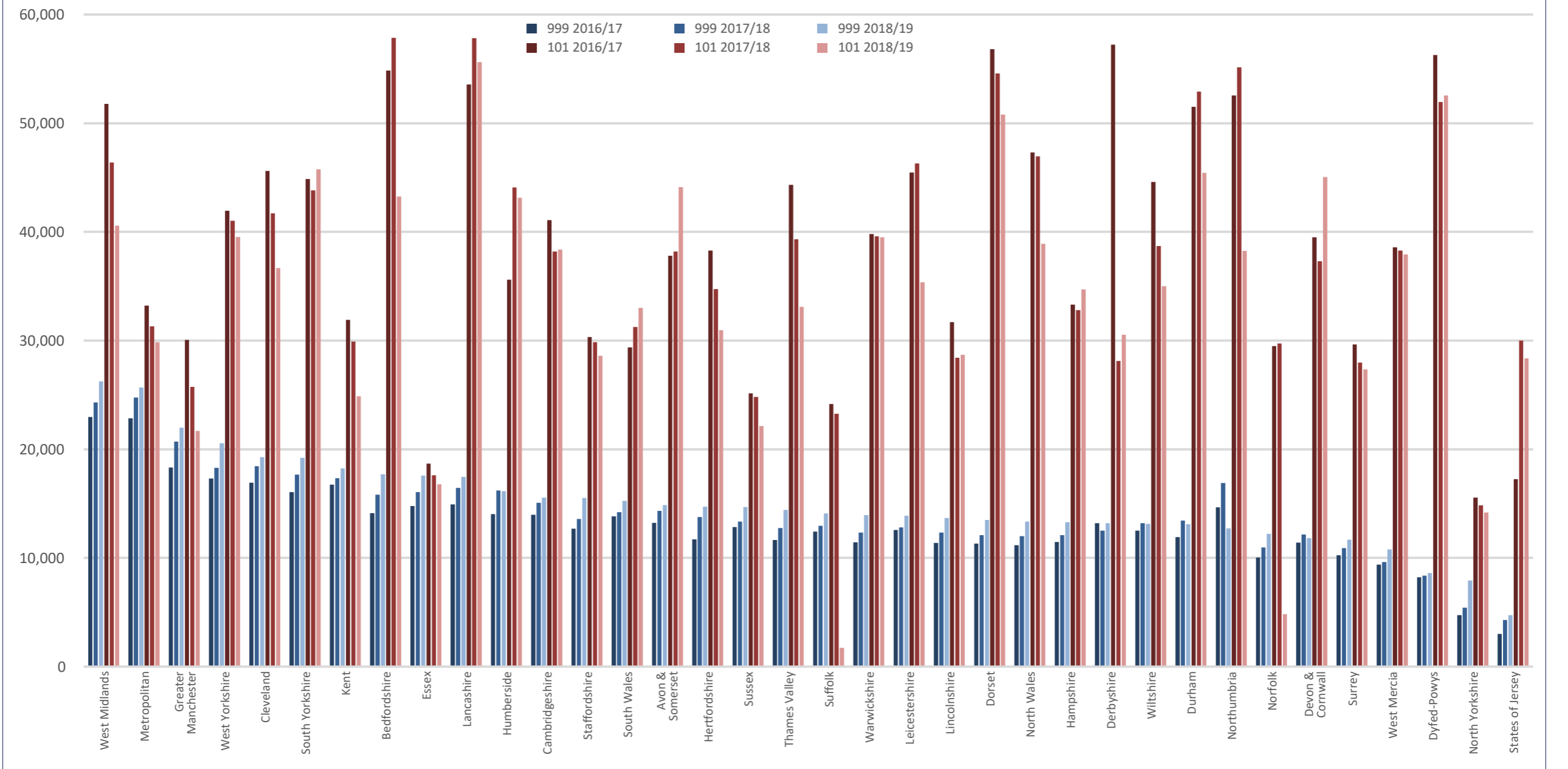




**999 and 101 call volumes per 100,000 by force and year**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.6a**

2016/17 to 2018/19 ranked by 999 call volume 2018/19. Source: FOI and ONS



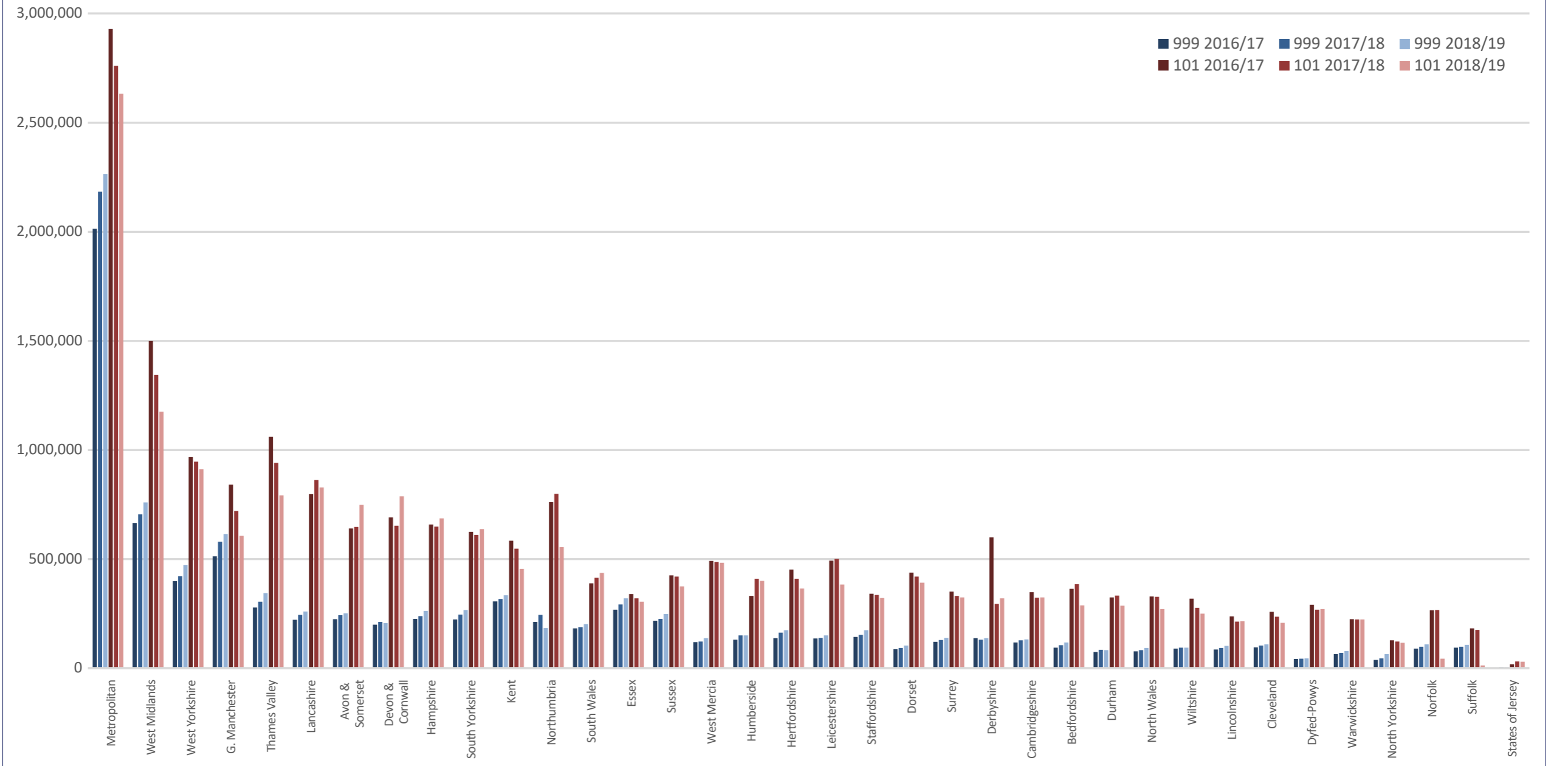
**Appendix: Call volumes**

**MARCH 2020**

**999 and 101 call volumes by force and year**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.6b**

2016/17 to 2018/19, ranked by total call volume 2018/19. Source: FOI



**Appendix: Call demand trends**

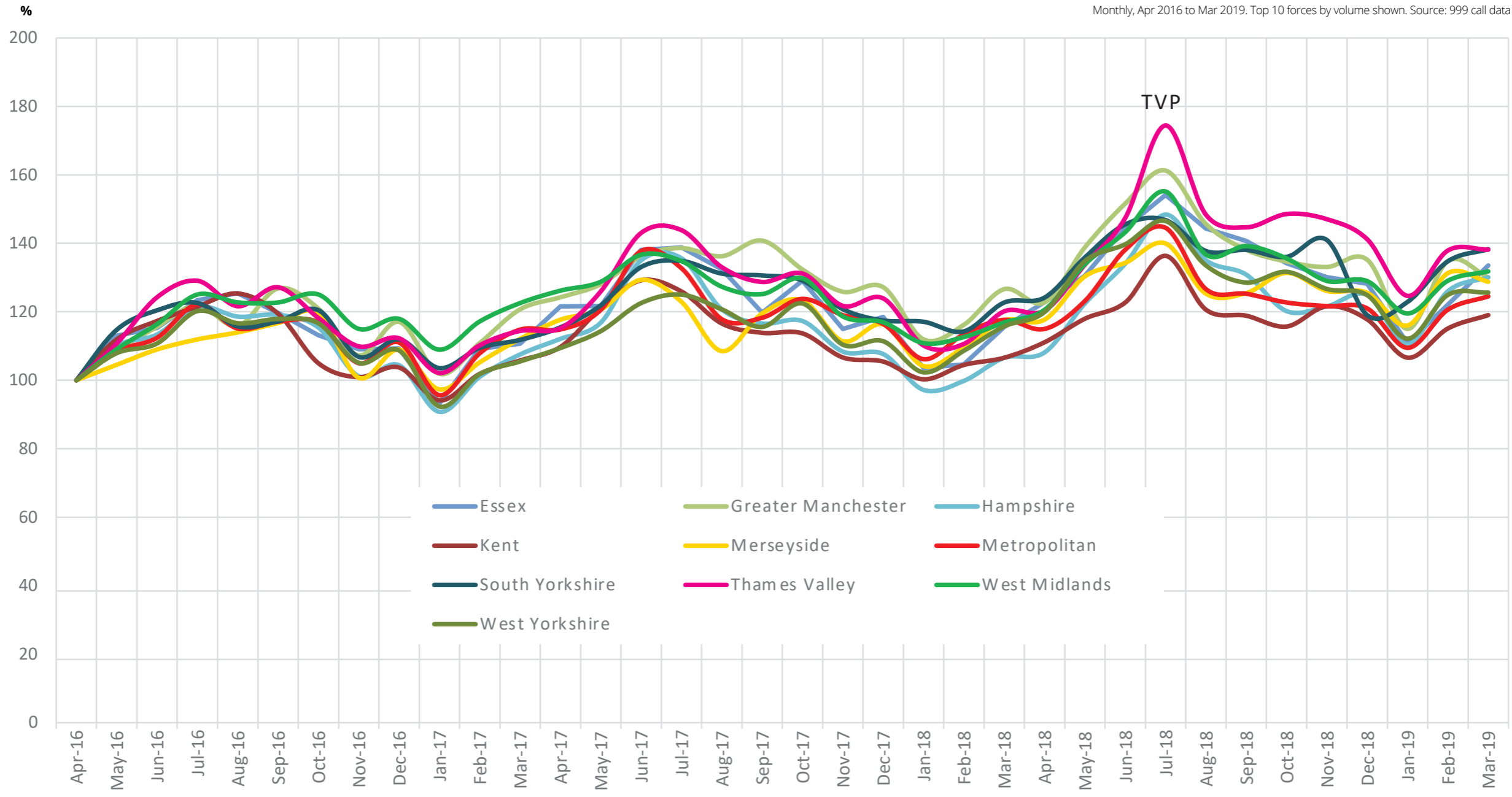
**MARCH 2020**

**Average daily 999 calls received indexed to April 2016**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#)

**Fig.7**

Monthly, Apr 2016 to Mar 2019. Top 10 forces by volume shown. Source: 999 call data (FOI)



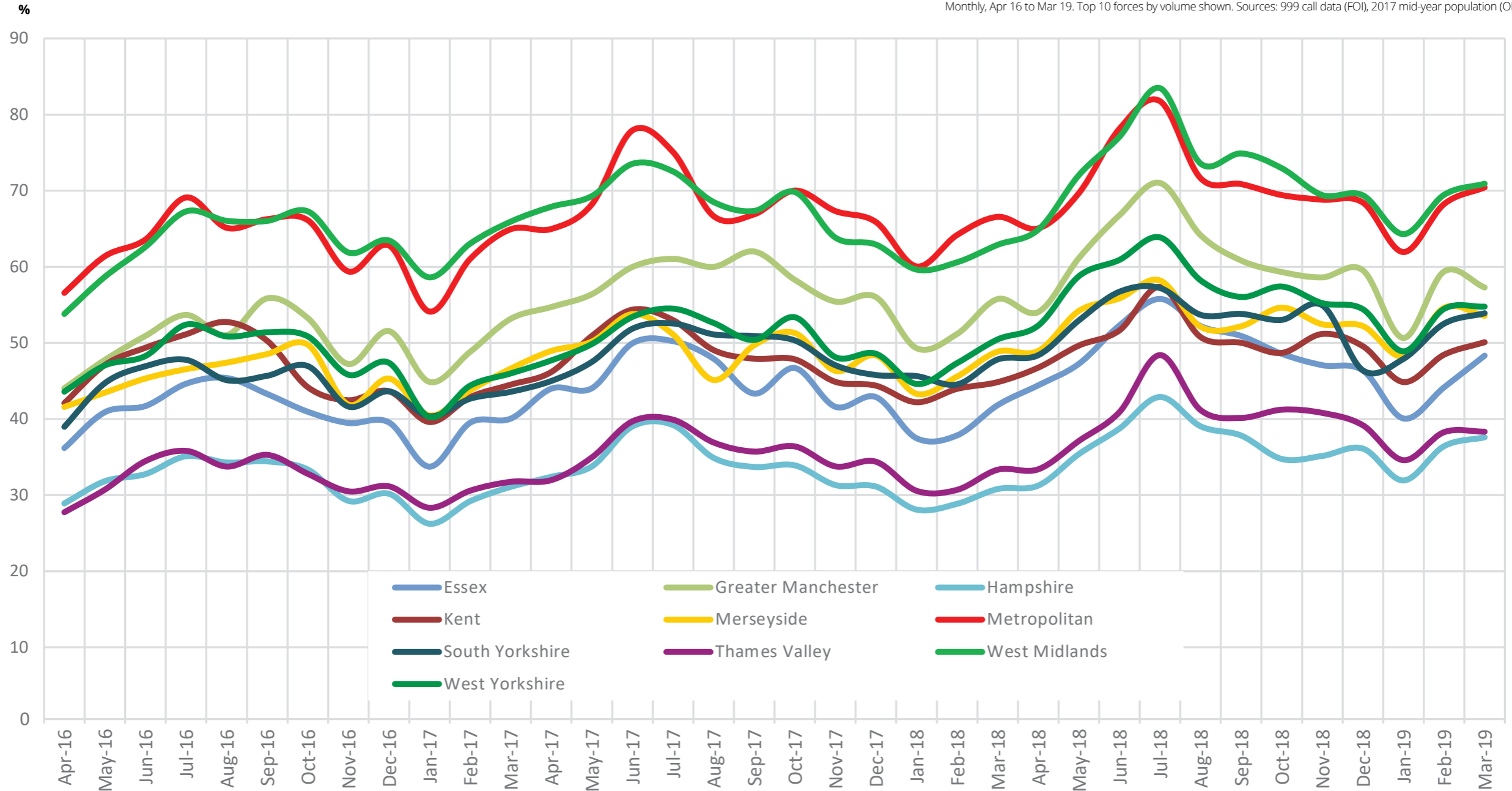
**Appendix: Call demand trends**

**MARCH 2020**

**Average daily 999 calls received per 100,000 population**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.8**

Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Top 10 forces by volume shown. Sources: 999 call data (FOI), 2017 mid-year population (ONS)



**Appendix: Call demand trends**

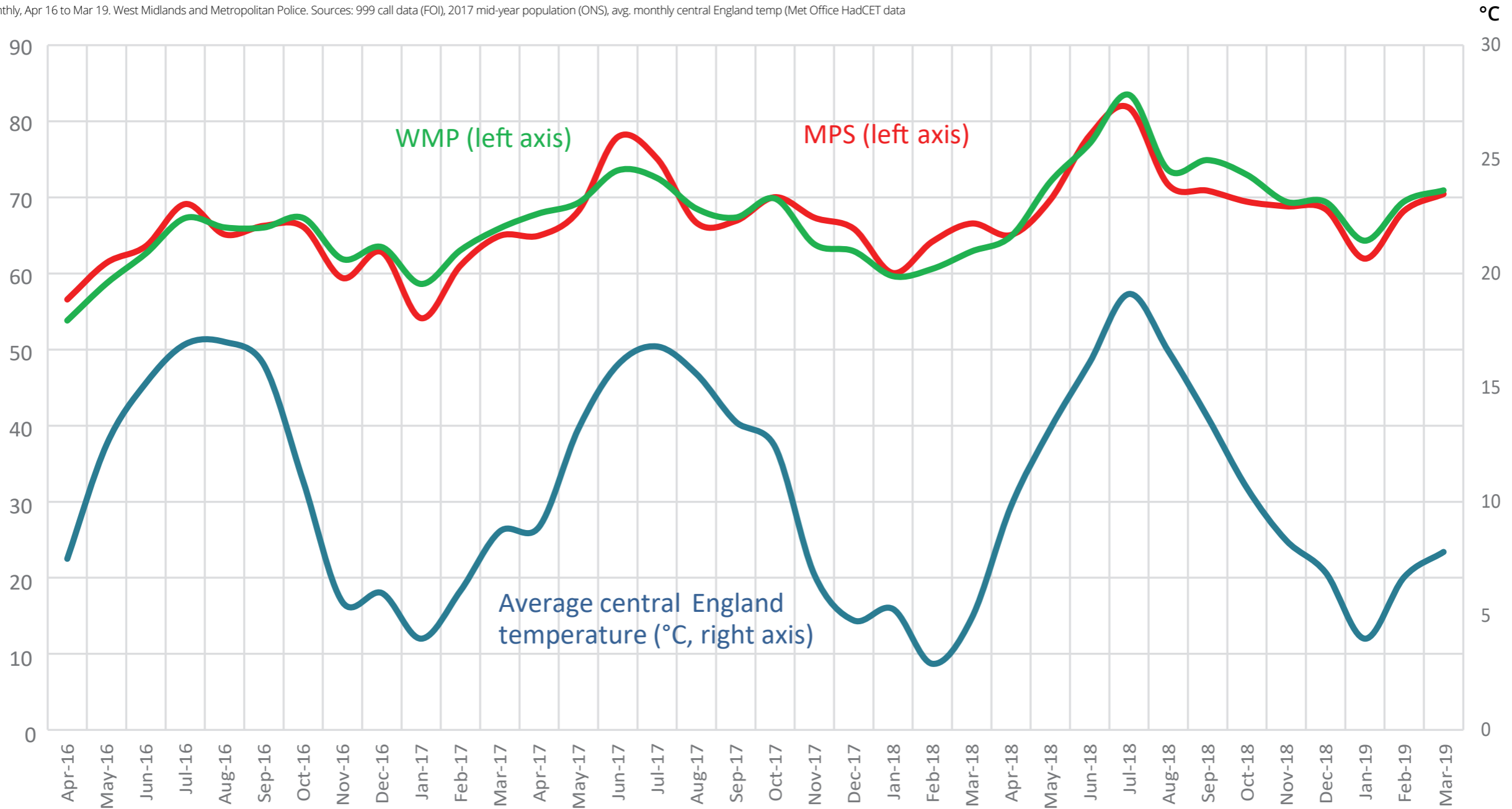
**MARCH 2020**

**Average daily 999 calls received per 100,000 population and average temperature**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#)

**Fig.9**

Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. West Midlands and Metropolitan Police. Sources: 999 call data (FOI), 2017 mid-year population (ONS), avg. monthly central England temp (Met Office HadCET data)

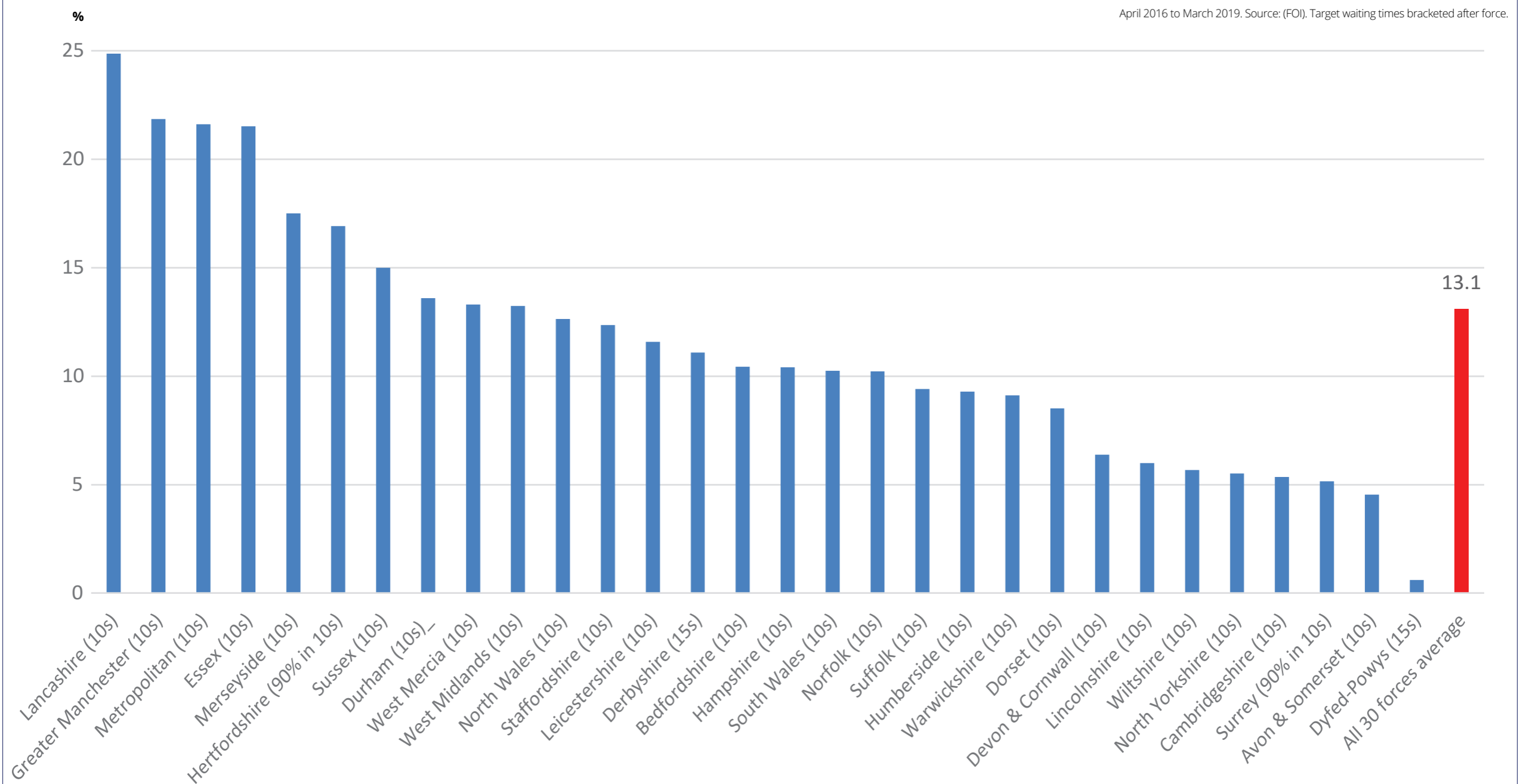




Average monthly percentage of 999 calls not answered within the waiting time target

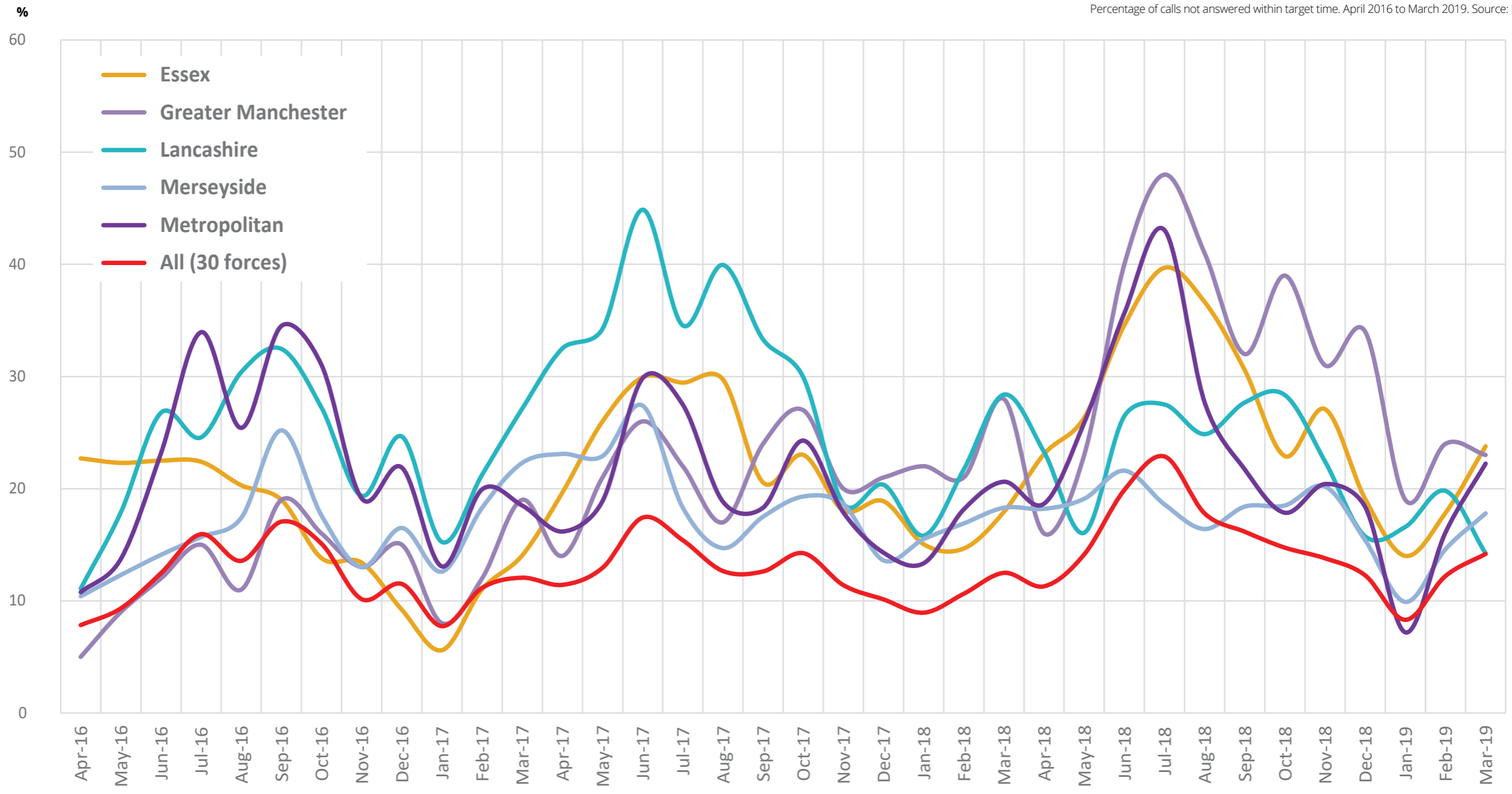
[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.10**

April 2016 to March 2019. Source: (FOI). Target waiting times bracketed after force.



The five forces that missed their 999 call answering target most often

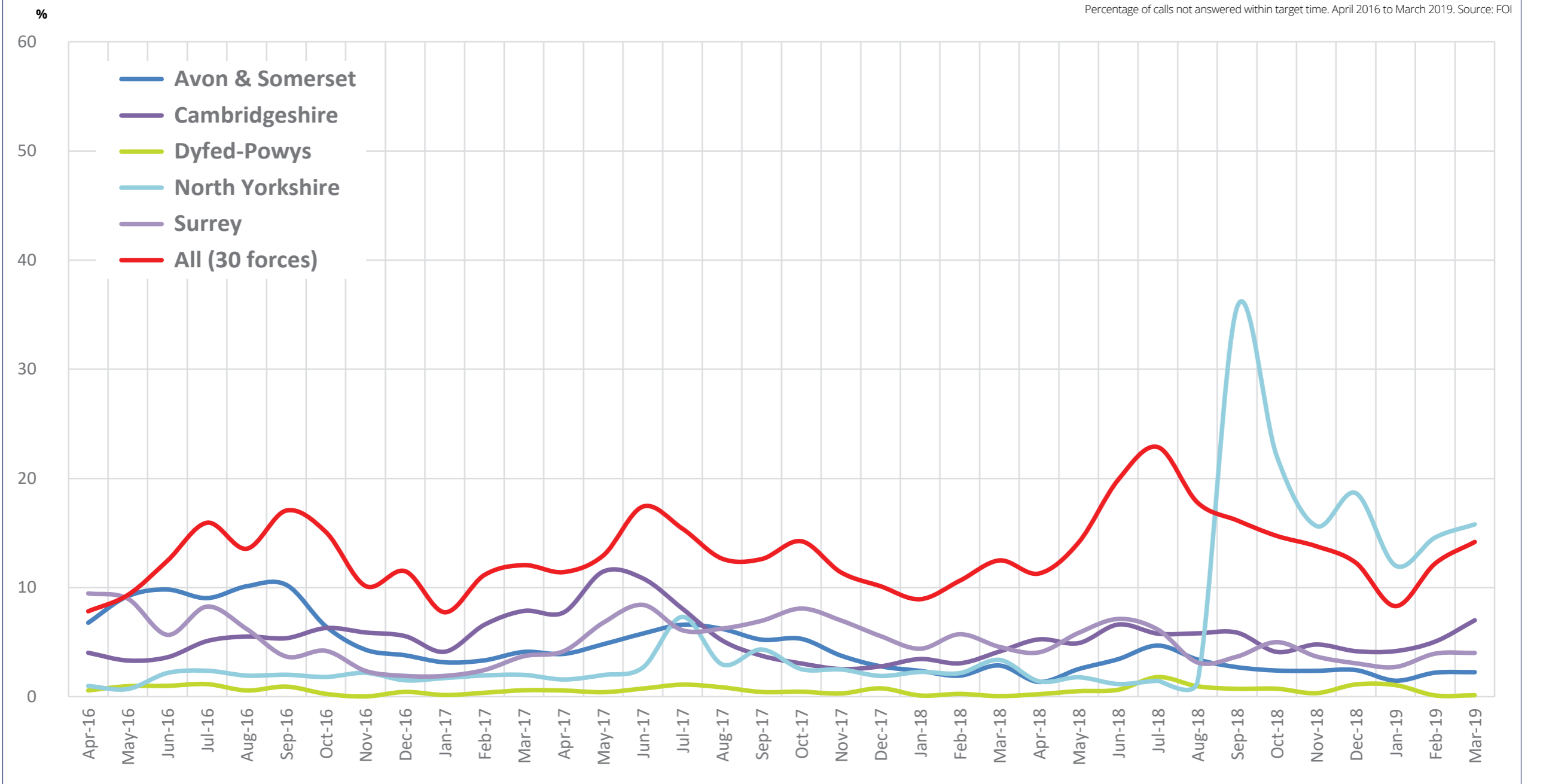
[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.11**



The five forces that missed their 999 call answering target least often

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.12**

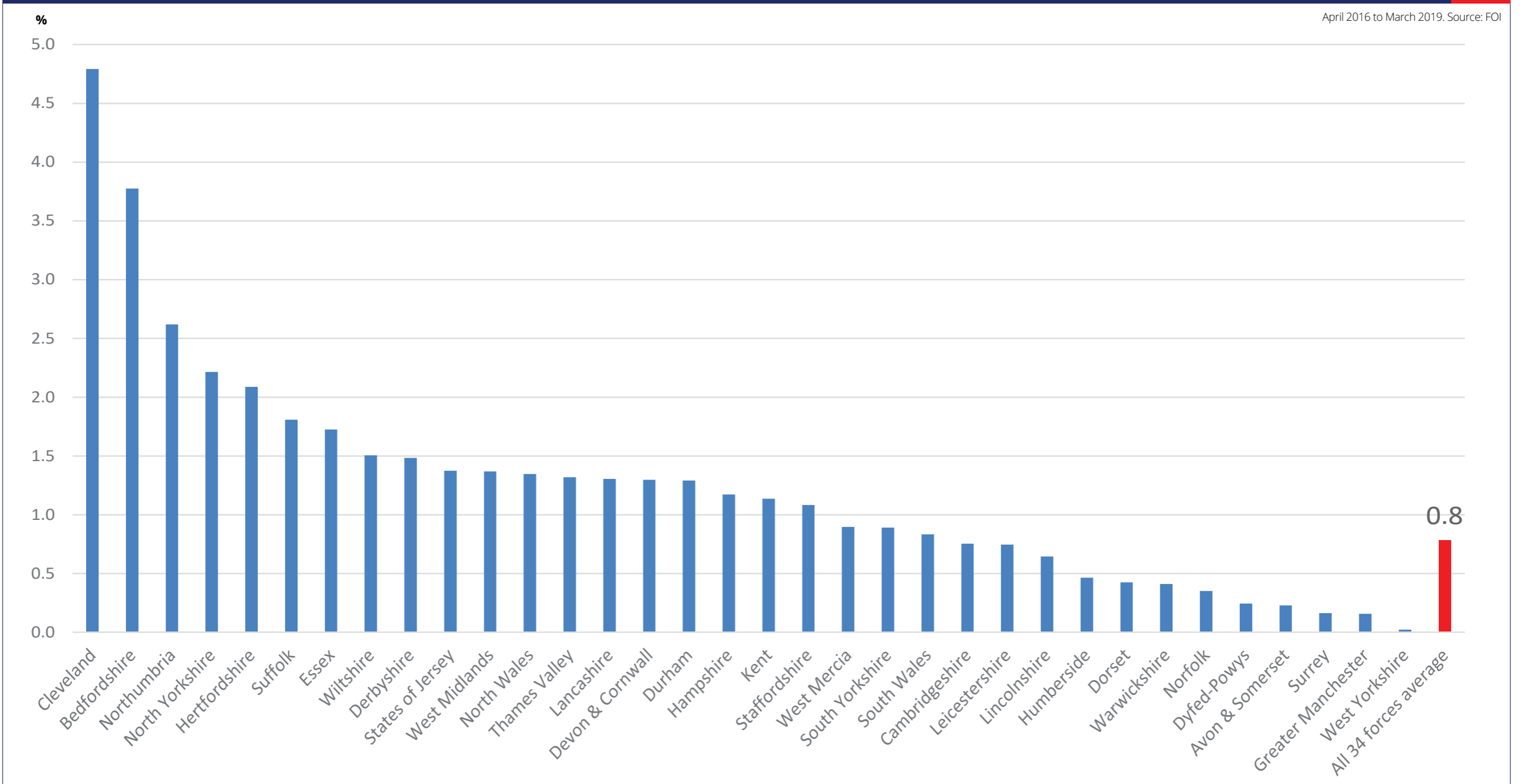
Percentage of calls not answered within target time. April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI



Average monthly percentage of 999 calls not answered/dropped

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.13**

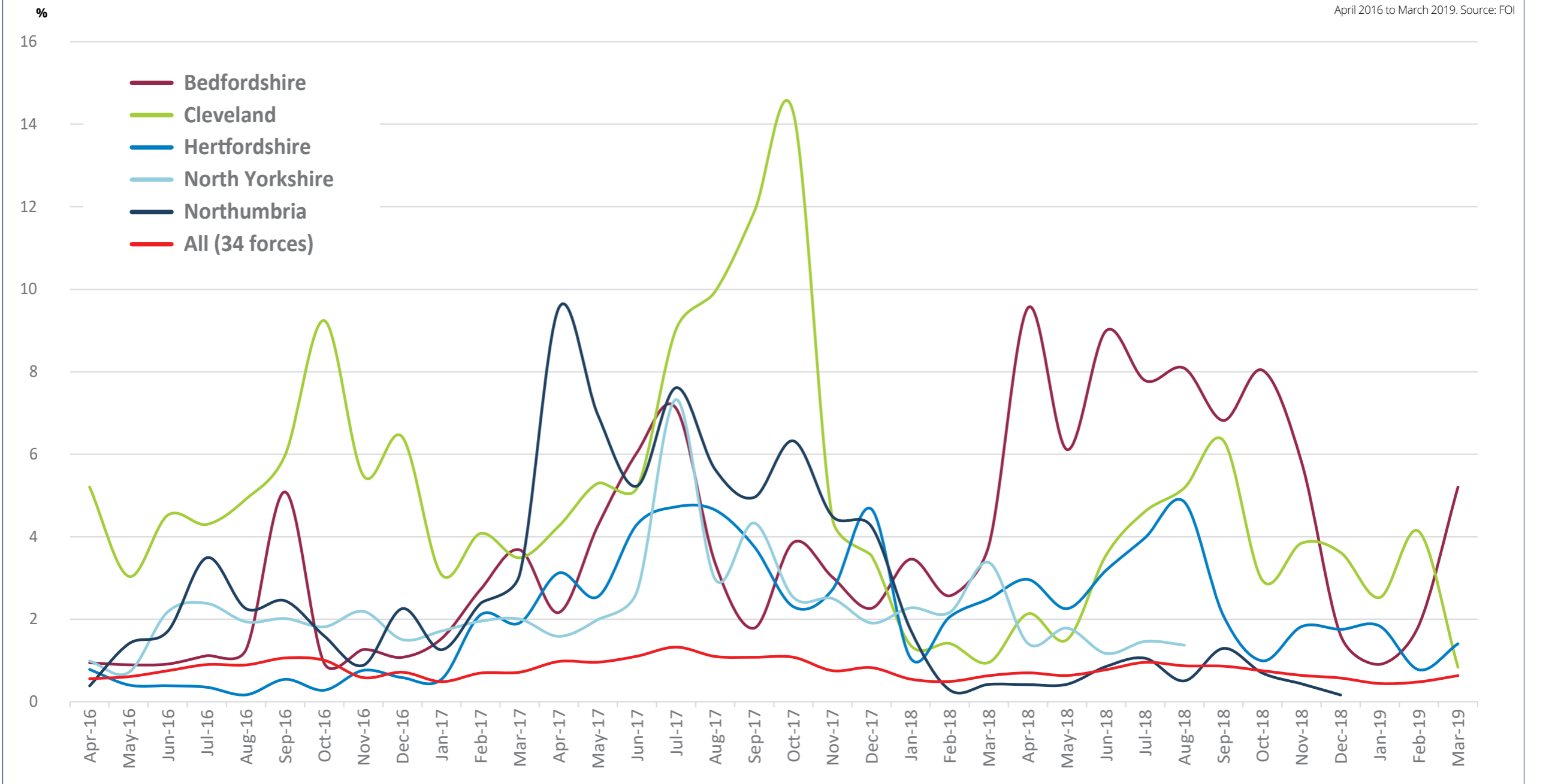
April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI



The five forces where the greatest percentage of 999 calls were not answered/dropped

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.14**

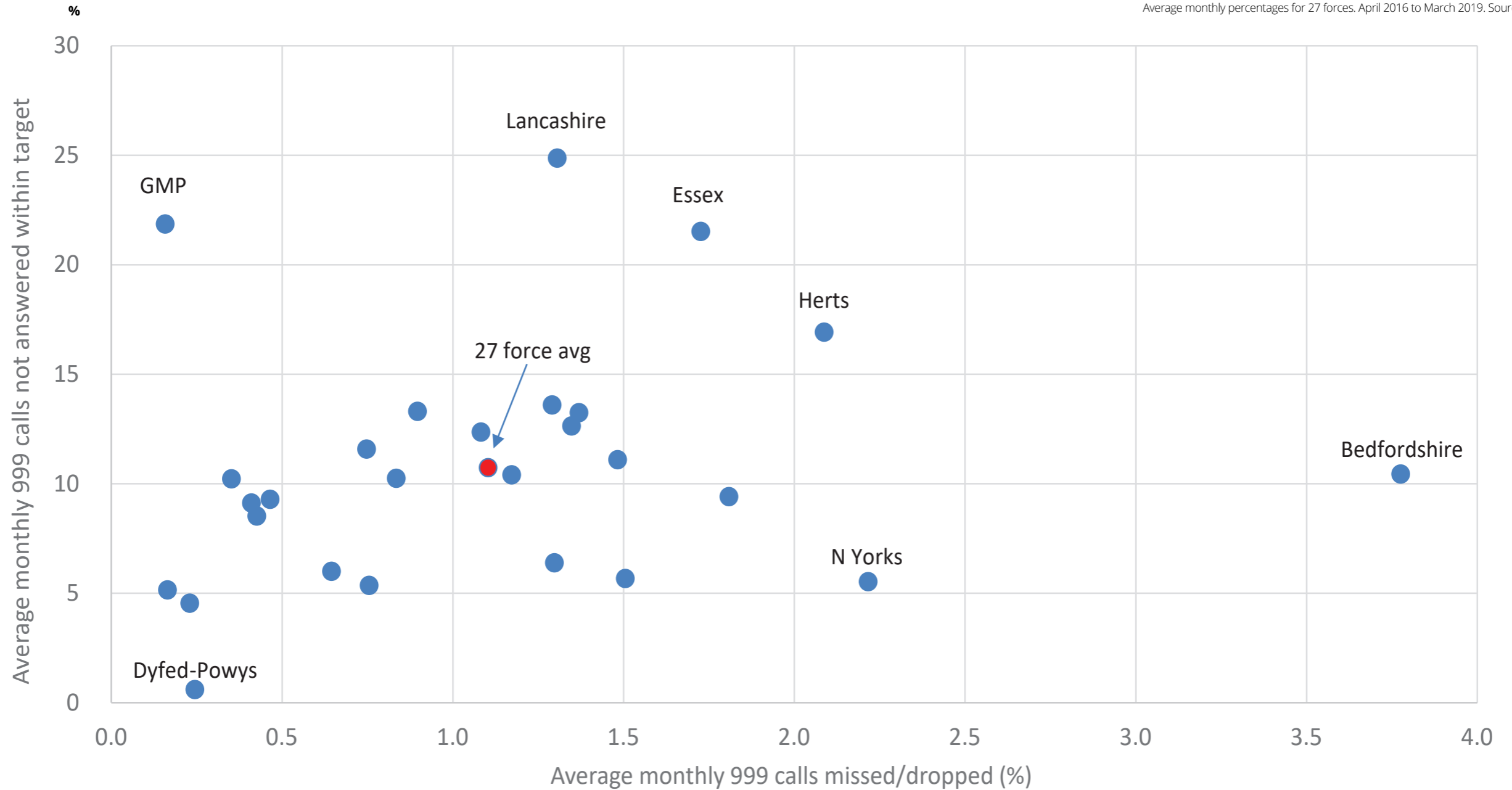
April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI



The relationship between missed 999 call answer targets and not answered/dropped 999 calls

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.15**

Average monthly percentages for 27 forces. April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI

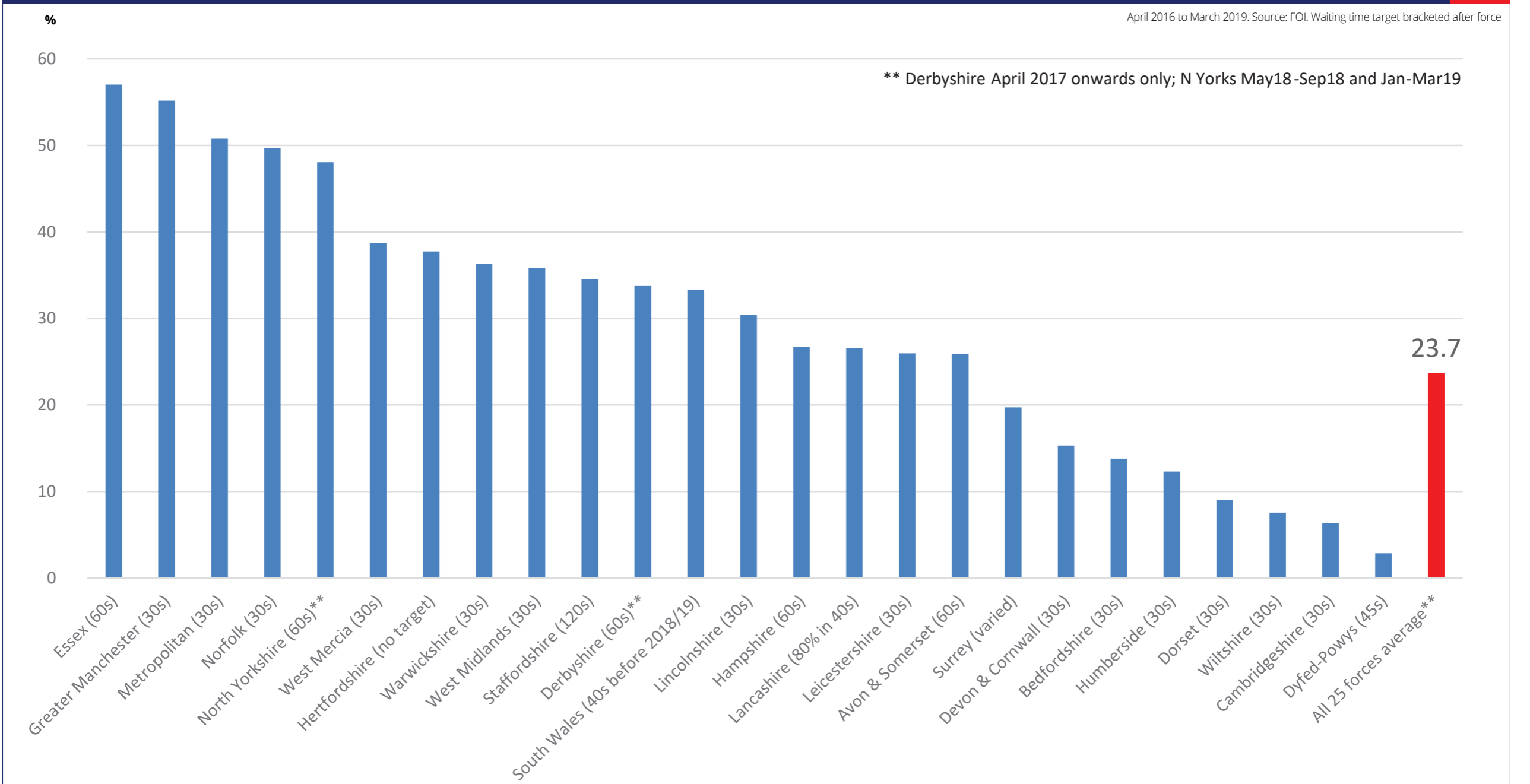


Average monthly percentage of 101 calls not answered within the waiting time target

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.16**

April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI. Waiting time target bracketed after force

\*\* Derbyshire April 2017 onwards only; N Yorks May18-Sep18 and Jan-Mar19

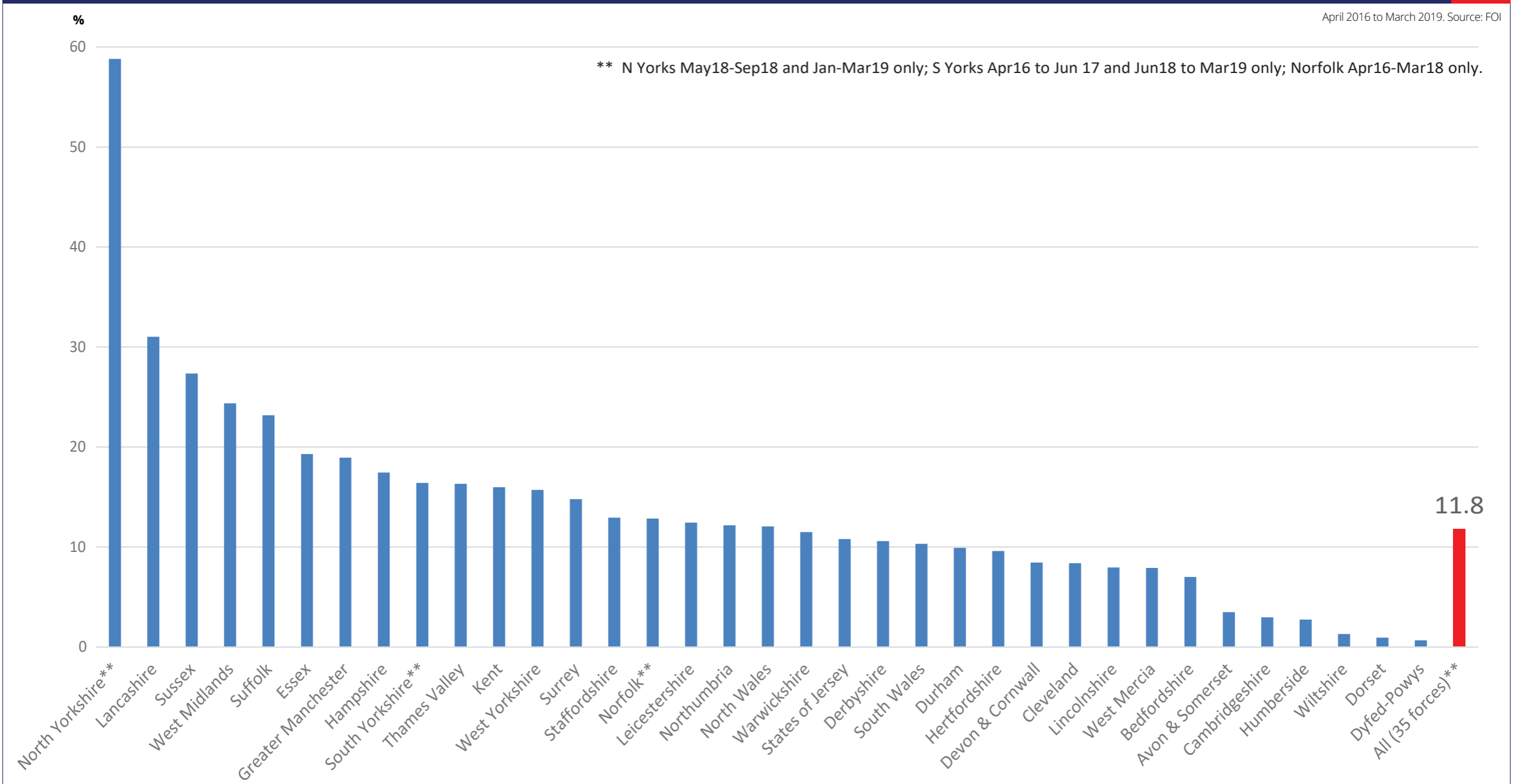


Average monthly percentage of 101 calls not answered/dropped

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.17**

April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI

\*\* N Yorks May18-Sep18 and Jan-Mar19 only; S Yorks Apr16 to Jun 17 and Jun18 to Mar19 only; Norfolk Apr16-Mar18 only.

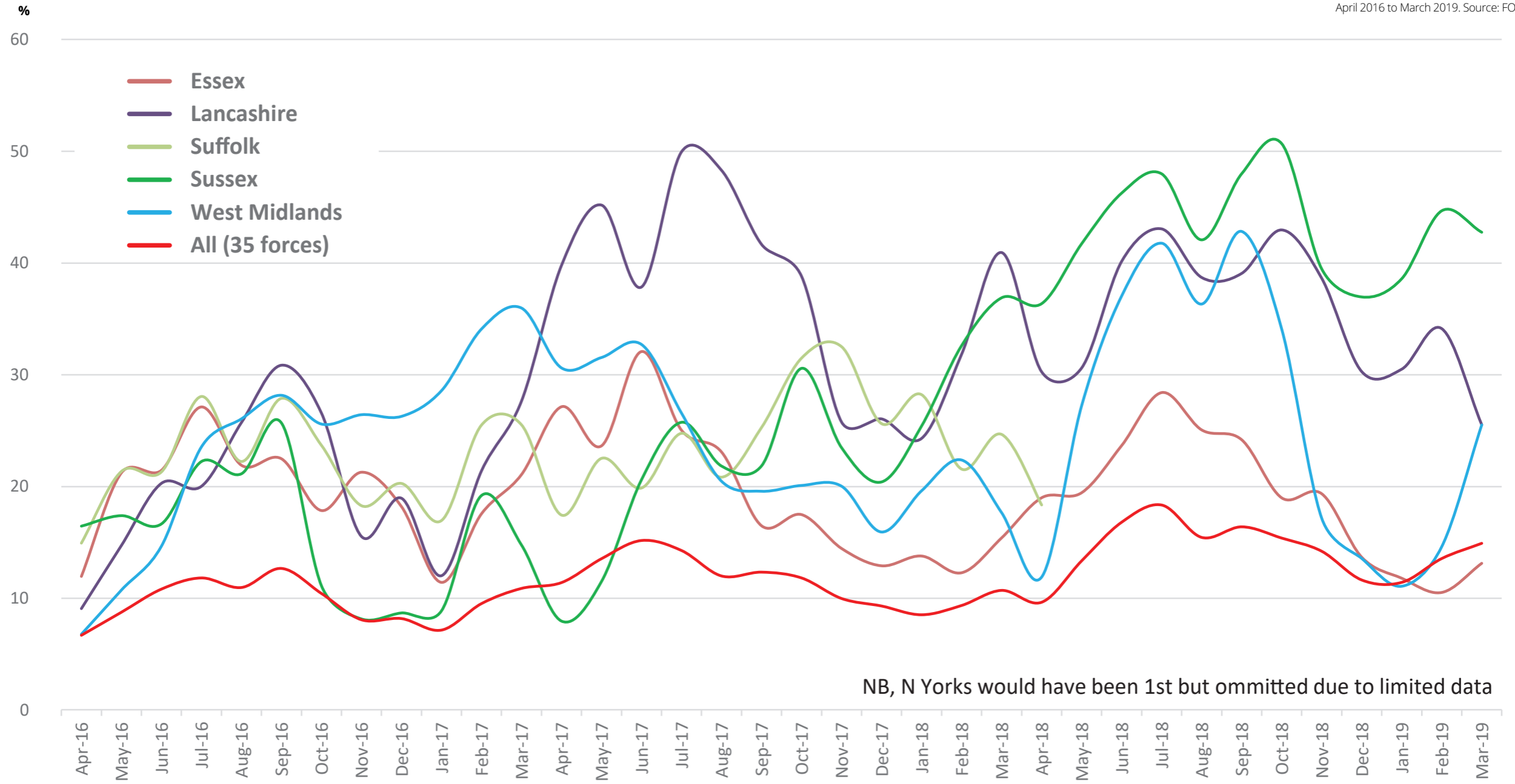




The five forces where the greatest percentage of 101 calls were not answered/dropped

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.18**

April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI

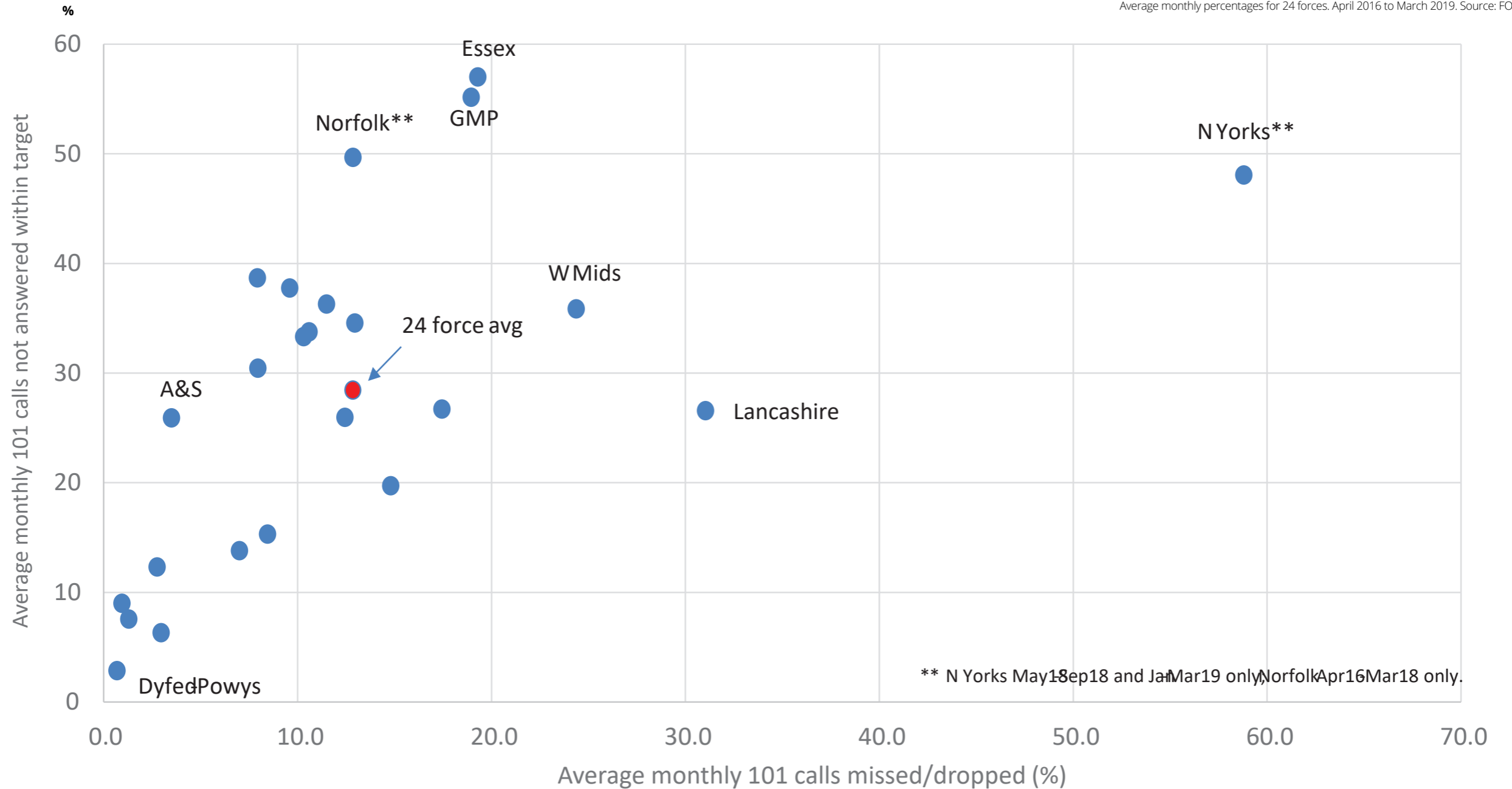


NB, N Yorks would have been 1st but omitted due to limited data

The relationship between missed 101 call answer targets and not answered/dropped 101 calls

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.19**

Average monthly percentages for 24 forces. April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI

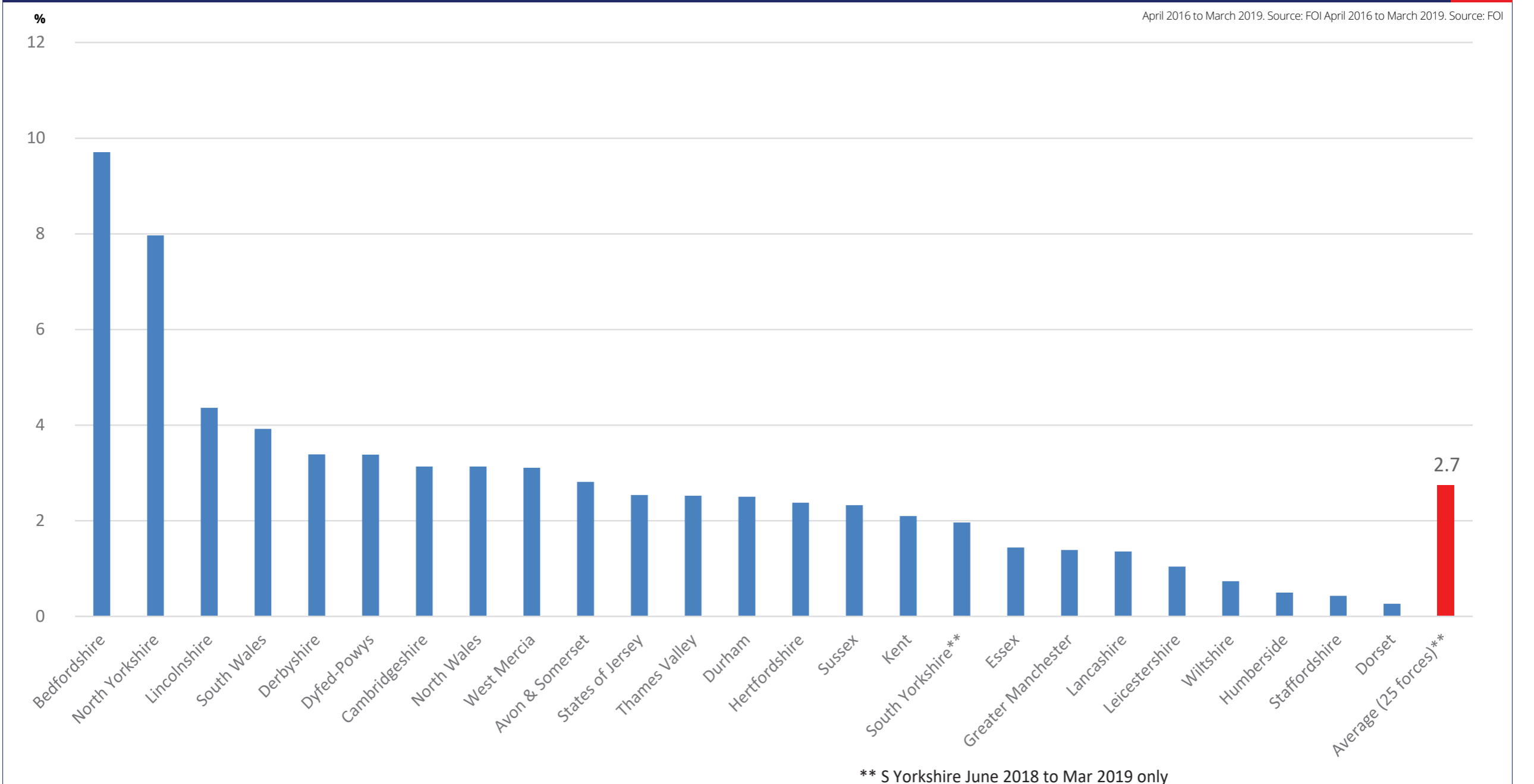


**Appendix: Emergency incidents**

**MARCH 2020**

**Average monthly percentage of 999 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1 / I Grade)** [CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.20**

April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI



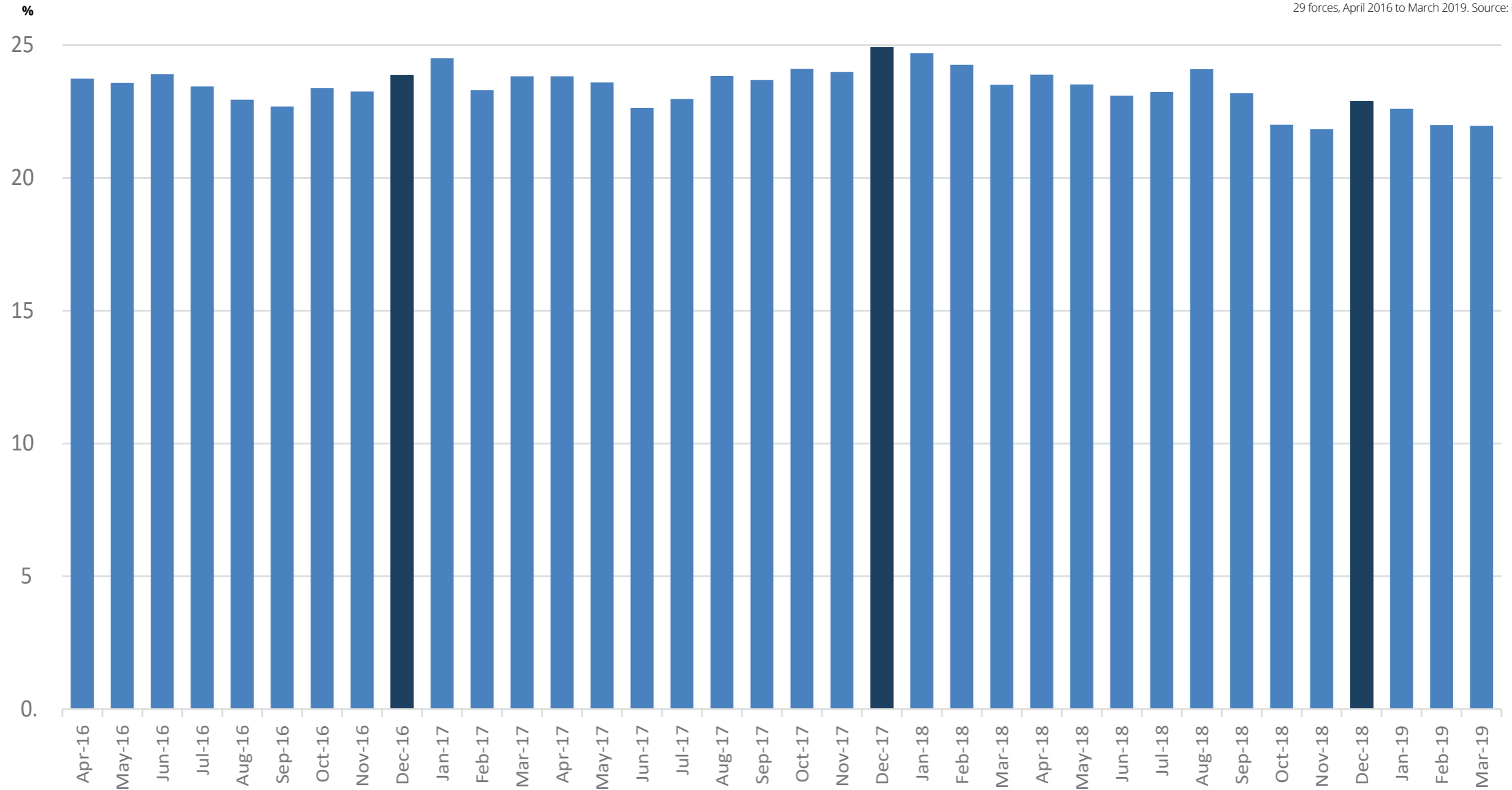
**Appendix: Emergency incidents**

**MARCH 2020**

**Percentage of 999 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1/ I Grade)**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.21**

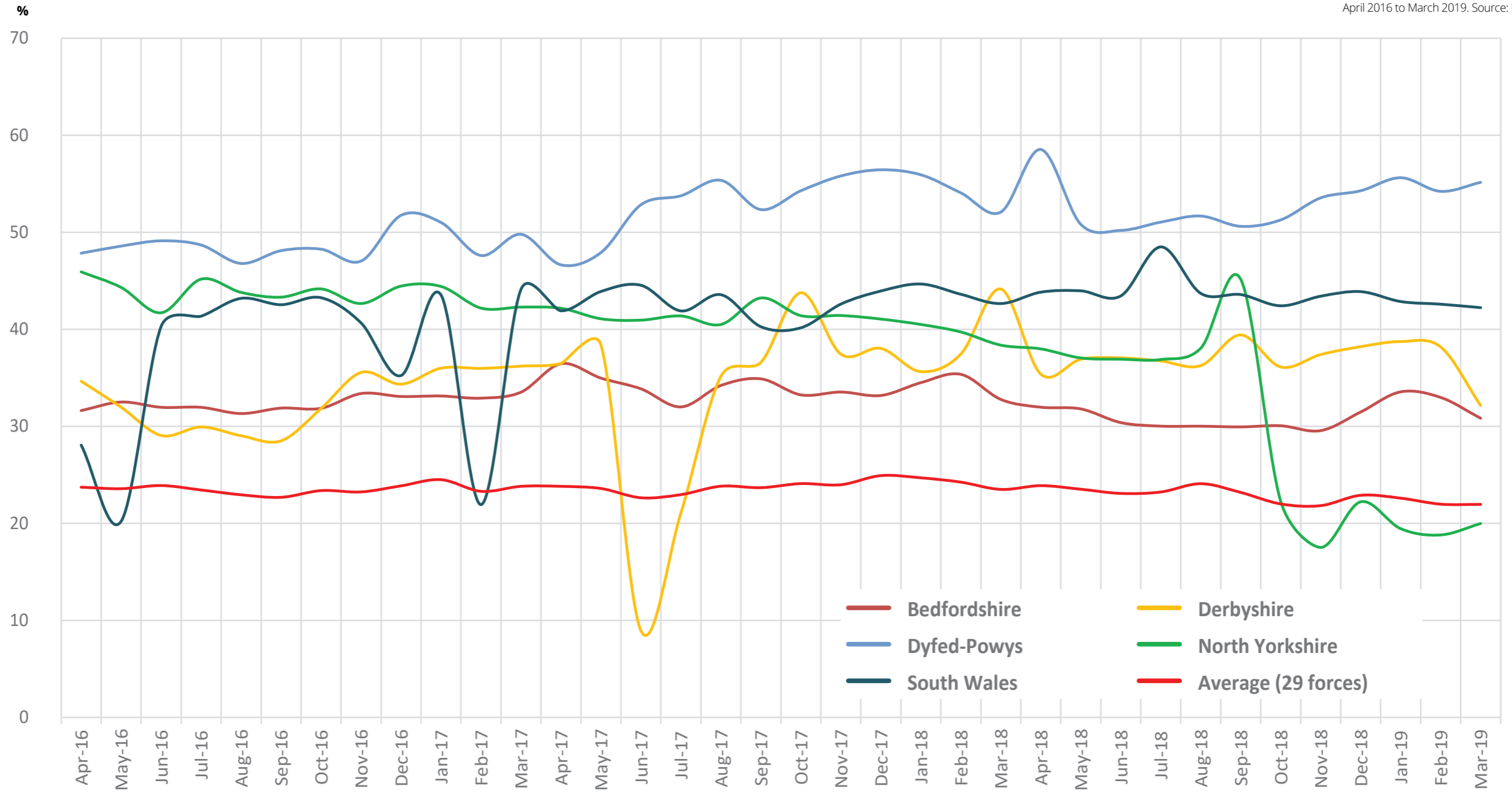
29 forces, April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI



The five forces with the highest percentage of 999 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1 / I Grade)

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.22**

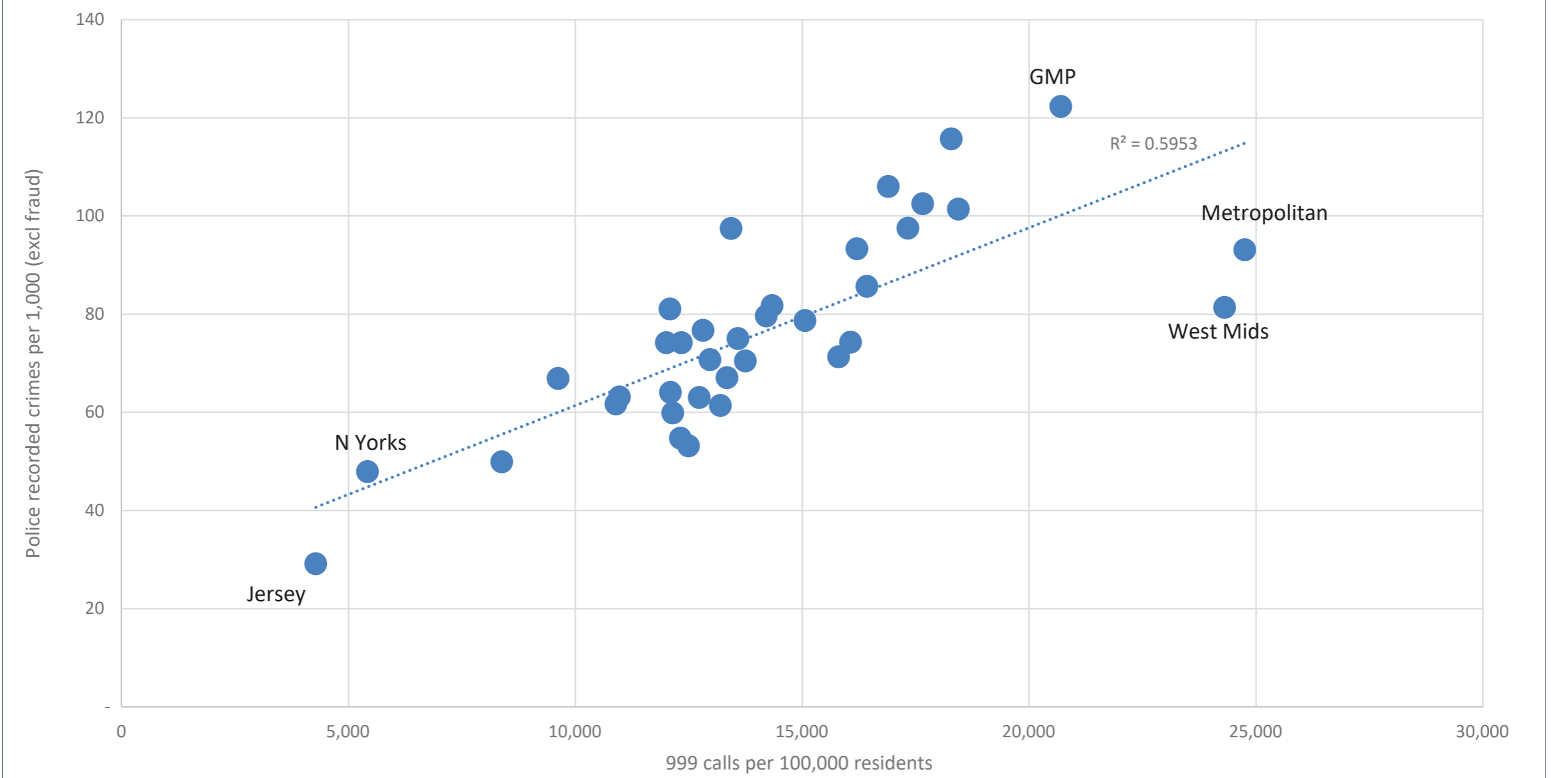
April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI

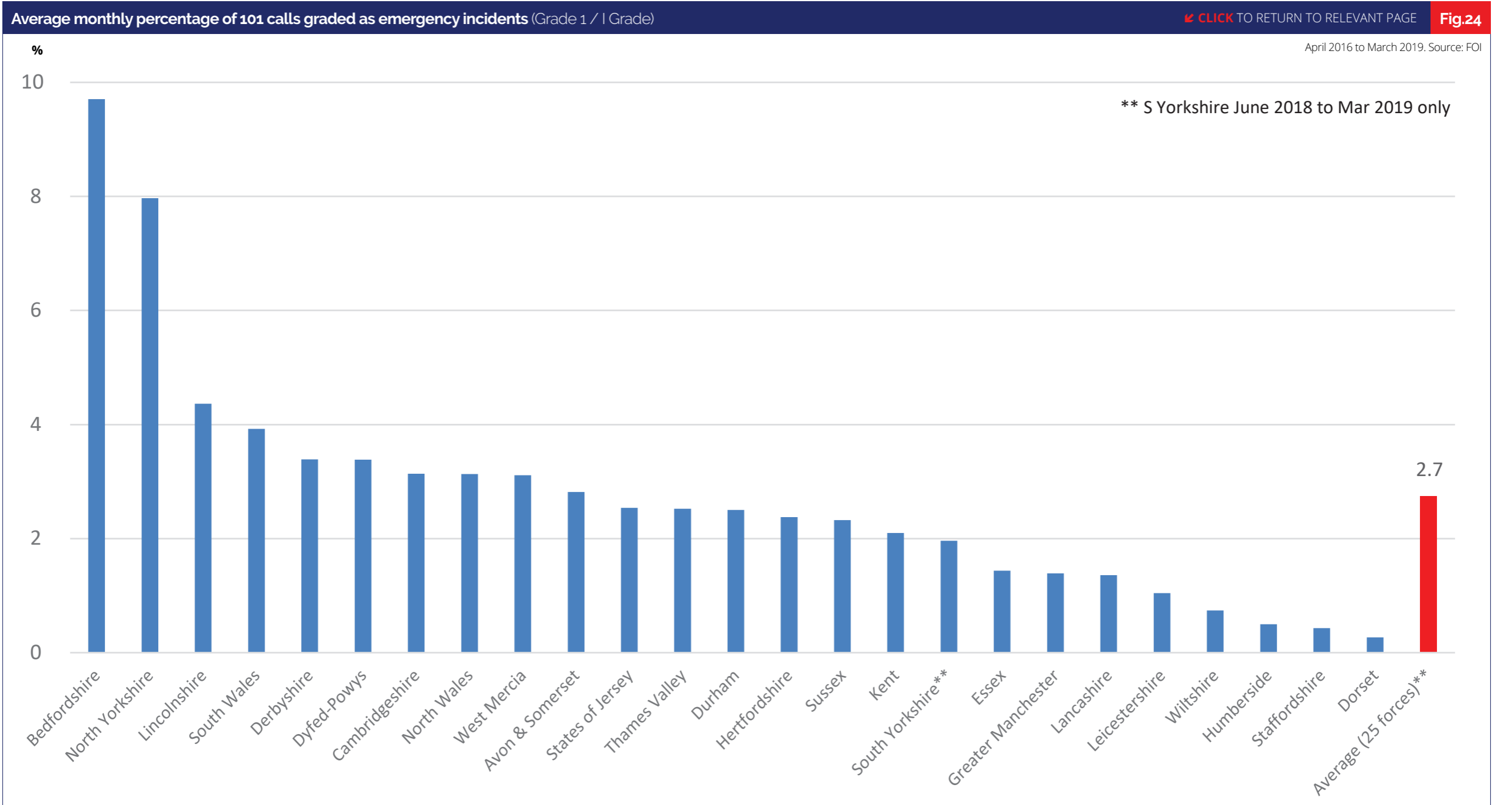


The relationship between 999 call volumes (per 100,000) and recorded crime excl. fraud (per 1000)

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.23**

2017/18. Sources: FOI and ONS





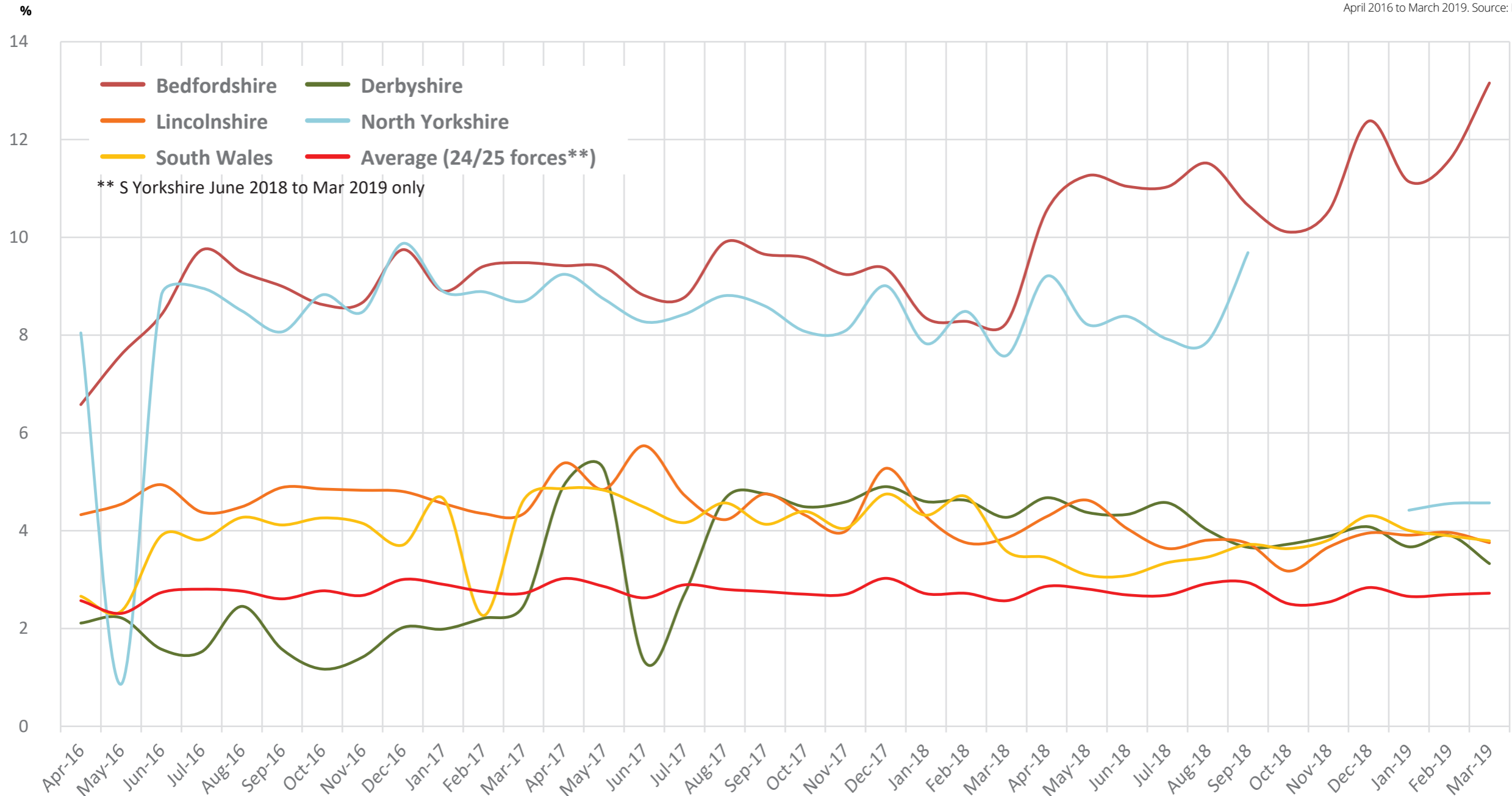
**Appendix: Emergency incidents**

**MARCH 2020**

The five forces with the highest percentage of 101 calls graded as emergency incidents (Grade 1/ 1 Grade)

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.25**

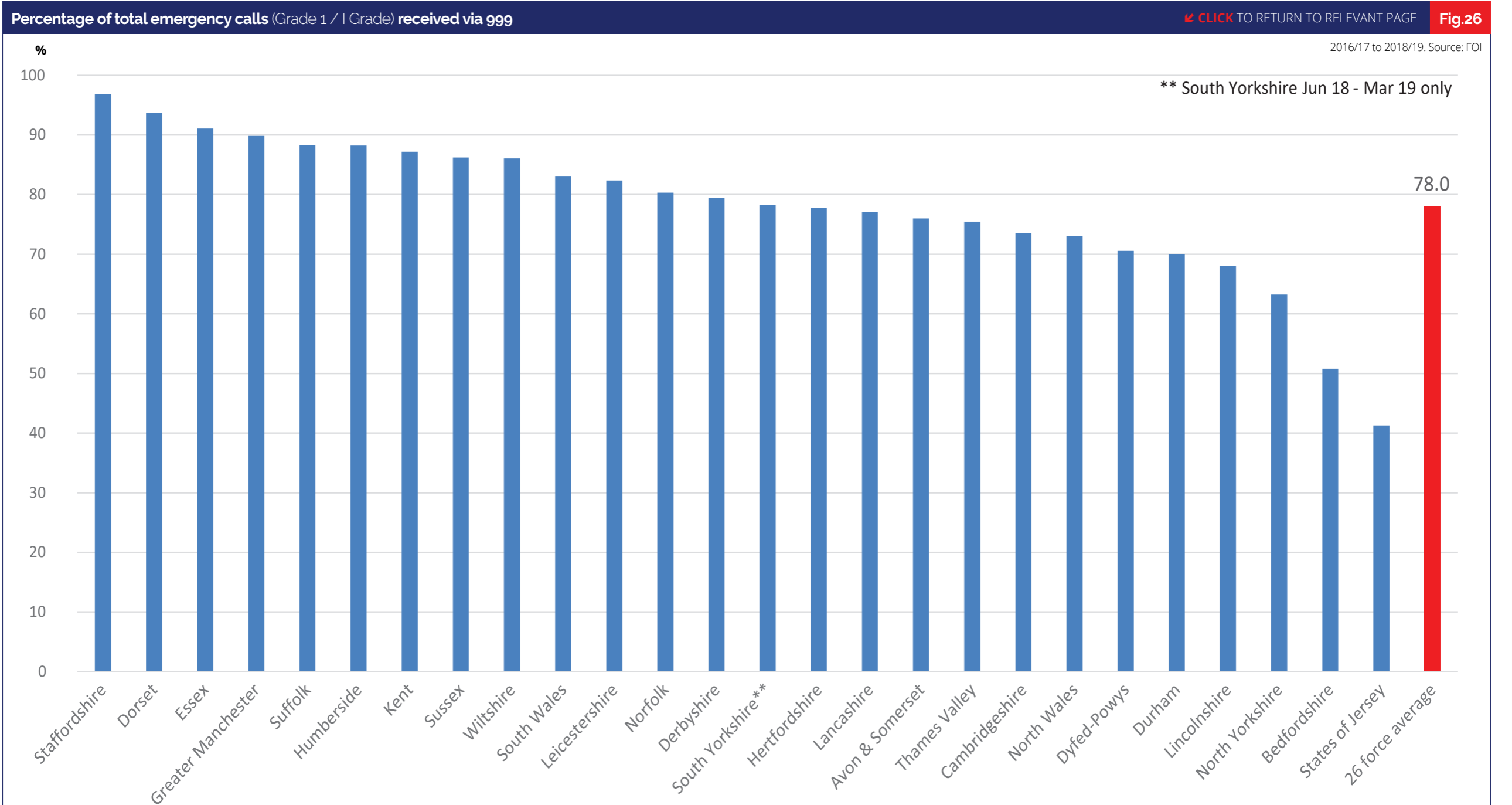
April 2016 to March 2019. Source: FOI





**Appendix: Emergency incidents**

**MARCH 2020**



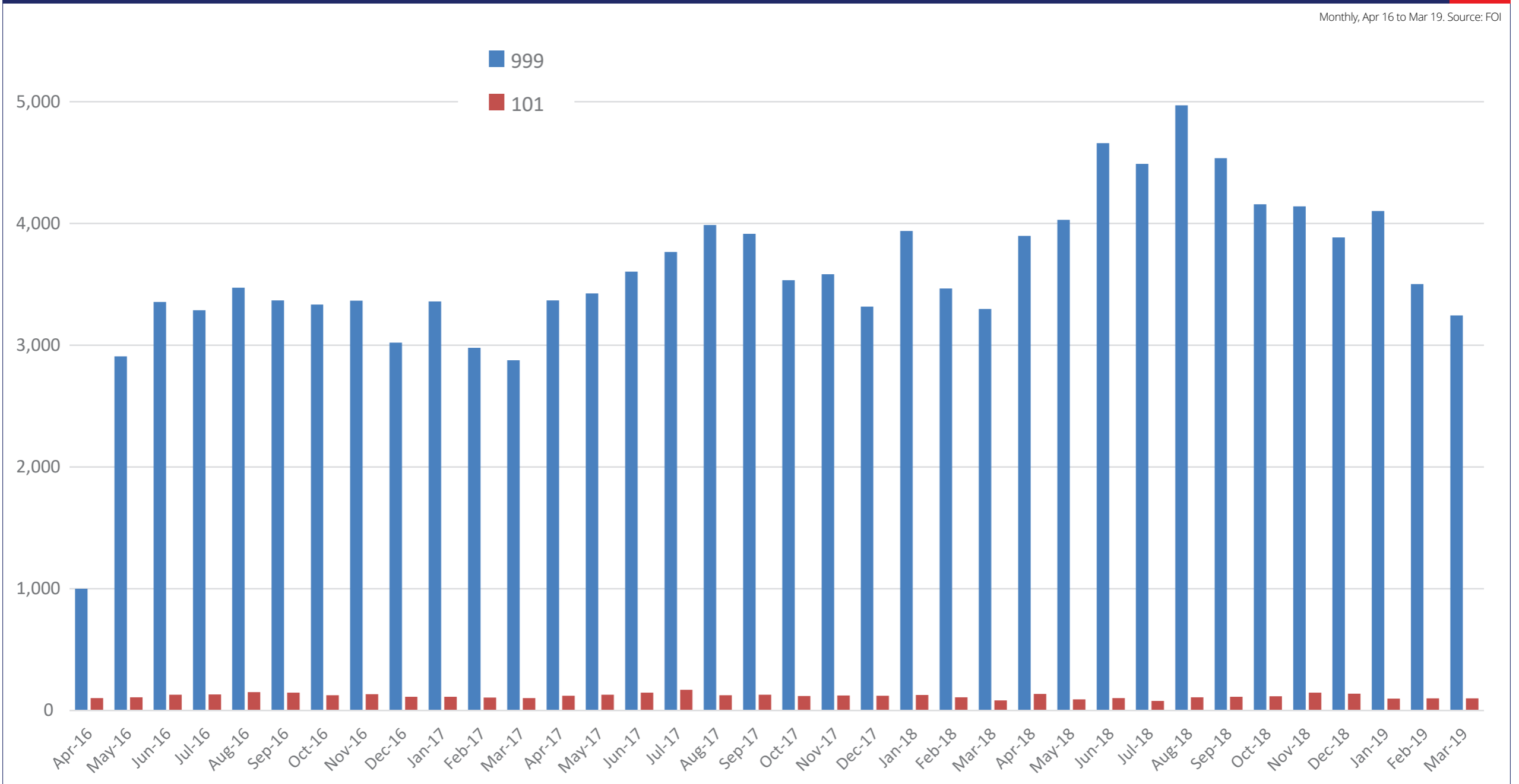
**Appendix: Emergency incidents**

**MARCH 2020**

**Staffordshire emergency call volumes via 999 and 101**

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.27**

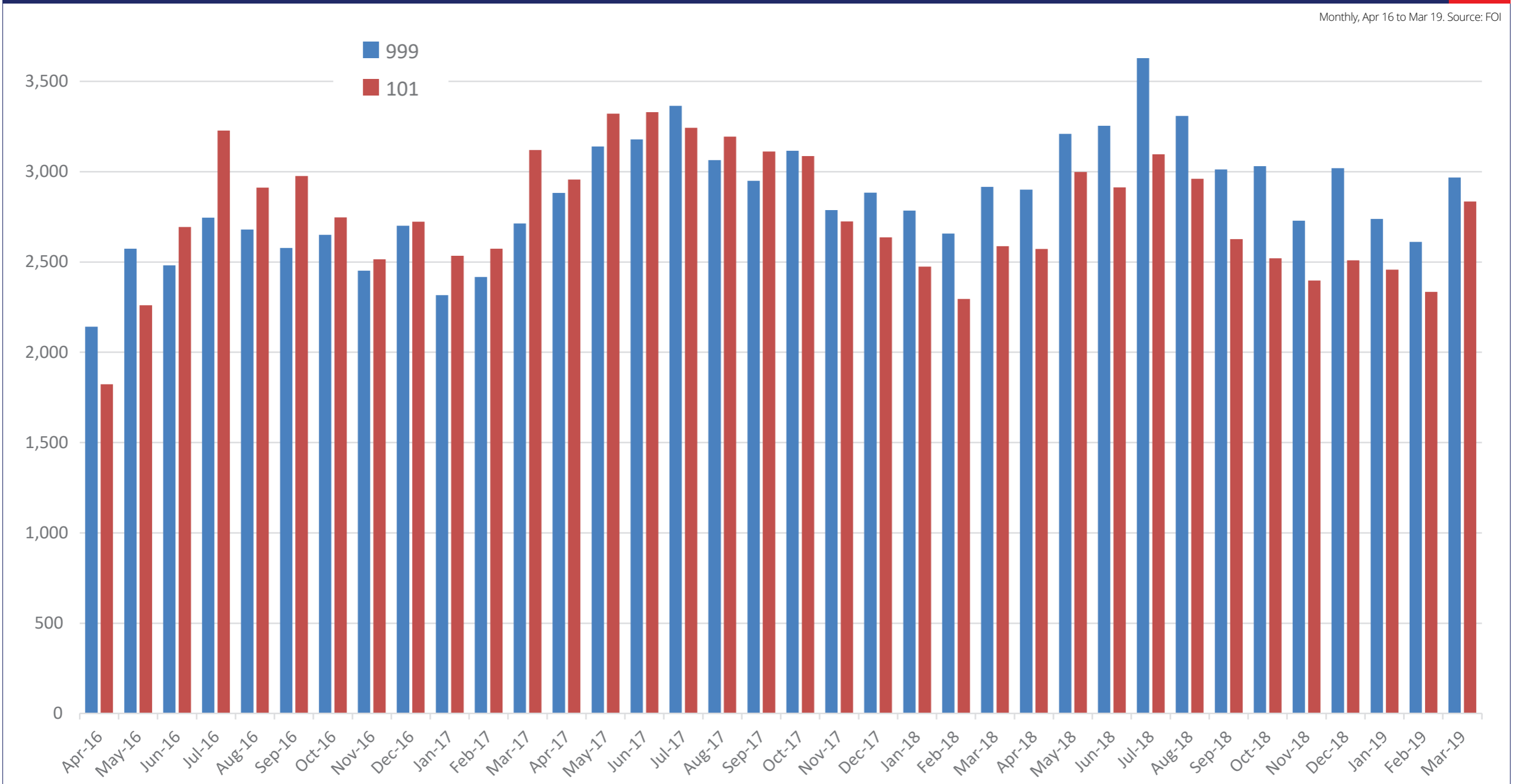
Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI



Bedfordshire emergency call volumes via 999 and 101

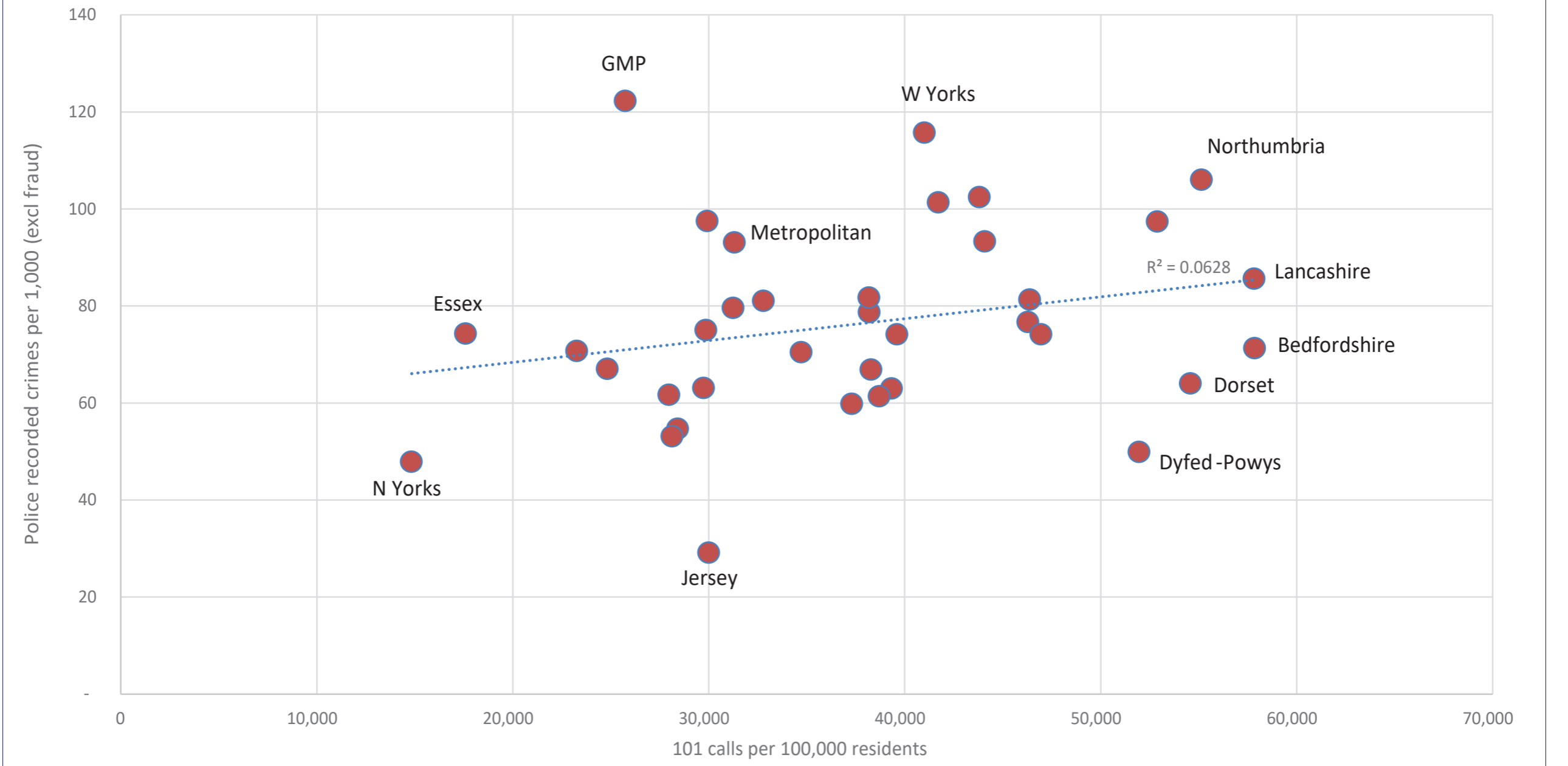
[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.28**

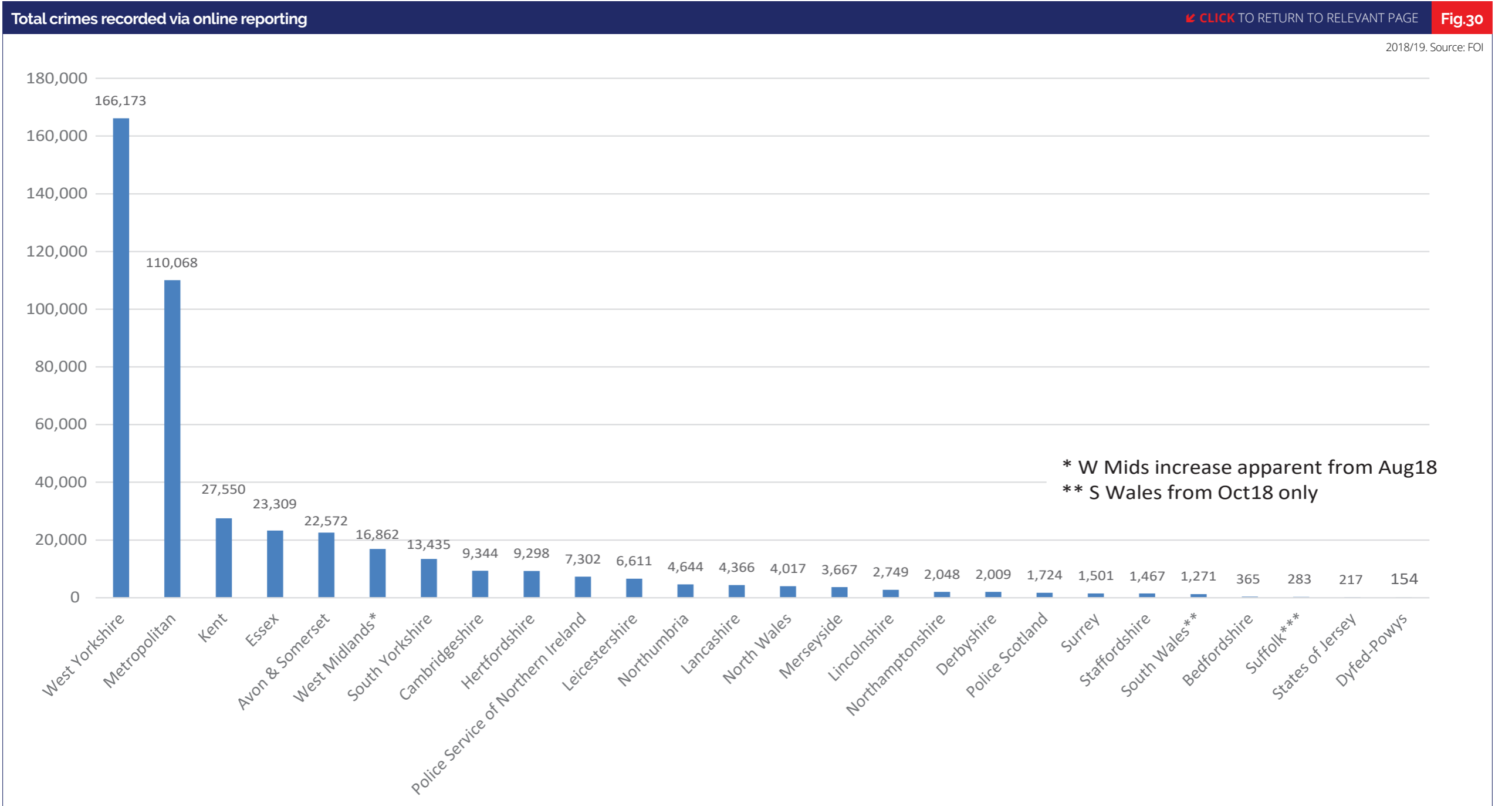
Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI



The relationship between 101 call volumes (per 100,000) and recorded crime excl. fraud (per 1,000) [CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.29**

2017/18. Sources: FOI and ONS

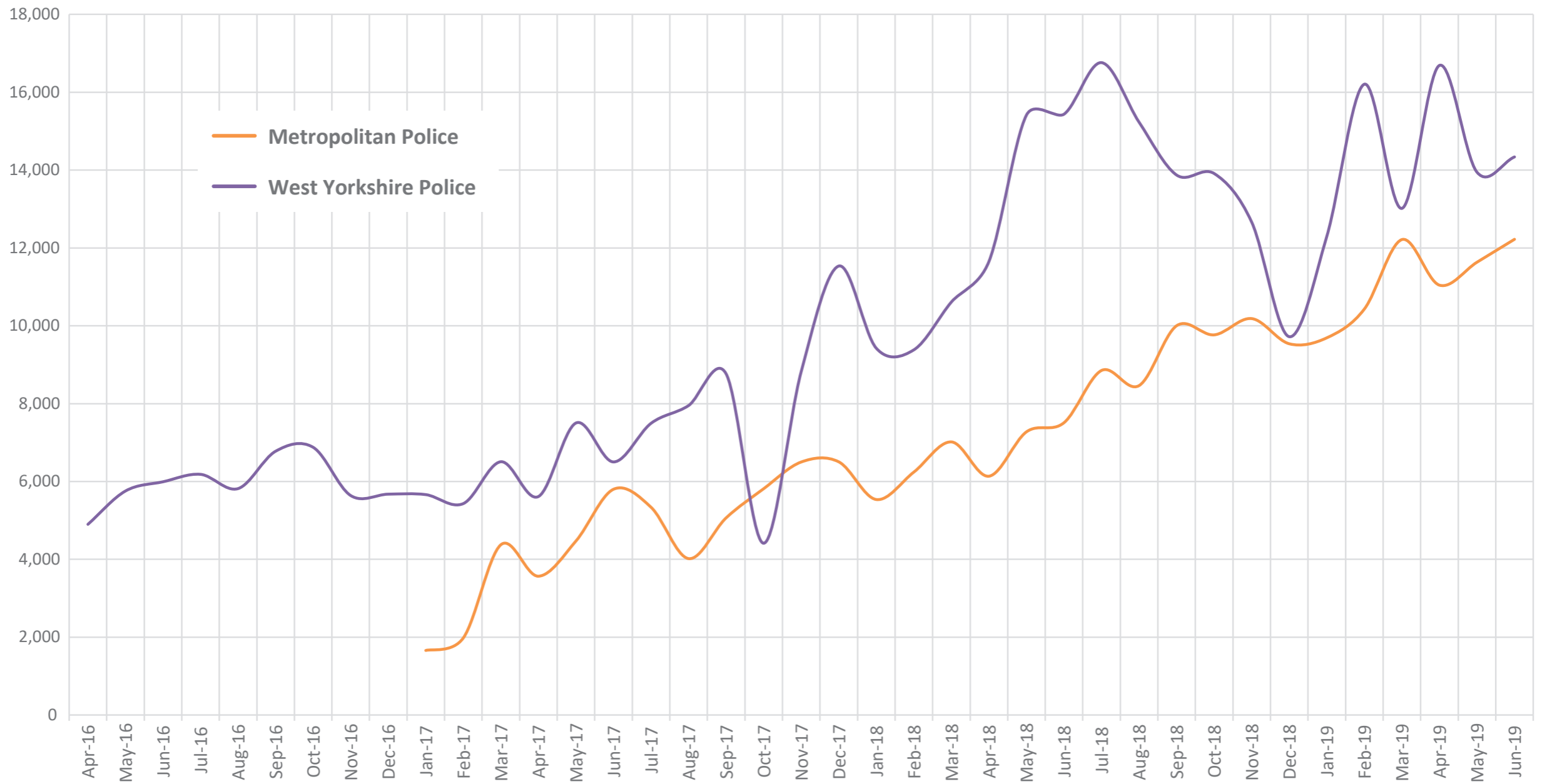




Crimes reported online: West Yorkshire and Metropolitan Police

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.31**

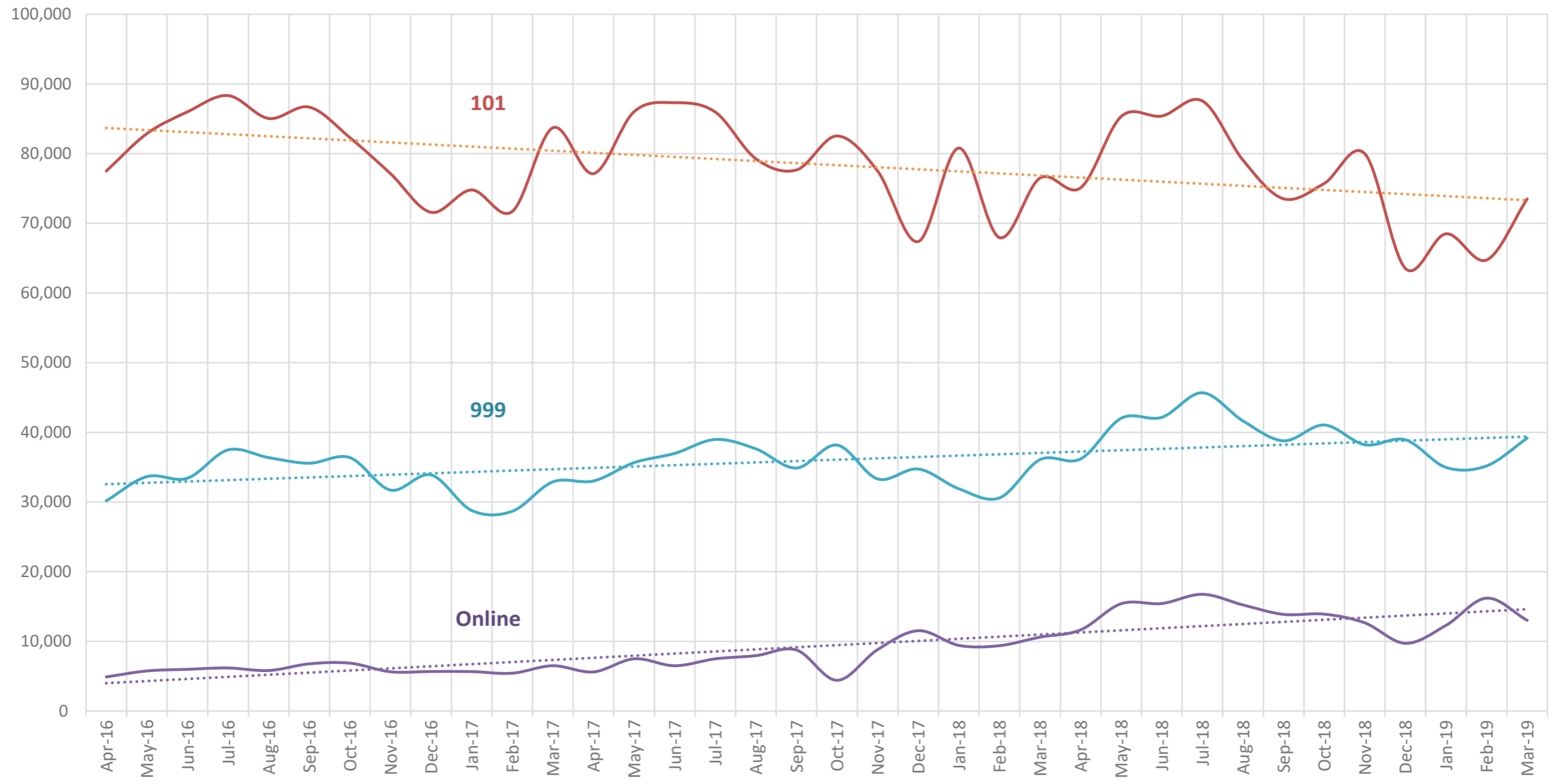
Monthly Apr 16 to Jun 19. Source: FOI



Crimes reported online and 101 and 999 calls received: West Yorkshire

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.32**

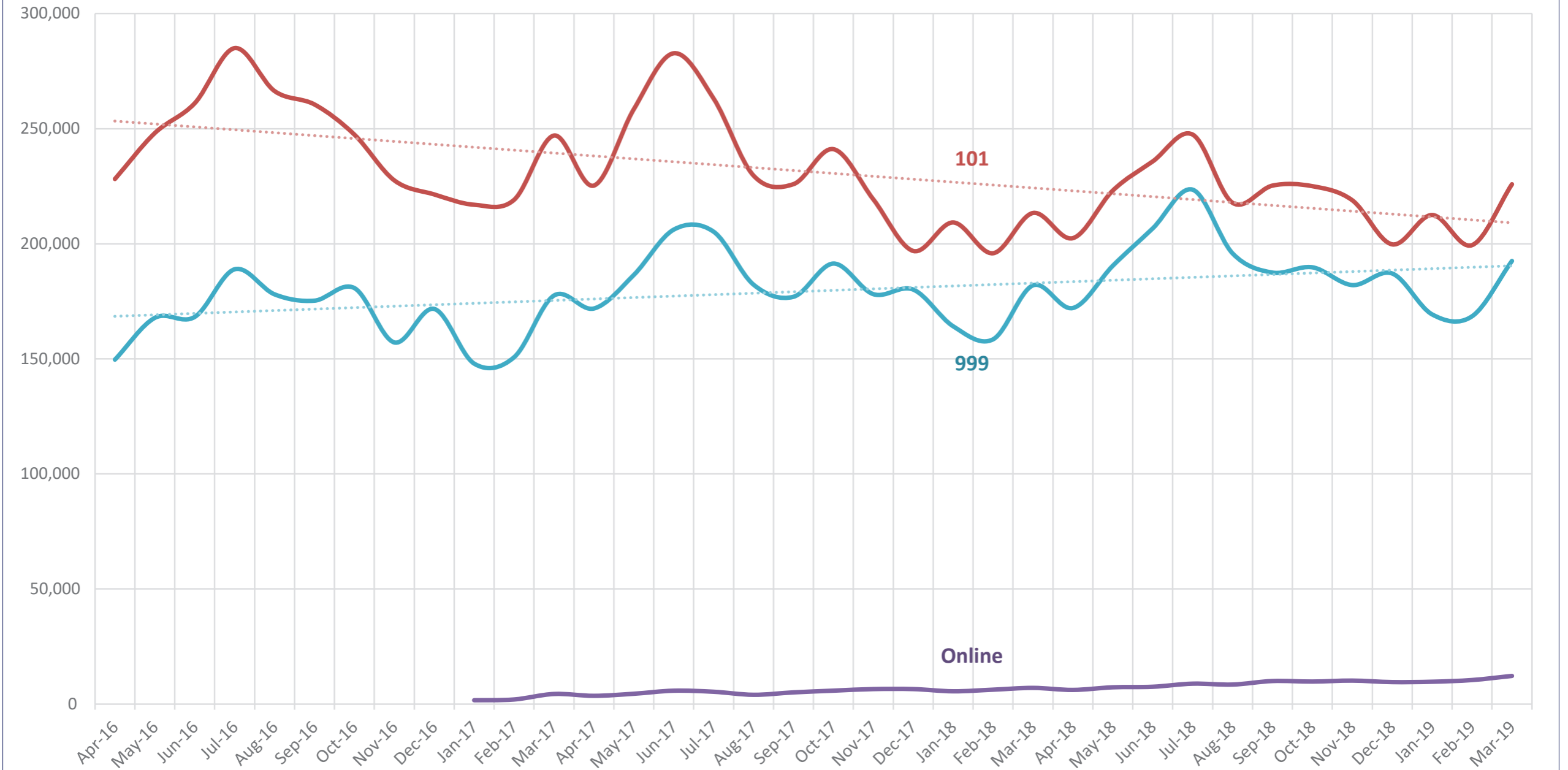
Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI



Crimes reported online and 101 and 999 calls received: Metropolitan

[CLICK TO RETURN TO RELEVANT PAGE](#) **Fig.33**

Monthly, Apr 16 to Mar 19. Source: FOI





# Two FOI requests sent to 48 police forces

The Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were sent to 46 UK police forces plus Guernsey and States of Jersey. Responses were received from 36 forces in time for analysis

## Call handling FOI request (April 2019)

1. Please state the number of 999 calls received by your force's control room in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
2. Please state the number of 101 calls received by your force's control room in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please break down the number of calls by calendar month.
3. Please state the waiting time targets for your force for
  - a) 999 calls
  - and
  - b) 101 calls
4. Please state the number of 999 calls that breached your force's waiting time targets in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
5. Please state the number of 101 calls that breached your force's waiting time targets in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
6. Please state the number of 999 calls that were dropped or abandoned by your force's control room before they could be

answered in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.

7. Please state the number of 101 calls that were dropped or abandoned by your force's control room before they could be answered in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
8. Please state the number of 999 calls to your force's control room that were first graded as emergency incidents i.e. Grade 1/I in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
9. Please state the number of 101 calls to your force's control room that were first graded as emergency incidents i.e. Grade 1/I in the last 3 years (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
- 10.a) Please state how many vehicle related incident automated eCall alerts were received by your force in the last 12 months (1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019). Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.
- 10.b) How many of the eCalls turned out to be false alarms? Please breakdown the number of calls by calendar month.

## Online crime reporting FOI (August 2019)

1. Does your force have an online system for reporting crime? If yes, when was the online system implemented?
2. If you do have an online system for reporting crime, what categories of crime are the public able to report (please list the categories as they appear on the website)?
3. Does each crime report submitted online directly generate a crime record? If not what are the steps to a crime record being created?
4. Does each crime report submitted generate a call back requirement for the force?
5. How many crimes have been reported online in the three years 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019 or for the period since the online reporting system was launched. (Please break down the number of crimes reported by calendar month)

*Note: Only the question 5 on volumes of crime was used for this report due to inconsistent responses to the other questions.*

*Note: There was insufficient response to question 10 for analysis to be included in this report with police forces unable or unwilling to extract eCall data from their systems*

