POLICING AND THE PUBLIC: UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC PRIORITIES, ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

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THE POLICE FOUNDATION
The UK's policing think tank

Insight Paper 1

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About the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales

Launched by the Police Foundation in September 2019, the *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* sets out to examine how crime, fear of crime and other threats to public safety are changing and assess the ability of the police to meet these challenges, as part of a wider strategic response. This far-reaching independent review, the first of its kind in many years, is being chaired by Sir Michael Barber and guided by an Advisory Board of former senior police officers, politicians and leading academics.

The overall aim of the Review is to set the long-term strategic vision for English and Welsh policing. It will conclude in summer 2021 with a final report presenting substantial recommendations for a modern service capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

More specifically, the Review will consider:

- What the police mission should be, looking in particular at the public's expectations of the police.
- The capabilities and resources the police service needs to achieve this mission.
- The future police workforce, including the roles, responsibilities, skills and knowledge of police officers and staff.
- How the police service should be structured and held to account, locally, regionally and nationally.
- How the police service should work with other sectors to deal with complex social problems.
- How much funding the police service requires and how this should be allocated.

More information about the Review can be found at: http://www.policingreview.org.uk

The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales is being generously funded by the Dawes Trust, Deloitte and CGI.

About the Insight Papers

This is the first in a series of Insight Papers, authored or commissioned by the Police Foundation, to inform the deliberations of the Strategic Review. The content of these papers does not represent the Review's final conclusions or recommendations but provides an input and a stimulus for discussion, based on research and analysis by the Police Foundation and external contributors.

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Its mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. It does this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

Andy Higgins is Research Director of the Police Foundation.

FOREWORD

By Sir Michael Barber

It is daunting to have been invited to chair the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales but also a huge opportunity. We intend to ask the most fundamental questions about the changing landscape of crime and the nature of policing as we approach the mid-21st century.

I have been hugely encouraged by the response to the announcement of the Review. I am struck by the number of people in the police and far beyond who have commented not just that it is timely to ask these fundamental questions about crime and policing but also that it is urgently necessary.

The questions the Review will need to ask are complex, even profound. It will inevitably raise issues not just about the nature of crime and how to tackle it, not just about policing and how it needs to change but also about the relationships between the police and other social services such as education and health and ultimately about the relationship between police, citizens and society. Questions of legitimacy and consent will be as important as those of capacity and effectiveness.

It is therefore appropriate that our first publication should focus on what the public think about the police and what their priorities should be. The answers, based on recent focus groups, polls and other research are rich, insightful and nuanced. There is a strong bedrock of support for the police but there are also high expectations which are not, currently, being met. This report sets out and explains the detail.

The single message from the report I want to highlight in this Foreword is that the more fully citizens are engaged in discussion about crime, the challenges facing police and the need to prioritise, the stronger their understanding of, and respect for, the police becomes. As Sir Robert Peel recognised at the beginning of modern policing in the late 1820s, the rule of law, the tackling of crime and the effectiveness of policing all depend on the quality of the relationship between police and citizens. As the world changes dramatically we need to ensure this fundamental principle remains central.

SUMMARY

This is the first in a series of Insight papers informing the Police Foundation's *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales*. It focuses on the public's perceptions of, and priorities for, today's police service. The paper draws on two sources: first, representative surveys of public opinion, and second, the Police Foundation's own recent, qualitative research, that sought to understand what lies behind the attitudes captured by opinion polls in greater depth. The paper provides **ten key insights** (summarised briefly below), that can help shape the Review's thinking about the challenge the police face in maintaining public support while also meeting new threats.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. There is bedrock of public support for the police:

Most people retain a positive opinion of the police service. This tends to increase as they learn more about the current challenges.

2. Support is not consistently distributed:

Trust and confidence in the police is markedly lower among some population groups. Black Caribbean people in particular experience policing less positively.

3. We may be at a 'tipping point':

Public views are changing; crime and policing have risen up the national agenda and ratings of local police are declining. This appears to reflect a widespread perception of police 'withdrawal' across multiple aspects of service.

4. The public want more visible policing and there are some specific reasons for this at the current time:

Our qualitative research suggests the current call for greater police presence is linked to a widespread sense of local 'deterioration', concerns about knife crime and a lack of clarity on the current policing 'offer'.

5. When asked to rank policing priorities, the public do not tend to focus on 'low-level' local crime and disorder:

Although people continue to ask for local order maintenance, when asked to choose between competing priorities, 'low-level' local issues tend be seen as less important.

6. The public are sensitive to harm and, when ranking priorities, emphasise the importance of police tackling serious and sexual violence and abuse:

In making choices about policing priorities, people tend to assess 'harm' and prioritise areas where it is perceived to be severe, direct and concentrated on 'the person'. Reducing and responding to serious violence and sexual crimes are seen by the public as clear top priorities for today's police service.

7. The public have a 'traditional' view of the police role:

People's priority decisions also draw on assumptions about what the police (relative to other agencies and actors) *do* and *should do*. Traditional ideas about police remit are in tension with the current trend towards responding to acute welfare and safety demand (such as dealing with people in mental health crisis). These preconceptions are flexible however; when people understand more about the demands on modern policing, suggestions for new ways of delivering public safety often follow.

8. People want visible local policing, but when asked to choose, see neighbourhood policing as less important than other areas of police work:

In line with national surveys, our focus group respondents called for a greater local police presence but, (initially at least), attached less importance to

other features of neighbourhood policing such as reassurance, engagement and community building; when asked to make trade-offs, neighbourhood policing tended to be seen as less important than other police functions. These views began to change however as the challenges of modern policing became better understood.

9. *Procedural justice* can reduce crime; *strategic alignment* between police and public priorities may also have positive benefits:

There is strong evidence that public perceptions of fair and respectful treatment by the police can influence compliance with the law, by generating a sense of 'moral alignment'. Our focus group research suggested that similar processes might be activated by police demonstrating that they have *'got their priorities right'*. Austerity, and the narrative of 'difficult choices', have sensitised the public to the need to prioritise, and communicating the 'wrong' choices may be particularly costly in terms of public confidence.

10. When people have more information and opportunities for deliberation, their priorities adjust and they become more positive towards the police:

As people learn more about the police operating environment and discuss priorities with their peers they tend to move towards consensus, take on a longer term perspective, recognise complexity, see that they have a part to play themselves and view the police in a more positive light.

Strategic implications are identified in three key areas to which the Review might give attention.

First, these insights highlight the need – but also some public permission – to reconsider the **form, function and focus that public facing local policing might adopt**. It doing so, three objectives might be given some emphasis 1) reversing the pervasive sense of police 'withdrawal' across multiple aspects service, 2) addressing long-standing deficits of trust, in particular among specific ethic minority communities, and 3) tackling the harmful violence and abuse that the public think the police should prioritise (including by building resilient communities, engaging, involving and winning trust and gathering local intelligence).

There is a clearly articulated public need for greater visible public-space guardianship, but also a strong case for strengthening arrangements to address the 'problems' that generate and amplify public security anxieties, at multiple levels.

Second, the **importance of value alignment between the police and public** is emphasised, both in terms of the *procedural justice* of specific encounters and the *strategic* priority choices communicated formally and through police activity. Our research shows that the public have fairly consistent policing priorities, and this is relevant to the Review's thinking about the 'core' police mission.

Third, the **critical importance of developing the public dialogue** in relation to policing and public safety is brought to the fore. Substantive strategic change is unlikely to be achieved while the public understanding of *'what the police do'* extends very little beyond traditional (response, patrol and investigation) functions. However, there are indications that people respond positively to new information and the chance to engage with contemporary public safety challenges. A range of measures, including greater use of deliberative democracy, might have the potential to change the debate.

INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales

In September 2019 the Police Foundation launched a major, independent Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales, the first of its kind in many years. In its first phase the Review will set out the ***challenge*** that the 21st century police service should be designed and prepared to address. It will explore the role the police should play, as part of the wider strategic response, to a changing landscape of crime, public safety, fear of crime and public expectation. The Review will then go on, in its second phase, to identify the ***capabilities*** that the police will need to take on that mission, including workforce, skills, powers, equipment, accountability mechanisms, structures and resources. The Review will conclude in summer 2021 with a final report setting out a long-term strategic vision for English and Welsh policing and presenting substantial recommendations for a modern service capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

The first phase of the Review will report in spring 2020. It will draw on a public Call for Evidence, a set of interviews with key informants, a programme of secondary research and the experience of its Advisory Board. It will also be informed by several thematic *Insight* papers, each addressing specific aspects of the police role in today's world.

This is the first paper in that series; it focuses on the public's perceptions of – and priorities for – today's police service. Rather than providing definitive recommendations, the paper is designed to frame questions and prompt discussion, from which the Review might benefit. Rather than providing comprehensive coverage of all the evidence and theory in the area, it seeks to summarise the landscape, highlight key issues and provide recent insights from the Foundation's own research.

Understanding the public's priorities for policing

This paper draws on two sources. First, data from representative opinion surveys of the public's confidence in the police and their attitudes to police priorities, and second, primary research undertaken by the Police Foundation in the first half of 2019, described briefly below.

Conducted in six English and one Welsh police force area,[1] the *Understanding the public's priorities for policing* project set out to develop a deeper and more sophisticated appreciation of the public's views on police priorities than surveys and traditional consultations typically provide. The research methodology was primarily qualitative, but as well as investigating *existing* public opinions, our focus groups contained *'deliberative'* elements that sought to explore how people's views changed in the light of new contextual information, and when given the chance to consider it in-depth and alongside peers (Burchardt, 2012; Taylor, 2018a, 2018b). In addition, with a view to mapping the diversity of opinion encountered and understanding the shared viewpoints present within our participant groups more 'holistically', we also made use of Q Methodology; a robust quantitative technique for studying subjectivity, using ranked sorting exercises and 'by person' factor analysis (Stephenson, 1935; Watts and Stenner, 2012).

Initially carried out as a series of discrete local investigations, careful synthesis and comparison across research sites then identified considerable consistencies likely to have relevance beyond these locations. In total, fieldwork consisted of 28 focus groups, carried out in 16 locations across the seven police force areas, in which over 250 members of the public took part. The findings summarised here is therefore qualitative and exploratory; gaps in our research coverage, particularly with regard to the most urban and therefore ethnically diverse localities

1 Fieldwork took place in 'high' and 'low' demand locations in the Derbyshire, Dorset, Gwent, Hertfordshire, Humberside, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire police force areas. We are extremely grateful to the Police and Crime Commissioners for each of those areas whose support made the project possible.

are acknowledged and conclusions about 'the public' therefore carry caveats.[2]

The full methodology and project findings are described elsewhere (Higgins, 2019). In this paper we present ten key insights, drawn from it and informed by relevant public surveys, which can help shape the Strategic Review's thinking about the challenges policing must confront, not only in meeting new threats, but in maintaining the approval, support and cooperation of the population it serves.

The public and the policing challenge

Defining the challenge that English and Welsh policing should be designed and equipped to meet requires more than just a threat assessment. In thinking strategically about the future, it is of course important to consider the way crime and other sources of 'demand' are being reshaped by technology, social change and globalisation, and what this means for the police service of today and tomorrow. However, it is equally important to revisit some foundational questions about the *role* we want the police to play in our changing society. What objectives should they seek to achieve? What activities should they (as opposed to others) undertake in pursuit of these? What principles should inform how they go about this? And, how should they decide what takes priority?

In the Peelian tradition[3] questions like these can only be answered with reference to the public. The British police are not only publicly funded, public-facing and publicly accountable, but draw their ideological legitimacy and power from public approval, consent and cooperation. While it is easy to dismiss such ideas as rhetoric and myth in the 21st century, we need only look at the way changing attitudes (rather than changes in crime incidence) have transformed police demand, in relation to rape, domestic abuse and child protection, to see how public and societal expectations powerfully frame the police mission (ONS, 2019a, HMICFRS, 2019b, NPCC, 2017).

Moreover, there is now a substantial body of evidence to support the fundamentally Peelian idea that when the police generate public approval by acting fairly, decently and respectfully towards people, they also create *legitimacy* and a sense of 'moral alignment', that predisposes people to act in socially positive ways, including by cooperating with the police and obeying the law (Tyler and Jackson, 2013; Bradford and Jackson, 2011; Jackson et al 2012).

Public attitudes therefore matter for policing, pragmatically as well as ideologically. They also matter democratically (and electorally), as reflected by the wide range of policy initiatives introduced by governments since the start of this century to make the police more responsive to public needs and expectations. From neighbourhood policing and statutory local consultation to Public Service Agreements, citizen focused policing and public confidence targets, and then more recently to locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners, strengthened inspection and complaints regimes and Community Trigger legislation, the political imperative has been to ensure the police address the public's concerns, wishes and fears, as well as keeping them safe.

This double-track policing purpose (to provide both public safety and a publicly responsive service) has proved increasingly difficult to sustain. With police budgets and officer numbers cut, and the balance of risk shifting from public spaces and 'volume' crime to online threats and 'hidden' vulnerability, many aspects of public facing 'core' policing have effectively become 'de-prioritised'. As a result, concerns have begun to emerge about the health of the police 'covenant' with the public (NPCC, 2018) and the 'mismatch' between the public's 'traditional' expectations and what the police feel compelled to prioritise (HMICFRS, 2019a).

2 Where research participants' responses have been presented as numerical aggregations (in Figures 6, 7 and 8) this is to provide an indicative summary of the views expressed during the research and does not purport to be a representative survey of any wider population group. We do however draw attention to the consistency of views identified (eg across locations and demographic groups) and triangulation with other more robust surveys (eg BMRG Research / HMICFRS, 2018 (pp.50-56)) which is at least suggestive of wider applicability.

3 The 'General Instructions' putatively provided to police officers since 1829 (known as the Peelian Principles) contain a set of influential ideas that still provide the foundations for policing in Britain and many other countries. The principles emphasise crime prevention over enforcement, the maintenance of public cooperation and consent, minimal use of force and police impartiality before the law (See: Home Office, 2012).

In recent months these concerns have begun to resonate in the national political debate in a way not heard for some years. With the Prime Minister's pledge to recruit 20,000 new officers (Gov.uk, 2019), it is clear that crime and policing have moved back up the public policy agenda. But it also appears that the myriad attempts to better connect the police to the public, have done little to finesse the debate about what the public *actually* want from their police service. More officers, tougher sentences and 'control of the streets' are successful as election slogans, but to provide fit-for-purpose policing in the decades to come, the police themselves will need a more sophisticated understanding of the public's needs, values and priorities. This paper provides **ten insights,** from our research and other surveys that we hope provide a framework for a more nuanced understanding of what the English and Welsh public currently think, feel and value in relation to crime and policing matters.

TEN KEY INSIGHTS

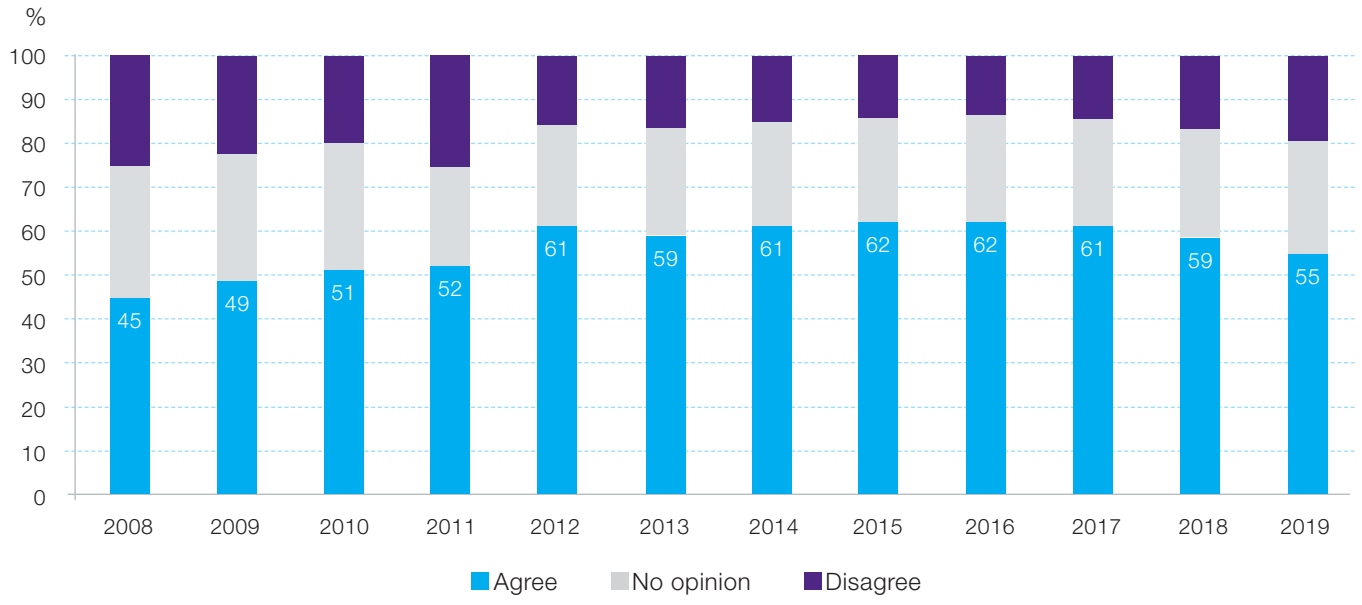
1: There is an enduring bedrock of public support for the police

A survey of the British public conducted for the 1962 Royal Commission on the Police found that, contrary to warnings about *"changed attitudes"* and *"a decay in respect for properly constituted authority"*, four fifths of the population professed 'great respect' for the police, while only one in a hundred had little or none (p.101-103).

Given the momentous social changes – not to mention the police corruption scandals, urban unrest and troubled industrial relations – of the decades that followed (Newburn, 2003 (pp.85-88)), it is unsurprising that such *'overwhelming'* levels of public support could not endure. However, almost 60 years on, it remains the case that the English and Welsh public, on the whole, hold their police in high regard.

In recent public surveys five times as many people said their local force had a good reputation than reported a negative one (BMG, 2019 (p40)), twice as many people said they would speak highly of their local police than would be critical (BMG, 2019 (p14))[4] and nearly nine in ten people said they had a favourable opinion of the police as an institution (ICM

Figure 1: Public confidence in the police (Crime Survey for England and Wales: percentage agreeing that "police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in the local area"; years ending March 2008 to 2019 (ONS, 2019b)).



4 In both cases around a quarter hold ambivalent views.

Unlimited, 2017). In rankings of 'trustworthiness' British police officers are placed above judges, journalists, civil servants and politicians (but below scientists, doctors and teachers) (Ipsos, 2019), and there is evidence that trust in policing as a profession has grown steadily over recent years (Ipsos MORI, 2017).

The most established measure of 'public confidence' in the police[5] has consistently attracted at least twice as many positive as negative responses over the last decade and, up to 2016, generally showed incremental improvement, although this has since diminished, slightly at first, then more markedly in 2018/19 (ONS, 2019b).

While acknowledging that there are population groups for whom police relations are more problematic and places where trust and confidence are harder to gain and maintain (see point 2), it is clear that, overall, the police continue to operate within a background environment of general public support and high regard.

This bedrock of support was apparent in our focus groups. Despite recent frustrations at perceived 'withdrawal' across multiple aspects of service, the overwhelming public sentiment was that the police do a valuable and challenging job, in circumstances made even more difficult by funding cuts and a perceived lack of support from other parts of the criminal justice system – and that despite these barriers, they generally did it well.

Importantly, it was also clear that public respect, support and sympathy for the police *increased* the more people learned and thought about the challenges and difficult decisions presented by the current operating environment. The comments (below), from research participants who had just completed a police priority ranking exercise, illustrate the typical feedback.

> *"It's really opened my eyes up because you think of the police dealing with the big stuff… but just how much they deal with…we are too quick to complain."*

> *"You look at it from the perspective of someone trying to plan a shift within a police force and it would be mission impossible."*

After hearing more information about the nature and scale of police demand, other respondents summed up the common sentiment.

> *"So, the way that people give the police a bit of a hard time – not responding if your car's been stolen or 'they didn't really do anything' – when you start thinking about the wider picture and what they actually are dealing with, it's not just because they're sat in their office on the phone with a cup of tea. It's a bit different…the lack of resources, and they're dealing with quite a lot more serious stuff."*

> *"I think they* [the police] *get a rough deal if I'm honest, I think policing is really, really complex and I think…the average member of the public isn't going to understand … We see the stuff on the ground, which is important to us, …whereas, actually, we don't really understand the higher end of the scale that they're working at".*

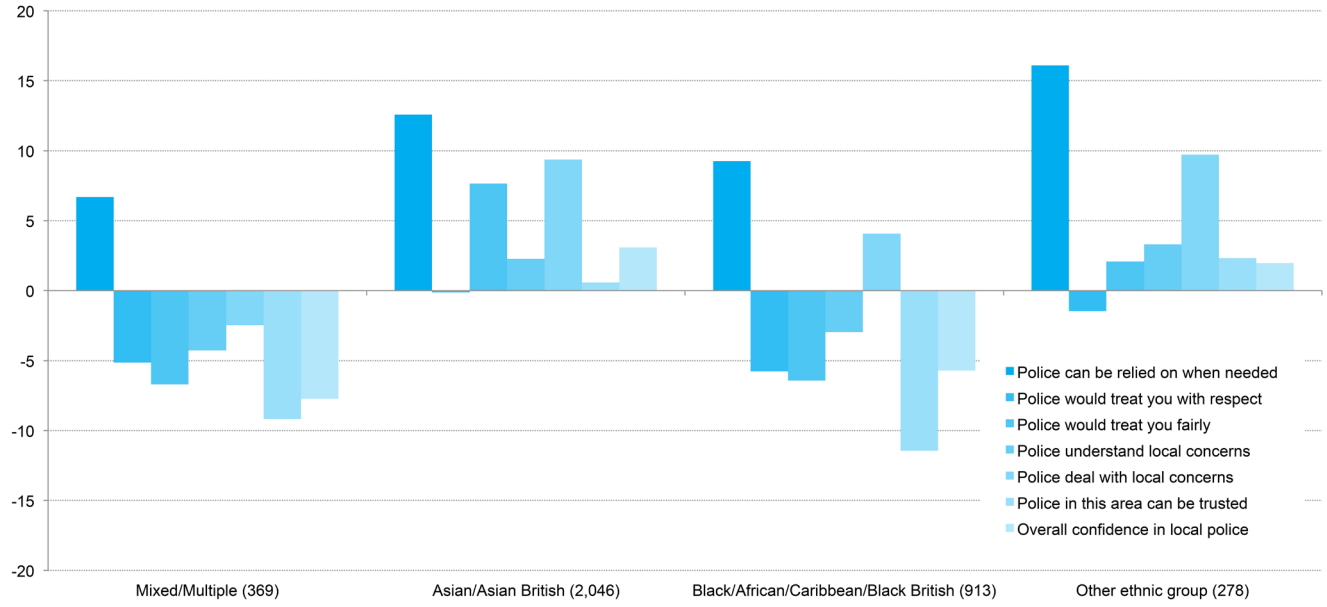
It is clear then that, although undoubtedly diminished since the early 1960s, the public retain a substantial level of positive support for the police service and that the more they are involved in the conversation, the more their respect and appreciation tends to grow.

2: Public support is not consistently distributed across the population

Not everyone shares this level of trust and confidence in the police however, and there are structural factors to the distribution of less positive views; most notably reflecting differences between people from different ethnic backgrounds. Figure 2 shows the extent to which (broadly categorised) ethnic minority groups differ from white people on a set of perception measures taken from the most recent Crime Survey of England and Wales. It shows that although black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) respondents tend to view their local police as being more *reliable* than white respondents, those from black and

5 This tracks the level of public agreement with the statement: *The police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in the local area*. It has been shown to map more closely onto perceptions of the police than local councils and to be driven by perceptions of fairness and shared values more than perceived instrumental effectiveness (Jackson and Bradford, 2010).

Figure 2: Perceptions of local police (per cent who agree): difference between (broad) ethnic minority groups and white majority (n=30,046) (ONS, 2019b)



mixed ethnic groups (specifically) are at least five percentage points (and as many as 12) less likely to agree that local police would *treat them fairly*, with *respect* and that they could be *trusted*. They also trail white people by six and eight percentage points (respectively) on overall public confidence. Asian respondents and those from 'other' ethnic groups tend to be as or more positive about the police compared with white respondents.

These broadly defined ethnic groupings mask more nuanced differences. Most notably, within the black category, Caribbean respondents were 30 percentage points less likely than white British respondents to agree that the police can be *trusted* and trail by 19 percentage points on overall confidence.[6] Black African respondents, on the other hand, showed similar or more positive responses compared with the white British group and, within the Asian grouping, Pakistani respondents were generally less positive about the police than Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese or other sub-groups.

Ethnicity also interacts with age; among 16 to 24 year olds the 'confidence gap' between white and black and mixed ethnic groups is particularly marked (and statistically significant) although this tends to reduce, but not disappear, for older groups (Gov.uk, 2018).

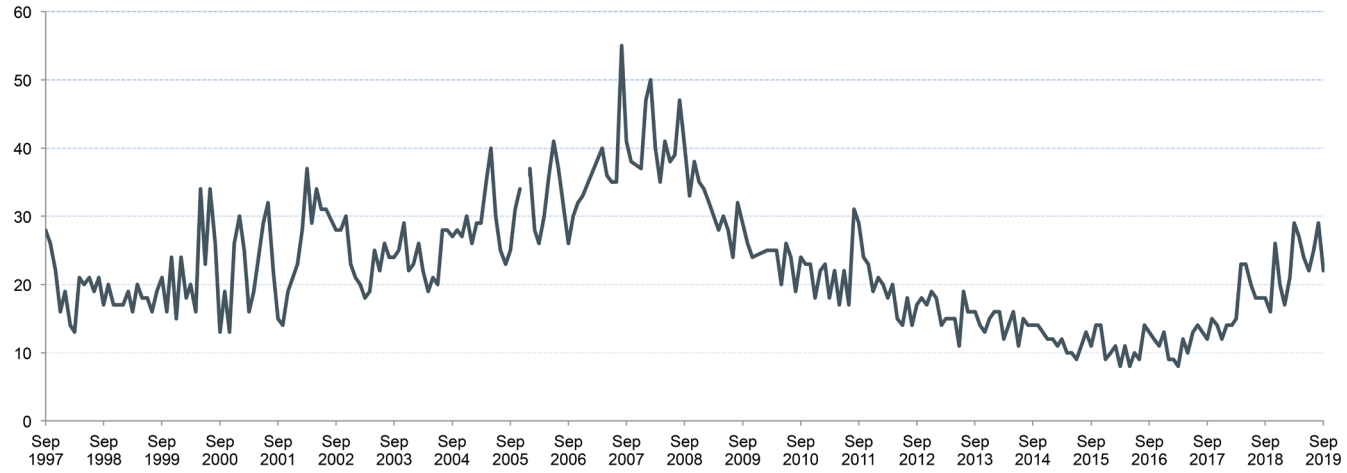
There are other sections of society where confidence and other ratings of the police are generally less strong – although none are as marked as for ethnicity. Disabled respondents give lower ratings, as do people not in employment due to long term ill-health, those living in single adult households (with children), social renters and those living in more deprived areas (ONS, 2019b).

Research suggests that demographic and socio-economic factors (such as ethnicity and deprivation) are not *independently* related to confidence (specifically), once differences in other perceptions (of local police effectiveness, fair treatment and of local crime and antisocial behaviour levels) are taken into account (Myhill and Beak, 2008).[7] There is also evidence (from the USA) that these perceptions can be influenced by vicarious as well as direct experiences of policing (Rosenbaum et al, 2005). We should be reminded therefore that although the language of Peel, democratic accountability and public 'service', predispose us to think of a singular 'public', policing is experienced very differently across the population.

6 Smaller sample sizes for specific ethnic sub-categories mean comparisons should be treated cautiously however the confidence deficit among Caribbean communities is statistically robust and consistent over time (Gov.uk, 2018).

7 In other words, it is these perceptions rather than the socio-demographic characteristics *in themselves* that relate to confidence.

Figure 3: Percentage of people each month who cite crime/law and order (etc) as 'one of the most important issues facing Britain today'. (Source: Ipsos MORI (2019).[8] Base: 1,000 per month)



3: We may be at a 'tipping point' in terms of public views on crime and policing

Notwithstanding the underlying strength of support for the police at the population level, there is evidence of a notable recent shift in public concerns and perceptions that may, in future, come to be regarded as a 'tipping point'. As mentioned previously, crime and policing are back on the public agenda; Figure 3 is taken from Ipsos MORI's Issues Index and tracks the proportion of their monthly sample who mentioned crime (or similar 'law and order' matters) as one of the three *most important issues facing Britain today*. It shows that over a five-year period, up to the end of 2017, crime and policing had a conspicuously low public salience. In 2018 and 2019 however, with crime (and knife crime in particular) making headlines, law and order re-emerged as a prominent national issue, reaching (in August 2019) a profile not seen since the 2011 riots.

The interplay of public concern, political attention and media coverage in generating these response patterns is no doubt complex. It is clear however that this surge in topicality has accompanied more specific recent changes in people's views about the level and quality of service they receive from the police.

Figure 4 shows data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, tracking public perceptions of local policing since 2006 (ONS, 2019b). It shows steady improvement on all measures up to 2012, followed by a general plateau (or marked slow-down in improvement) in ratings to 2018. In the most recent survey however, all measures (except police respectfulness) saw modest, but unprecedented and statistically significant, deteriorations. In the year to March 2019, public ratings for police *understanding* and *acting* on local concerns, being *reliable*, treating people *fairly* and of *confidence in local police*[9] (although still generally positive) all took a turn for the worse.

Our qualitative work strongly suggests that this downturn reflects widespread perceptions of deterioration in public-facing police services (as reflected in the quotations from our focus group respondents below), including in terms of:

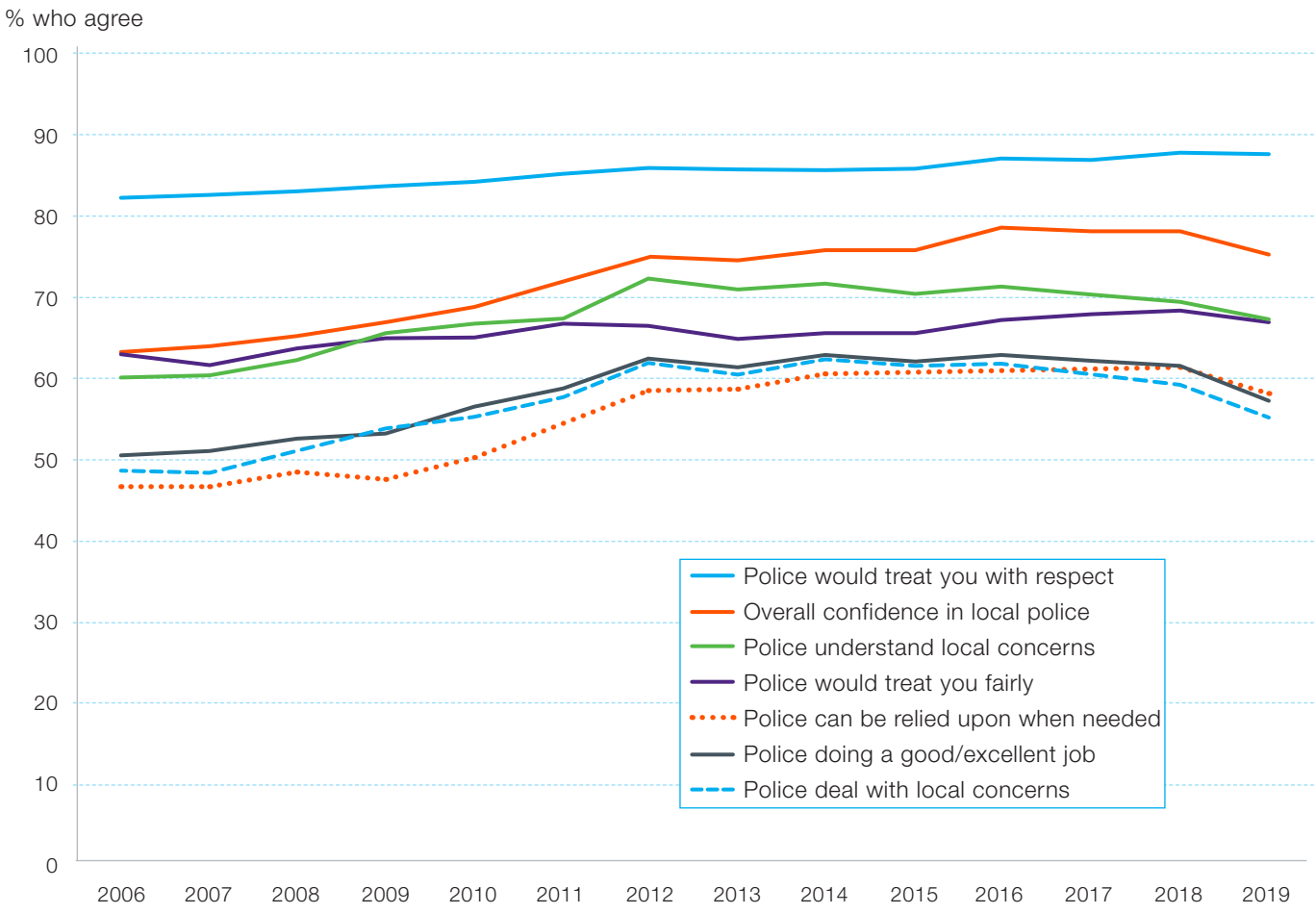
Absence from public space;

> *"Where I live we get a lot of issues with kids on stolen mopeds, people delivering drugs… it's a known* [high-crime] *area but you never see a local bobby, never see somebody on the beat like you used to, just putting people off as a deterrent more than anything, they are always having to react to something that has already happened."*

8 We are grateful to Ipsos MORI for making available the source data to reproduce this chart.

9 This is a different Crime Survey for England and Wales question from the headline 'public confidence' measure reported in Figure 4. This measure tracks *overall confidence in local police* the public confidence measure tracks agreement that *police and local councils are tackling the local crime and antisocial behaviour issues that matter*.

Figure 4: Trends in ratings and perceptions of local police: years ending March 2006 to March 2019. (Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales. Base: 33,704 (2019))



Responses to calls for assistance;

> *"I was living next to a neighbour for two years and she used to scream abuse at us…It was parties; it was drugs, smashing my garden up… She terrorised me and a couple of other neighbours. Multiple times we have phoned the police because she is…screaming and shouting, threatening everybody and never once, over two years have the police come out… y'know, it wasn't life threatening but it would have been nice, if somebody had come out and said, y'know, 'we're here'."*

Crime investigation;

> *"The police just weren't interested, so you're best to try to solve it through Facebook."*

Victim service;

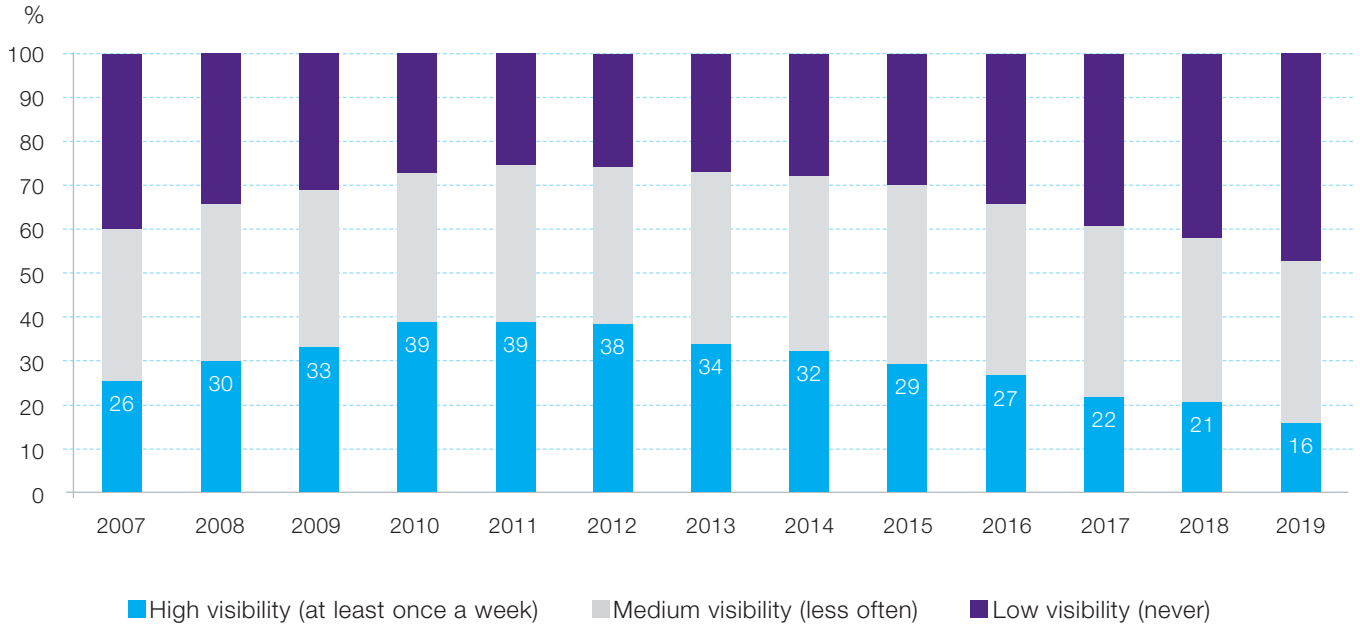
> *"I remember when I was younger, I was absolutely gutted because I had my favourite video stolen out of the video player, and when we got back I remember the police doing finger-printing, like, really taking the time to make you feel like the police were really doing a good job. And now…it's literally just crime reference number for insurance, because they can't do any more than that."*

And local focus;

> *"It's like they are withdrawing from the town, bit by bit… I get the feeling that they would rather not be in that messy day to day crime that we experience, they'd much rather be dealing with the gun trade or the sex trade… they'd rather be doing that."*

Despite occasional accusations of police laziness, despondency, or defensiveness, the vast majority of respondents saw these erosions as direct consequences of cuts in government funding that were beyond the control of the police. Although largely sympathetic to their predicament, it is clear that the public now believe they are getting less from the police, and that they think the police should have the resources to do more.

Figure 5: Trends in visibility of police foot patrols, years ending March 2007 to March 2019. (ONS, 2019b) Base: 8,726 (2019)



4: The public want more visible policing and there are some specific reasons for this at the current time

Long before ratings of local police began to deteriorate, people began to notice that they were not around as much. The steady drop in police visibility since 2012 was the first, and perhaps still most marked, indication that service changes were making an impression on the public at large.

A local police presence remains important to most people but only one in four are satisfied with the current level of visible patrol in their area (BMG, 2019 (p.26)). In our research, the lack of, and need for more visible policing was regularly and spontaneously raised by respondents. In their rankings of police priorities, participants tended to give high importance to *'providing a presence on the streets'* (although dealing with serious and sexual violence, other forms of harmful crime and responding quickly to emergencies were generally seen as more important (see Figure 6)).

The public 'clamour' for visible policing is, of course, long-standing and (perhaps) insatiable, but that is not to say that the sentiments and rationale behind it do not change over time. In fact, several recurring themes from our discussion groups point to concerns that seem specific to the current context and suggest forms of responses that might go beyond simply upping the number of officers on patrol.

First, the desire for a greater police presence was expressed most often in the context of a general sense of 'deterioration' in the quality and atmosphere of familiar local public spaces (such as town centres, parks and shopping precincts). In many locations, and as illustrated in the quotations below, respondents identified empty shops, civic disrepair, street homelessness and visible drug and alcohol misuse as signs of a local 'turn for the worse' and saw these changes as indicators of increased menace and threat.

> *"You just see people dealing drugs and smoking, you just see it all, you see people fighting, it's just disgusting. You go through town and there's barely any shops, people begging, they've got no shoes and socks on. It's just not a nice place to be anymore, not at all."*

> *"I went to town Wednesday after work…I parked my car…and I wanted to walk through the market-place. I chose to walk all the way around because I felt intimidated by some louts drinking with a dog. If I can't walk through at half past four in the evening it's a bad thing."*

The instinctive response to this increased sense of nearby malignancy was often to call for a greater deterrent police presence.

Second, it was also clear that for some, this local sense of 'edge' and unease had become intertwined with the national narrative of an advancing knife crime 'epidemic', and a sense that once remote threats were coming 'closer to home'.

"Before it always used to be far away in London…now…people that you know are really getting affected by these things…ten years ago. It used to be far, far away now it's someone I went to school with."

"If you go down my road a little bit it starts getting a bit ropey, and it just never used to be like that. Kids will be kids and they're always messing about, but it wasn't like drugs and; someone was stabbed at the bottom of the road …That's not what I'm used to and I think that there would be less [crime] *if there was a higher police presence."*

Third, in the context of the perceived reduction in services, respondents expressed some lack of faith and clarity about what the police 'offer' to the public currently entails. Against this ambiguity, *visible* policing was seen as tangible evidence of at least *some* policing.

"The impression is a lot of these things just go into a black hole and you get a crime number and a leaflet to say 'there's your victim support' …It feeds into not seeing anyone around, police stations being closed, it's just that sense of 'I don't really know what response I'm going to get if I have to call'."

"You wouldn't mind them not being visible if then, when you need them, they came straight away, because they are sending resources to where they are needed…but when you do phone them, they don't come anyway."

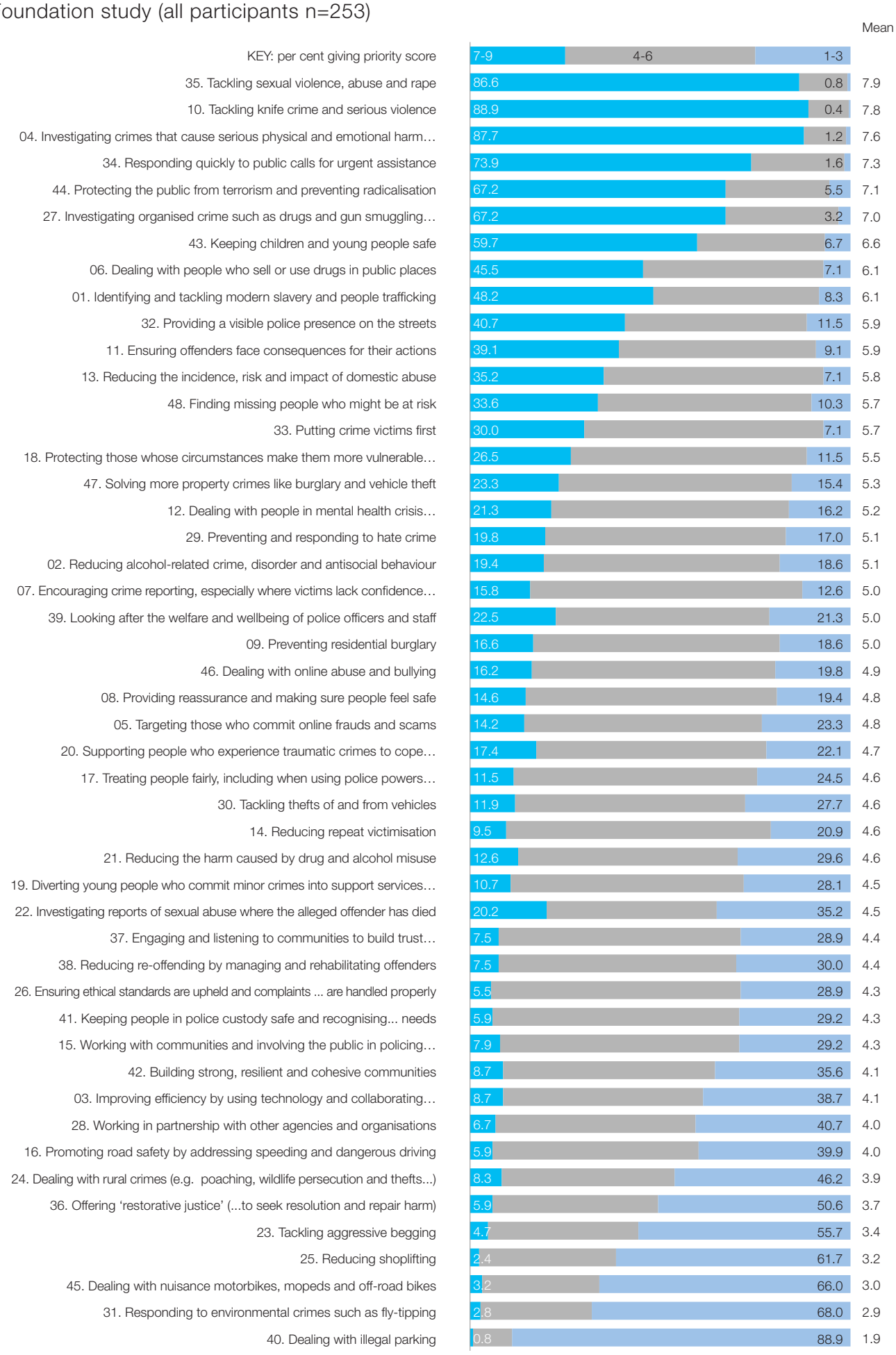
Finally, it is worth noting that there was a recurring (although minority) counter-narrative to the call for greater police presence – if a rather bleak one. This held that the recent police 'absence' from the streets, coupled with diminished social deference, over-empowered youth and criminal justice leniency had robbed visible policing of its deterrent efficacy.

"You go back to the days when people used to be quite scared of the police, I don't necessarily think that's the case anymore …I can imagine that there's a lot of people in this town who just have zero respect…that might be because they've grown up and they [police] *aren't on the streets."*

"I don't think the visible presence does anything at all. People have no respect for the police whatsoever, they couldn't care less. I've watched people…light up a joint in front of a policeman as they're walking passed…I don't think that works nowadays, because there is so little respect for the police force".

Like the call for police presence, public concerns about a 'catastrophic' decline in attitudinal standards are also familiar and these warnings evoke the social-change anxieties heard by the Royal Commissioners in the early 1960s. But, while familiar, they suggest some ground for the police to make up. Police visibility remains a viscerally important issue for many and there is undoubtedly a strong argument that it should be bolstered after a period of attrition. Additionally however, the public concerns and reasoning summarised here suggest that a more nuanced response to people's security anxieties might also include (for instance): focusing on the locations most symbolic of local deterioration, addressing the visible correlates of insecurity (street homelessness, substance misuse, urban dilapidation etc) through partnership problem-solving, strategic efforts to tackle knife crime and maintaining and communicating a 'balanced' local policing offer.

Figure 6: Summary of priority rankings given by participants completing 'Q sorts' in Police Foundation study (all participants n=253)



Note on Figure 6: At the start of each focus group (before any substantial discussion of crime and policing issues had taken place), each participant was provided with 48 'items' printed on magnetic cards (shown on the left), and asked to arrange them into a 'Q-sort' grid in the order that best represented their views on what *'the police should prioritise'*. The grid required two items to be designated as 'top priorities' (each given a ranking score of 9), four to be assigned to the next highest priority category (score of 8), six in the next category (score 7), eight in each of the next three descending categories (scores of 6, 5 and 4), six in the score 3 category, four in score 2 and two in the (lowest priority) score 1 category. As an illustrative summary of the views most frequently expressed by study participants, Figure 6 shows the mean ranking score given to each item (on the right) and the proportion of respondents giving each a 'high' (7-9), 'medium' (4-6) and 'low' (3-1) priority ranking (in the bar chart). The data were also subjected to force-level and second-order factor analyses to identify the distinctive shared 'viewpoints' present within the sample (see Higgins, 2019).

5: When asked to rank policing priorities, the public do not tend to focus on 'low-level' local crime and disorder

Our qualitative research has thrown up a challenging paradox. Neighbourhood police officers, Police and Crime Commissioners and local councillors and MPs across the country, will be familiar with the array of 'everyday' complaints about antisocial behaviour, 'minor' crime, incivility and nuisance that the public bring to their attention most vociferously. A dip-sample of 200 'neighbourhood priorities' recently pulled from the www.police.uk portal, and all (presumably) set following some level of public representation and consultation, provides an illustration. 28 per cent of these relate to antisocial behaviour (in general), 14 per cent to local vehicle crime or burglary, 13 per cent to public drugs activity, seven per cent to road safety, followed by nuisance motorbikes, alcohol related disorder and a host of issues from prostitution and parking to fly tipping and begging (see Higgins, 2019 for full analysis). Partly as a legacy of mid-2000s neighbourhood policing arrangements, these local 'quality of life' concerns tend to be badged and regarded as 'public priorities', which, especially when resources are stretched, brings them into tension with the 'higher harm', but less publicly visible issues to which policing – including neighbourhood policing – now directs more focus.

Our findings present a challenge to this simple opposition of *public versus police* priorities. As Figure 6 illustrates, when presented with a wide-ranging set of policing issues and asked to consider what '*the police should prioritise…'* these ubiquitous, 'low-level' issues (parking, fly tipping, nuisance motorbikes, shoplifting, aggressive begging, road safety etc) tend to gravitate to the bottom of people's lists; (no more than one in ten, and often fewer than one in 20 respondents gave these issues a 'high' priority ranking). Of the visible, persistent crime and antisocial behaviour issues included in the item set, only *alcohol related crime and disorder* and (in particular) *public place drugs activity* regularly attracted higher rankings.

This appears to show that many of these so-called 'public priorities' are not, *actually* what the public think the police should prioritise, when they are given an insight into the breadth of police business and a little time to think it through – and we should probably therefore start calling them public 'demands' or 'concerns' instead. But beyond semantics, these findings raise an important issue. In many, perhaps most, cases, interactions between public and police happen within a consumer/provider framework. The public present their 'demands' (for assistance, justice, peace of mind, local improvement) and the police attempt to satisfy these. The police have, at times, actively encouraged this service dynamic and, in many cases, it is undoubtedly appropriate. But we have demonstrated here that with only a little encouragement, people can easily and willingly step out of this mindset and engage with policing issues as socially engaged 'citizen policy-makers' rather than demanding consumers of security.

Below, three respondents reflect on *how* they completed the task of deciding what *the police should prioritise*, illustrating the shift made from an individual to a more 'universalised' perspective. As Figure 6 shows, when they do this, ubiquitous 'nuisance' issues often tend to recede into comparative triviality.

> *"I was trying to take myself away from the fact of what is a priority to me, and* [thinking about] *what is a priority – or should be a priority – to the general population."*

> *"How can you determine what you believe?… For me, every single one* [of the items] *is important because it can have an impact on somebody's life. It doesn't matter how minimal I think it is, to someone else it can have a huge impact…it's now got me thinking about the funding of the police."*

"You've got to take into account your own [views] *while trying to be reasonable…and look at it is a whole really; it's not just us."*

It does not follow, of course, that antisocial behaviour and 'quality of life' issues should be ignored; nor should we overlook the considerable, sometimes devastating, impacts these can have on people's lives. The *paradox of the public's priorities* does, however, raise the question of the *balance* policing should seek to strike between, attempting, on the one hand, to meet the public's (perhaps insatiable) 'consumer' demands for local order and security and, on the other, publicly aligning itself with the (relatively consistent) morally and socially conscious value-system that people display when they are engaged as citizens. Recent experience suggests that it will become increasingly difficult to do both, and the imminent injection of new resource will likely only provide a temporary easing. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the coming decades will be to convene a public dialogue that brings the two forms of public 'ask' closer together.

6. The public are sensitive to harm and, when ranking priorities, emphasise the importance of addressing serious and sexual violence

In its latter phases, *prioritisation* took over from *efficiency* as the police service's predominant response to austerity. Public acknowledgements that the police simply cannot meet all the demands placed on it, and that 'difficult choices' need to be made, have become common utterances (see eg Dearden, 2018, Dodd, 2015; Press Association, 2019). *Threat, risk, harm* and *vulnerability* – and to a lesser extent *demand reduction* – have become the principal paradigms on which these decisions are being made. This has resulted in an overall shift in emphasis away from the prevalent, visible, generally experienced and less serious, to the (comparatively) rarer, often 'hidden', residualised and more harmful. Despite its apparent moral imperative, this value framework has (arguably) not been explicitly communicated to or sufficiently ratified with the public. In part, our qualitative and deliberative research set out to address this gap.

We found that one of the two things people tend to do when formulating a view on police priorities, is to make an assessment of the 'harm' or 'impact' implicit within a given issue (the second is covered in point 7). Three respondents describe their thinking below;

"I [prioritised] *a lot of stuff to do with sexual violence, abuse: things that I think are massively impactful on people for the rest of their lives, I think that's a more justifiable focus".*

"I put anything that's a bit violent or can cause harm to someone [as a high priority] *and tried to sort it out like that. Even though some of these* [other] *things are quite important, because they don't stop people getting hurt or injured or anything like that, I put them quite low down."*

"I think for me it was crime that affects people rather than property; that's got more of an importance to me. Things like shoplifting, illegal parking, I don't think, to me, they are priorities; but things that have an impact on people's lives quite severely…property isn't as important as people."

As reflected in these quotations, participants tended to focus on both physical and psychological harms, especially where direct and concentrated, but tended to differentiate (high priority) harm 'to the person' from (lower priority) financial losses resulting from property crime. The result is again evident in Figure 6 and demonstrates the strong direction from the public, for the police to concentrate on serious and sexual violence as their top priorities; with terrorism and organised crime also featuring strongly due to their perceived impact. The comparatively high aggregate rankings for child protection, modern slavery and domestic abuse also show that the public recognise, and mandate the police to attend to, harms that often go unreported and occur out of the public gaze.

In our focus groups this public orientation towards harm – and violence specifically – was widespread and unequivocal. Even where our analysis identified attitudinal groups (using Q Methodology) that demonstrated a more 'traditional' emphasis on property crime, this tended to manifest as a nuanced 'sub-preference' with serious and sexual violence and terrorism still seen as being most important. Even for the minority of focus group participants most 'radically' inclined towards community-based criminal justice innovations, tackling violence remained a key concern.

Our research also found general, although qualified support for *'threat, risk and harm'* and *'vulnerability'* as an explicit framework for triaging calls for service, although there were concerns about the fallibility of the processes for identifying urgent need and about the possibility of a 'retreating threshold' in terms of the level of risk required to justify a response. Similarly, there was overall support for the principle of 'screening out' 'routine' crime investigations, once it was understood that this could allow finite resources to be focused on more serious (especially rape and sexual abuse) investigations. Here however, there were strong concerns about the impact of the practice on local acquisitive crime rates, criminal escalation and public morale.

Overall, our qualitative work appears to provide some grounds for reassurance that the key value-pillars of recent police decision making meet with public approval. It also indicates a clearly articulated public direction for the police to treat preventing and responding to the harm caused by violence and abuse as a top priority. While the police will always need to provide a broad, generalist and 'universal' service, this appears relevant to thinking about the 'core' purpose and mission of the police.

7: The public have a 'traditional' view of the police role

The second thing people do when asked to make judgements about what *the police should prioritise,* is draw on a set of deeply embedded preconceptions about the role and responsibilities of the police within society, relative to those of other agencies, communities, citizens, and other actors. As the comments below from our focus groups illustrate, this tends to reflect a rather narrow and 'traditional' understanding of police work that places much of what is now well-established preventative and/or 'welfare' related activity at the edge (if not beyond) the police remit – and therefore lower down the priority list.

"Rehabilitating people; that's not actually the police's job. That's for someone else to do… it's while the crime is happening they [the police] *should be involved…I'm not saying it* [other things] *shouldn't be dealt with…but somebody else should be doing it, not the police."*

"Dealing with online abuse and bullying, I mean that is really bad in this day and age, but would you think that that was [for] *the police? You need the schools to be working… I'd rather the police were out there protecting people from people with knives."*

"Things like 'promoting road safety'; isn't that the DVLA's job really? Because it's not really ***crime*** *we are talking about, it's about people being more aware. 'Building strong communities'; how on earth is that the police's responsibility when they have got all this stuff to do as well?"*

"People are expecting the police to parent children and problem youths… it used to be that you had neighbourhoods… if there was somebody elderly, on their own, they were looked after, not left on their own where they are a more vulnerable target and I feel like things like that have been put on the police's shoulders."

As these comments suggest, although they recognise the range and diversity of modern public safety challenges, when it came to deciding what police (specifically) should do in response, the public have not moved far away from 'standard' police tactics (Weisburd and Eck, 2004). As Figure 6 (again) reflects, in terms of the *'how'* of policing, the public prioritise rapid response, deterrent presence, and (proactive as well as reactive) investigation as part of a criminal justice intervention model. For most, there is (at least initially) little resonance, and some scepticism, about 'doing things differently', whether that be in terms of partnership working, community engagement, innovating to improve or exploring criminal justice alternatives.

This 'traditional' view of the police role came under particular tension, in our discussion groups, when participants were presented with information about the recent increase in 'non-crime' police demand. Although providing a 'generalist' emergency service was widely recognised as a crucial part of the police function, when people learnt about the way 'welfare and safety' demand was increasingly impacting on resources, they often felt compelled to limit this to what was 'crime-related' or 'just the immediate crisis'. As these comments suggest, people sensed mission drift and felt the need to resist it.

Moderator: *"Should policing be about crime or broader safety and welfare?"*

Respondent: *"I'm with the crime…for safety and welfare there are plenty of other people. OK, it may cross over a little bit for reporting and support but …you've got probation, health visitors, social services. Police for me, in my opinion, should be about crime."*

"I think police should [concentrate on the] *'act of crime', you know the actual emergencies and* [other] *agencies should act at preventing emergencies. That's how I think it should be cut."*

"I think it's really annoying when you hear about the police doing a standoff for four hours for someone on a roof with [a] *mental health* [crisis] *and those police officers could be dealing with a crime. But then on the other hand, what* [else] *would we do with this person?"*

For some however, information about rising levels of 'safety and welfare' demand, also provoked a broader realisation that *'the system'* in place for addressing (broadly defined) public safety or 'social need' was not well configured to the current challenge and profile of demand. Rather than expecting the police to take on a broader, less clearly defined workload to 'plug the gaps', participants tended to reflect on the need for broader, systemic, 'multi-agency' redesign; for instance, by creating new agencies or functions, or better funding existing ones.

"It's almost like we need to take the carpet from under them [public services], *shake it, get it all sorted and put it back under them. Which never happens does it?"*

" [If] *six out of ten missing people are children in care, does that not highlight that something's not happening?…Something's not working as it should be, so that needs to be addressed."*

"We almost need 'layers' of police don't we?"

"There should be more overlap in terms of who can respond to things [in an emergency]*…not just police but social workers, mental health workers people who are on standby to help…there should be more support available for the…social side of policing work."*

In summary, while police and policy makers may increasingly accept that we cannot arrest (or patrol, or respond) our way of our current set of policing challenges, most members of the public have yet to take on board a convincing message about the need to move beyond 'traditional' police activities. For our respondents, it was 'core policing' that felt most absent and focusing attention elsewhere seemed like a distraction. However, once the realities of contemporary demand and social 'need' are understood a little better, initial conservatism about how things should be done and 'who does what' begins to dissipate. When they know more about the challenge, the public seem up for a more radical conversation about how to deliver public safety in the 21st century.

8: People want visible local policing, but when asked to choose, see neighbourhood policing as less important than other areas of police work

Neighbourhood or community policing is often seen as the police service's principal tool for improving and managing relations with the public. When national or local public confidence targets have been in place, in practice, responsibility for delivering these has largely been handed to neighbourhood teams and given the scale of erosion, it is tempting to see restoration as the solution to growing public concern or dissatisfaction.

We should note however, that overall, the public do not appear to be strongly attached to many aspects of neighbourhood policing, as it has been formulated and implemented over the last two decades. Notwithstanding the enduring call for police presence and visibility (discussed in point 4), it seems that ideas like *engaging with and listening to local people*, and *working with*, *reassuring* and *building stronger communities*, are not things that most people see as priorities – at least in the context of the full scope of

Figure 7: Percentage share of all resource received by five police functions in group exercise (combined results across 26 occasions on which exercise was completed)

police business. The overall impression conveyed by Figure 6 is that people want a decisive police force that delivers action, without involving them too much in the process.

Towards the end of our focus groups, participants were asked to complete a group exercise that involved deciding the allocation of a limited quantity of resource between five policing functions (emergency response, neighbourhood policing, public protection, crime investigation and proactive operations). Although they found making 'trade-offs' difficult and often attempted to share out the resources relatively evenly, groups tended to come out in favour of protecting resource for emergency response and (to some extent) public protection, principally by giving less to neighbourhood policing.

We should not over-simplify here. During the exercise a number of voices argued strongly that the police needed to have local knowledge, be familiar to communities and develop personal trust. We also found that the perceived value of community engagement, involvement and dialogue increased as people thought about contemporary policing challenges more deeply (see point 10), however, it appears from our focus groups that these ideas may not be as immediately vivid in the general public consciousness as we might assume.

There is a sound evidence base for a neighbourhood policing model with community engagement at its core (Tuffin et al, 2006; Myhill 2012) and significant efforts have been made to demonstrate its ongoing relevance to a context more concerned with vulnerability and harm-reduction than reassurance and antisocial behaviour (College of Policing, 2018; Higgins, 2018). Our findings suggest that this evidence and logic, rather than perceived general public appetite for local engagement, should inform the next generation of local policing. While visibility must remain a key consideration, there appears to some permission from the public to innovate with the mode of delivery.

9: *Procedural justice* can reduce crime; *strategic alignment* between police and public priorities may also have positive effects

As mentioned in the introduction, there is now a substantial body of empirical and theoretical literature linking public trust in the police, and perceptions of police legitimacy, to a broad set of law-abiding and pro-social behaviours (eg Tyler and Jackson, 2013, Bradford and Jackson, 2011). For example, in the British context, Jackson et al (2012) have demonstrated that people's self-reported compliance with 'everyday' laws is predicted by their sense of 'moral alignment' with the police. Even once other pathways to compliance (via personal morality and feelings of obligation) are accounted for, the more someone agrees and identifies with the values represented and demonstrated by the police, the less likely they are to break the law. Moral alignment and (to some extent obligation) are, in turn, predicted by people's perceptions of police *procedural justice* (the degree to which people feel police officers act fairly, decently and respectfully). Importantly, this links to compliance much more strongly than beliefs about police *effectiveness* and the likelihood of being caught and sanctioned.

These and similar findings support an argument for crime control strategies that emphasise *procedural fairness* over instrumental efficacy, with practical attention tending to fall on how this is conveyed in everyday encounters between officers and the public. However, we should also recognise the potential for 'moral alignment' to be activated in other ways (Bradford and Jackson, 2011 (p.6)). For instance, a plausible link might be hypothesised between a *strategic* police focus that resonates with the public's sense of *'what's most important'*, (especially where communicated though police actions), via moral alignment, to law-abiding and other positive public behaviours (and ultimately less crime).This may be a fruitful area for future research.

As previously outlined, our focus group research identified a general, overall consistency between many aspects of the current strategic police focus and considered public opinion. However, we also encountered some public sensitivity to examples of apparent police *mis*-prioritisation, which seemed to have been heightened by the recent emphasis on *'the need to prioritise'* in public discourse about resourcing. As reflected in the quotations below, sending the message that the police *'cannot do everything'* may well lower the tolerance-threshold for what is deemed unnecessary or disproportionate. The above discussion suggests we should not dismiss such departures from consensus too lightly.

> *"The village I live in… you don't feel unsafe on the streets, you don't really see gangs or anything, but at the same time I've seen PCSOs walking around in the day time… Why? What's the point? You are not going to catch anyone; you are just out for a nice walk in a nice village. Why is the time being wasted when they could be in a different area doing something?"*

> *"Sometimes I see like six cars and a van chasing some little idiot in a Metro. And you think what could 12 of those people be doing?!…waste of resources."*

> *"They can always find them* [uniformed officers] *when the football's on – there's hundreds of them, so where are they* [the rest of the time]*?"*

> *"They need to do more actual crime fighting and less stopping people for pointless things that are not necessary."*

In summary, we should take seriously the possibility that demonstrating publicly aligned strategic priorities may, *in itself*, have positive and advantageous consequences. Conversely, if the police are felt to *have got their priorities wrong*, public cooperation and compliance may be more likely to be reserved. While maintaining and communicating this alignment may not always be straightforward, particularly given heightened resource sensitivities, our findings tend to indicate a broad public consensus on police priorities, rather than division.[10] There is no sense in our analysis of police having to 'take sides' or speak simultaneously to radically opposed factions, and this seems to offer a platform from which strategic legitimacy (as a counterpart to procedural justice) and its positive correlates, can be built and bolstered.

10: When people have more information and opportunities for deliberation, their priorities adjust to recognise complexity and take on a more strategic focus. They also become more positive towards the police.

So far, we have mainly focused on the *initial* policing priorities, that people identified in our focus group exercises, based on the information, beliefs and values they *'brought into the room with them'*. We have seen that simply giving people a glimpse of the range of police business (in the form of 48 possible priority 'items') and a little time to consider (on their own), tended to move them away from local 'quality of life' concerns and towards 'higher harm' issues, although with an emphasis on those that fitted with more 'traditional' ideas about *'what the police do'*.

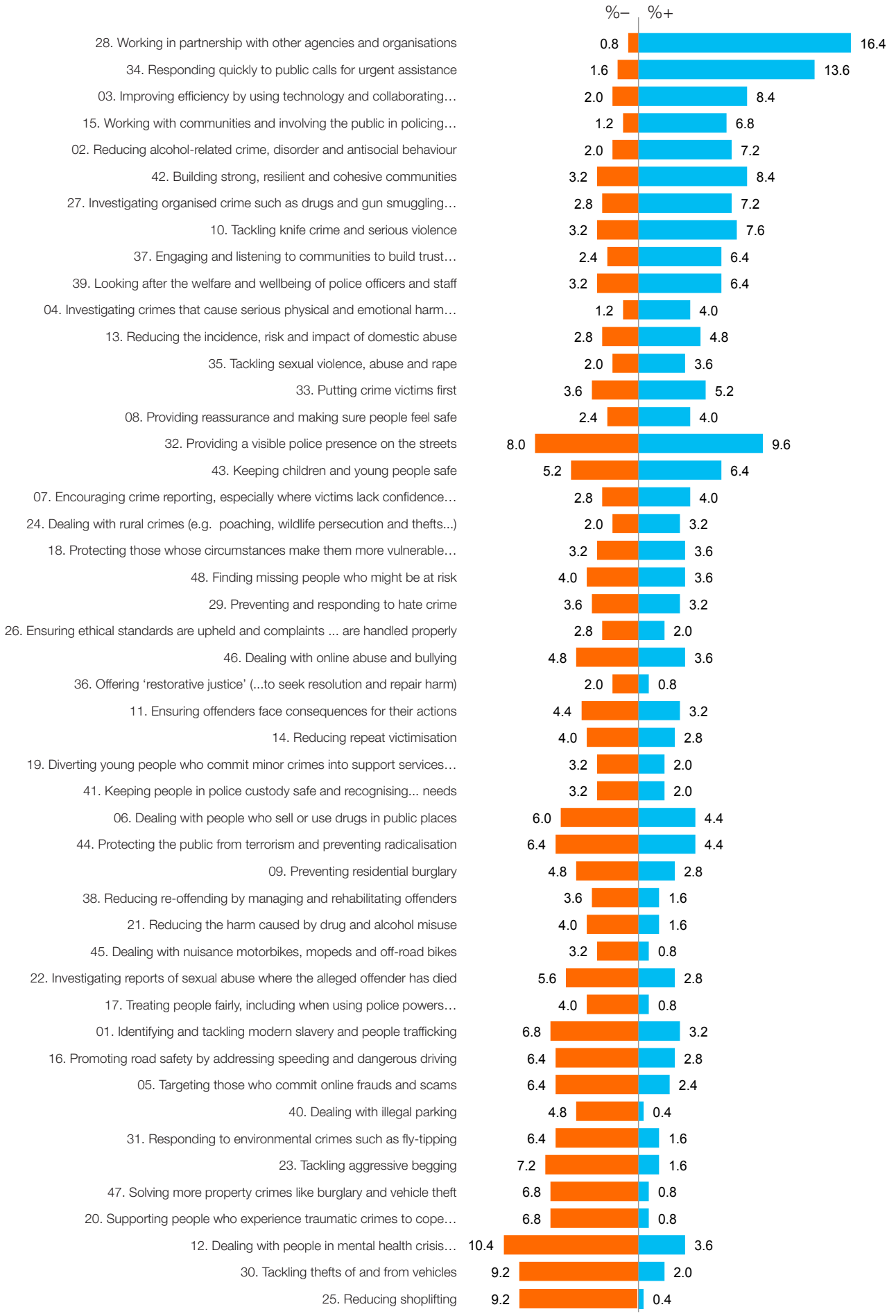
In addition, we wanted to explore whether, and how, people's views and priorities developed when they were given new information about contemporary policing[11] and a chance to discuss and debate it with their peers, including in the context of 'deliberative' group decision-making tasks (such as the resource allocation exercise described in point 8). At the end of our sessions, once this process had been completed, we asked participants to return to their initial priority rankings and make adjustments (if they wished) to reflect any change in views that had occurred during the session.

Figure 8 shows the proportion of respondents that gave each item a higher or lower ranking at the end of the session compared with the start. It shows that, although overall shifts were relatively modest, there were some consistent themes.

10 Although there was evidence of attitudinally distinct groupings at the local level, when these were compared nationally, the vast majority cohered together (statistically) as variations of a single shared viewpoint, rather than splintering into distinct factions. This 'mainstream' consensus viewpoint gives a priority focus to tackling violence, abuse and exploitation, fighting terrorism and organised crime, and responding to emergencies.

11 During the second half of each session participants were presented with a set of information boards summarising facts and figures relating to current police resources, demand, crime rates, investigations, 'non-crime' demand and protective and proactive work. Where time allowed, this was supplemented with TV documentary clips covering similar themes.

Figure 8: Proportion of all participants (n=250) who ranked each item as a higher or lower priority at the end of the sessions compared with the start



First, there is evidence of strengthening consensus; plausibly an effect of participants being persuaded by others as they talked through their priority choices. This led to several 'high priority' items, (including emergency response, tackling serious violence and investigating harmful crimes) receiving *even more* consistently high rankings after discussion. It also resulted in some items about which doubts were regularly expressed (based on 'harm' and/or 'remit' criteria, such as vehicle crime, dealing with people in mental health crisis or aggressive begging) being downgraded.

Second, the item most often seen as more important at the end of the session compared to the start, related to *partnership working*, with *'improving efficiency through technology and collaboration'* also gaining a higher (net) ranking. This appears to reflect the realisation, often triggered by the discussion, about the complexity and 'multi-agency' nature of many of policing's current challenges, particularly around welfare and safety related demand, and that solutions are not ones police alone can deliver (see point 7).

Thirdly, there was a modest but consistent (net) increase in the priority given to items relating to community policing; in particular for working with communities, building strong communities and engagement. As illustrated in the comments below, this reflects a general shift towards a longer-term, more strategic perspective and recognition that communities have a positive role to play in addressing many of the issues that generate demand for the police.

> *"I pushed up quite a few of the 'working with the community' ones* [items]…*Originally, they were, for me, quite low priority – I looked at knife crime and everything – but if you look at being preventative and look at a 10 year plan rather than now…it's just then how do you convey that to Joe Public? …most people in the country want something doing now."*

> "[The session has made me think about] *what we as a community can do more, to help to support the police and see if we can be a bit more positive* [and] *influence a bit more positively our communities ourselves, without draining other resources. Like supporting young people, making more youth groups available…I just think maybe there is more we can do out there to take the pressure off."*

Finally, it is worth reflecting on participants' closing remarks from the end of the sessions, which overwhelmingly suggest (as in the exchange below) that time spent considering the challenges and decisions confronting modern policing can lead to greater respect and more appreciative outlook towards the police. They also indicate that participants found the experience valuable and left with a view that they, and the public at large, should know more, engage and *be* engaged more, and be in a position to play a more informed and active role in keeping their communities safe.

> Respondent 1: *"I think by us having this knowledge* [having taken part in the focus group] *gives us better information to have a nicer view on the police service. So if anything, if the general public had a similar piece of information they could also have a more positive approach towards them".*
>
> Respondent 2: *"I want to go and hug a police officer, now!"*
>
> Respondent 3: *"How many thousands of people, if they had the same information, would then change to the same view? All of us wanted an extra policeman in our town, and now we are all like; actually, it's a bigger picture."*

It appears therefore that there is much to be gained from promoting a more engaged public debate, and in particular, for further experimenting with *deliberative democracy* in relation to policing issues. These processes can sharpen the public mandate around prioritisation and guide thinking on the myriad emergent and contested ethical issues policing will need to confront in a fast-changing world. They also have potential to supplement and enhance representative democracy, as currently embodied by Police and Crime Commissioners, by communicating to the public that decisions were made and supported by '*people like me'* in possession of the facts (Taylor, 2018a, 2018b).

Our research indicates that when people know more and have a chance to work things through with their peers, they tend to come together, recognise complexity, think about the long-term, realise that they have a part to play and appreciate the police more – this must surely be something that both police and policy makers should seek to encourage.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STRATEGIC REVIEW

The *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* aims to set out a road map for English and Welsh policing over the coming decades. To do so it must first articulate the challenge that the service must be designed and prepared to meet. It is likely that many aspects of this – threats emerging from new technology or from transnational organised crime, for example – will seem opaque and remote to much of the public; as will the policing responses required to meet them. This only increases the importance of keeping the relationship between police and public at the heart of the vision and the centre of the plan.

This does not mean, of course, that police and policy makers should follow public opinion reflexively or uncritically and difficult questions remain about how to distil the implications of the insights presented here. How, for instance, should the views of the 'general public' be weighed against the specific needs of crime victims or marginalised or 'vulnerable' groups[12]? How can we both hear the public's voices but also acknowledge the partiality of their knowledge and limit of their 'expertise'? And, how should we deal with the fact that when asked what they want as 'consumers' people tend to say different things to when approaching the issues from a more disinterested, 'universalised' standpoint? While acknowledging these complexities, we feel that this analysis has implications for the Strategic Review in three main areas.

1. The future of public-facing local policing

First, it suggests the need to think carefully about the form, functions and focus that public-facing local policing (and broader community safety) services, should take on in the future. Public ratings of the quality of the policing provided in local communities have held up remarkably well in the face of funding cuts and as the police have been pulled towards less publicly visible threats and risks. But there are signs that the firm bedrock of public support on which these rest has now been reached and is showing signs of wear. Public perceptions of police visibility, local knowledge, reliability and proactivity have declined and, of particular concern, views on police fairness and overall confidence ratings appear to be following these downwards. Our qualitative work suggests that this erosion reflects the recent public experience of a 'withdrawal' of policing from public space and across other aspects of service. The Review needs to consider not only how this ground can be regained, but also how trust and confidence can be nurtured among sections of the public where it has never previously flourished.

These findings also suggest a need to think carefully about how to respond to public calls for greater visible policing. Our respondents expressed a visceral sense of the loss of protective guardianship from familiar, but now 'edgier' and less welcoming town centres and public spaces; they also want to feel confident that the police will come quickly when they are needed. But we should also take note of the generators and amplifiers of contemporary security anxieties; dilapidated shopping precincts, street-homelessness and visible substance misuse are not problems solved by street-level law enforcement or rapid response alone – neither is knife crime. There is a strong case for a targeted increase in visible policing but addressing the *causes* of public insecurity will require strategies and coordinated activity involving multiple partners at multiple levels.

There also appears to be permission from the public to innovate in relation to local policing (and wider community safety) delivery. The public want a visible local policing presence but, in our focus groups, we encountered comparatively weak attachment to many of the ideas central to recent formulations of neighbourhood policing and a challenge to the simplistic assumption that the public think the police should focus on the 'everyday', 'low-level' crime and disorder problems. While there remain acutely felt needs for local order maintenance, when asked to

12 Which the Review will consider specifically in later phases

choose, people do not feel these issues should be police *priorities* and it may therefore be worthwhile rethinking how, and by whom, such problems should be principally owned and addressed. There is, however, a clear mandate for the police to focus on violence and abuse, and therefore the value of neighbourhood-level engagement, relationship building and community cooperation in addressing these priorities (for example through intelligence gathering and the co-production of resilience) might be given prominence in future service models.

Finally, in relation to local policing, we have seen that public recognition of the need for community engagement, involvement and partnership working only begins to gain traction when people are given more information and engaged in a deeper conversation about the complexities of producing community safety. Developing public dialogue and understanding, that goes beyond (and may sit uncomfortably with) 'reassurance', will be a crucial enabler of reform.

2. The importance of alignment between public and police priorities

We have drawn attention to the possibility (a hypothesis at this stage, which requires further research) that alongside *procedural justice*, a police service that conveys to the public that it has *got its priorities right* at the strategic level, might generate 'moral alignment', bolster legitimacy and unlock a set of beneficial public dispositions and behaviours. Getting the public 'on side' may well involve police demonstrating that they share the public's sense of what is most important (what we have called *strategic alignment)* – as well as treating them fairly and with respect *(procedural justice*).

Much of the work to achieve greater alignment between police and public priorities ought to be carried out locally, however, there are also implications for the Review's thinking on the *mission* of the police service as a whole. On the evidence of our research it seems that a strong and explicit institutional-level focus on preventing and responding to serious and sexual violence and abuse, would go some way to securing value-alignment with the public at the present time.

3. Developing the public dialogue and a role for deliberative democracy in policing

Perhaps most clearly, these findings draw attention to the critical importance of fostering a more sophisticated public dialogue in relation to crime, policing and public safety issues, and the Review might give some attention to how this might be achieved.

While the police and the public appear generally well-aligned in terms of underlying *values* – particularly in their shared orientation towards 'harm' – it is clear that public priorities are also influenced by 20th (perhaps even 19th) century ideas about *what the police do.* For most people, the police still principally exist to respond quickly, to deter crime (largely by their physical presence), and investigate when it occurs – and when these functions feel threatened (as they do at present) focusing elsewhere seems like a distraction. Police and policy makers may increasingly accept that 'standard' police tactics are not sufficient to address the current profile of threat and demand, but the public are yet to take on board a convincing message about what should be done instead, or as well, (and why). We should not assume that ideas like partnership working, community engagement and upstream prevention, that are now 'mainstream' within policing, are familiar or accepted by the public (let alone more 'radical' concepts like public health approaches, early intervention or restorative justice). Arguably, too little has been done to bring the public along as thinking has developed on *how* the police and others should address contemporary public safety threats, and there appears to be considerable ground to make up.

But there is evidence that public preconceptions are flexible and respond positively to engagement, evidence and debate. Our research showed that simply giving people a glimpse of the range of police business and some time to consider it consistently moved them away from personal demands and toward more a more 'universalised' outlook. This is about treating people not merely as consumers of public order and security but as citizens with the capability of thinking about what is in the public interest. It is worth reflecting that, for the police at all levels, convening and maintaining a more sophisticated public conversation, that moves

beyond ‘reassurance’, will require new skills and approaches as well as a policing model that provides time and opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

In our group conversations with ‘dip-samples’ of the public, across England and Wales, we found that giving people more information and an insight into the challenges now confronting the service led to some radical suggestions for changes to the way public services are delivered. Moreover, providing a forum for people to discuss and debate policing issues tended to bring out consensus, a longer-term perspective, greater recognition of complexity and increased respect and appreciation for the police. Activating these processes ‘at scale’ will not be easy. Deliberative democracy appears to hold significant potential, but beyond this there may also be a need for policy makers (including Police and Crime Commissioners, chief officers and ministers) to lead honest public appraisals of the adequacy of ‘traditional’ police/criminal justice models, and the existing configuration of services, for addressing contemporary crime and public safety challenges.

13 Accessed 05.02.20.

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