



Making the best use of police time

Research into general public opinion across England and Wales

Conducted by DUCKFoOT Ltd
for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

March 2014

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1. Summary of findings

- The research was conducted to contribute to the HMIC inspection, ‘Making best use of police time’, assessing the public’s perceptions and expectations of the incidence and nature of police attendance in different areas of the country, representing different types crime and other incidents profiles.
- The study included looking at whether people’s attitudes on police attendance shift when given more information about the nature of incidents attended to by the police and differences between police officers, PCSOs and police staff.
- A general confidence was expressed that the police were making reasonably good use of the resources they had at their disposal, though acknowledge this opinion is based on the limits of personal experience of the police service and a lack of real understanding of what resources and personnel make up their local force.
- Those with less contact, or occasion to observe the police, found it more difficult to make an informed judgement and tended to be more optimistic. Those with more personal contact felt more able to pass judgment on the use of police time. They tended to find reasons to be critical of the way police time was spent, though with the majority still confident that the police in this country were doing a good job with perhaps more limited resources than might be optimum.
- Opinion on the best use of police time is underpinned by an emotional desire for the police to conform to an idealised old-fashioned archetype of “*the bobby on the beat*” who represents a benign controlling force that cares and protects.
- In responding to the question, ‘*Who in the police force should attend and respond to different kinds of crime, anti-social behaviour and other incidents, in your neighbourhood? The intuitive position is that a police officer is the only person who holds sufficient authority to effectively resolve incidents in the community whether before, during or after a crime or risk-laden incident.*
- There is a general awareness that PCSOs lack the power of arrest; something considered essential to any individual officer’s ability to respond and resolve a situation that deserves attendance. This contributes to a lack of confidence in their worth, leading to a lack of respect for “fake” police disguised as “proper” police, which fuels a lack of confidence that police resources are being best utilized.
- Other police staff members were rarely front-of-mind as part of the team resolving incidents. After reflecting on what they already knew about the police, and becoming more informed of the different roles within policing, people can become more open to workforce personnel other than a police officer – holding the Office of Constable - responding to some incidents, in particular after crime. This implied the potential for available police officer time to be focused on activity

where urgent arrest and control of the public is required and in everyone's interest.

- People begin to see incidents where a PCSO as sole attender could be a suitable response: welfare incidents, rowdy but not violent anti-social behaviour, or taking statements after a burglary if there were no threat remaining. But there remains a discomfort about the true value of the PCSO, saying that better use of financial resources would be to swap two PSCOs for one new police officer.

2. Background

The research was conducted to contribute to the HMIC inspection of all 43 police forces in England and Wales regarding 'Making best use of police time.'

The overall programme is concerned with assessing the effectiveness of certain aspects of policing activity, including preventative policing, police attendance and freeing up police time. The inspection is being conducted in light of the Government's spending review announcement of 26 June 2013 requiring the police service to find further savings on top of those sought in the 2010/11 review. It is important to ensure that forces are not further reducing cost at the expense of service and that police time is freed up to focus on those activities that are key to reducing crime and improving public satisfaction and confidence.

There are clear links across these three areas of policing referenced above; the ability of the police to free up time will affect their response to calls from the public, the quality of service whilst attending, and the amount of time they can dedicate to preventative policing (which also reduces future demand on police resources). How well the police respond to calls for service from the public will influence the likelihood of detecting the crime and preventing repeat incidents from occurring.

The policing issues identified for this inspection programme have been the subject of some examination recently by HMIC, either directly or as part of other reviews. Results from this work indicate that, as forces make significant changes to their structures, systems and working practices, the service being delivered to the public and the effectiveness of preventative policing is very mixed.

A part of HMIC's review is assessing the public's perceptions and expectations of the incidence and nature of police attendance. When crimes and incidents occur, how do the public perceive their local police force responding and how does their activity affect their reassurance, satisfaction and confidence? This research was commissioned to gather public opinion on this question, in different areas of the country representing different types crime and other incidents profiles.

3. Research objectives

- To assess public views on:
 - what situations the police should be attending;
 - which members of the police workforce should respond to calls about different kinds of crime – police officers, police community support officers, or police staff.

- To establish whether people’s attitudes on police attendance shift when given more information
 - and to identify the key facts that bring about any such change.

- To determine the public’s prior knowledge of the differences between police officers, PCSOs and police staff;
 - to get ‘gut reactions’ as to who they would expect to see turn up in response to calls about particular types of crime.

- To determine the public’s spontaneous responses to learning more about:
 - the powers available to each group of the workforce
 - their particular force’s ‘response strategy’ (i.e. details of what kinds of incidents they prioritise).

- To test whether people’s expectations of who shows up change on learning extra information;
 - and, if so, what in particular made a difference

4. Research in five locations across England and Wales

The research was conducted in five locations to represent neighbourhoods with different crime and other incident profiles, which have cause to adopt different types of strategy to attending incidents. People were recruited from:

1. Kingston upon Thames/Teddington area to represent a relative low crime area in Greater London.
2. Tower Hamlets as a higher crime area in Greater London.
3. Altrincham/Timperley suburban area on the outskirts of Greater Manchester.
4. Rural areas outside Norwich, Norfolk.
5. Cardiff, representing Wales.

Three 'triad' sessions, each an hour long, were held in each location, each with three participants of similar demographic profile. This structure optimised the coverage and diversity to ensure different voices were heard in each community and across the sample. In all 45 people participated.

To represent the opinion of the general public, people were recruited on the basis that they did *not* have especially extreme opinions about the police service in general, had not been a recent victim of a serious crime, and had never been arrested for a serious crime. Being a victim of car theft and burglary were the most serious offences reported by participants.

(See **Appendix A** for the overall sample structure and recruitment questionnaire.)

The above approach led to range of responses to the research question of, 'making best use of police time.' Opinions varied according to the degree of visible policing in the area, awareness of local crime levels, and the nature and circumstance of personal contact with the police in the recent past (with age being a significant factor).

5. The scope of the discussion

Each session was introduced with the overall theme of ‘Making best use of police time’ and brief discussion of how confident people felt about current police performance in this regard. The following question was then given to participants to steer the rest of the discussion:

“Who in the police force should attend and respond to different kinds of crime, anti-social behaviour and other incidents, in your neighbourhood?”

The session then covered:

- What comes to mind as the kinds of incidents dealt with by their local police?
- Who they understood from the overall workforce attended and responded to such incidents.
- Opinions on best use of the workforce in light of the full scope of police attendance.
- Reflection on best use of the workforce, in light of considering the exact roles of different elements of the overall police workforce.
- Opinions on different response strategies at the local call centre.
- Responses to the local priorities set by the police.

A number of the participants were telephoned a few days after the session to ask if their opinions had changed in light of the discussion.

6. Current levels of confidence in the police making best use of their time

The great majority of participants felt reasonably confident that the police were making good use of the resources they had at their disposal. However, this was an opinion most admitted was based on very limited personal experience of the police service and a lack of real understanding of what resources and personnel make up their local force.

Opinion on how the police should allocate resources in principal was filtered through experience of how the police were observed to use their time in practice. Key factors were the degree to which people had had direct contact with the police in recent times and general observation of police presence in the community; the less direct contact with the police at work they had, the more difficult people found it to make an informed judgement about how well the police were using their time.

People who felt they lived in a relatively safe community, with low levels of crime, tended to assume that the police were focusing time and resources where needed most, i.e. in areas of higher crime and greater risk of anti-social behaviour. This was cause to feel more confident the police were making best use of their time.

“Maybe the fact that we all feel safe is an indication that they’re doing something well.”
Female, 40s, West London

“I do have confidence in our police force, I know they can’t be everywhere at once.”
Male, 20s, Norfolk

“As afar as I’m concerned where I live, because we don’t get a lot of crime, and okay if there is anything big or more major it does take them time to get there, but the number of times in a year are few and far between.”
Male, 60s, Norfolk

Typically those living in more densely populated and higher crime areas felt more able to pass judgment on the use of police time, based on any personal need of the local force and general observation of the police force’s presence in the community and apparent priorities. In such areas older participants, who had not had recent need for the police nor witnessed much anti-social behaviour, tended to be impressed by the police service. Those who had had property stolen, or personal contact with the police over their own behaviour while out and about in their neighbourhood, could feel there was room for improvement. However, such an outlook still left most people expressing an overall feeling of confidence that the police in this country were doing a good job with perhaps more limited resources than might be optimum.

“I think they’ve got too much to do, its not their fault but they’re expected to be everywhere. Everything is in such a rush.”

Female, 40s, Norfolk

Opinions on the best use of police time amongst those people who had suffered a burglary were often filtered through a criticism of police response time, which could be recalled as slower than considered appropriate. (NB: No one in this sample shared any experience of calling the police while thieves were still in the house.) People who had reported or witnessed incidence of anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhood could raise a similar criticism of delayed response. However, such opinion was not universal and examples could be cited of prompt decisive action.

We’ve one difficult neighbour, drugs, prison and mental institutions. Recently it’s come to a boil again, a lot of shouting and a very large group of young teenagers being encouraged to go to this house. The police were very good actually, responded within minutes and spent the rest of the night circling round in the back lanes. A few weeks later they followed up asking what we knew and telling us to call 101 if there was more trouble.”

Female 50s Wales

It was felt more thorough follow-through would improve the use of police time, on the basis that a higher standard of service would be reflected in more successful resolution of incidents. For example more speedy arrival of a fingerprint specialist or returning to manage repeat incidences of anti-social behaviour, without further calls by the public being required.

Through general observation of the nature of the police presence in more urban areas there can be criticism for what participants described as the police “parked up”, which is perceived time wasting behaviour by individual officers – judged unofficially off-duty when they should be on-duty whenever out and about in the community.

Opinion about best use of police time was also filtered through the impact of the police on an individual’s lifestyle, which could fuel feelings of the police wasting their time on bothering innocent, well-meaning citizens.

Male motorists could see poor use of police time because of a perceived over-emphasis on traffic control – too much attention paid to catching out the ordinary motorist.

“The traffic cops! As a driver that’s one that bugs us all, there’s so many traffic police you see, they’re the main ones you see. A lot of time they’re just sat there looking. There’s so many idle police around just trying to get motorists for basic motoring offences.”

Male, 40s, Greater Manchester

In the city environment ‘us versus them’ attitudes were aired by some of the younger men and ethnic-minority women. This could be a criticism made generally about a lack of respect or unwarranted pushiness shown by the local force or applied to individual officers.

The group of men in Cardiff, living in more deprived areas of the city, expressed the strongest antagonism towards the police heard in this research. They were angered by what they regarded as an aggressive attitude from the police who also appeared not that bothered on some occasions to solve crimes and resolve incidents. Such perceptions fuelled feelings that the police were not on their side, and implied they were not making best use of their time.

Incidences were cited of the police pulling over motorists and behaving in a disrespectful manner when no offence had been committed, in the opinion of the participant.

“He pulled me over, annoyed me about having a soft drink and I asked him what if I was having a fag, he got annoyed with me for challenging him. I thought about it later, he could be doing something else more useful.”

Male, 20s, Norfolk

Young men hanging out with friends in urban parks recalled feeling unduly hassled by PSCOs and told to move on, when in their own opinion no harm was being done. Or, being aware of lack of police sympathy and concern for the victims of street violence, i.e. friends and family treated as if they had been part instigators.

Recall of such occasions, while giving cause to find it possible to question the best use of police time, were often qualified by comment that not all officers were the same.

In evaluating the best use of police time, people intuitively considered the visible presence of the police in the community. They reflected on there being different demands on police time, namely watching over a neighbourhood to prevent crime; protecting the public from harm; and pursuing criminals. They did not spontaneously reflect on what happens behind the scenes, other than the prospect of the Police Constable needing to spend time doing paperwork and instructing other staff to help with a case, which of course was not considered good use of their time – excessive admin holding back a police officer from what only they can achieve in the community.

In spite of these various question marks over the police making best use of their time, the general opinion held is of the police acting, by and large, with respect for the community they served. There was a sympathetic recognition that they had a difficult job to carry out – that on occasion had the potential to turn life threatening.

“They’re trying their best. They’re doing their job. The problem is too big for them to handle: there’s no youth club, there’s nothing to do. The kids, they haven’t got jobs.”

Male, 20s, East London

Under-pinning much of people’s evaluation of the best use of police time is an emotionally charged desire for the police to conform to an idealised old-fashioned archetype that is often summarized as *“the bobby on the beat.”* This is imagined as someone of good character in all aspects of their life, motivated to care and protect

others; someone to look up to as a beacon of integrity. It's comforting to know they are watching over you – the comfort of a warm, controlling embrace.

“A policeman should be strong and powerful but sensitive and well trained, to have the standing to do the job.”

Female, 50s Wales

7. Current assumptions about who should respond to incidences of crime or risk to the public/individuals

As part of the research discussion participants were presented with a list of potential incidents of crime or risk to the public or an individual. It was felt that only a PC could effectively respond to:

- Child missing from home
- Serious car crash
- Domestic violence – in the home
- Fight in the street
- Assault
- House burglary
- Motor vehicle theft
- Youths causing nuisance in the street

Other incidents listed could still require a PC over a PCSO, subject to the severity of the incident and the distress it caused:

- Noise-related incidents
- Handbag snatched
- Shoplifting by an adult
- Theft from a motor vehicle
- Concern for a person's welfare
- Report of illness/injury in the street

“Someone just staggering about in the street, probably wouldn't send a van full of police, and a couple of PCSOs would be fine for that.”

Female 50s Wales

A few listed events were spontaneously identified as being adequately covered by a PCSO as first response:

- Making off without payment from a shop/garage
- Minor traffic incident
- Lost purse or wallet

Private security, along with PCSOs, were expected to be the first response to:

- Child lost at the shopping mall
- Shoplifting by minor

8. The police officer's welfare role

Participants were also presented with three scenarios describing incidents of personal welfare. Responses highlighted how people regard the police as there to play a significant role in caring for the welfare of the public, as much as addressing crime.

1. You are witness to a man collapsing in the middle of a high street. He appears to be on his own and is not near anyone else at the time. You go to his aid. He appears to have fainted and be disorientated. You call for help. Who would you call for? Who would you expect to attend and help him? What would you think if the police were the only service to attend?

This is seen as a 999 call. Almost all participants spontaneously mentioned an ambulance attending with paramedics. On consideration, participants were comfortable with the police also attending to ensure that other services successfully pick up the case. Participants assumed that PCs – but not necessarily PCSOs – would have First Aid training, although this was seen as inadequate to rely upon, and therefore undesirable for the police to be the *only* service responding.

2. You haven't seen your neighbour today, who leaves the house every morning at 8am without fail. Knowing that they live on their own, you go round and knock. With no response, you look through the letterbox and see them lying on the floor of the kitchen. You call for help. Who do you call for? Who would you expect to attend the situation? What would you expect to happen? What would you think if the police were the only service to attend?

Again, an ambulance is expected. But on this occasion participants volunteered that the police would have to attend because of the need to break in to the person's home. Here, again, it was a concern if the police were expected to provide primary medical care.

3. A neighbour, whom you know suffers from mental health issues, is in the middle of your street shouting and causing a scene. People are able to approach him, and he isn't being violent, but he is resisting help and support. You call the emergency services for help. What would you expect to happen? The man is taken to hospital where he remains non-violent, but still won't let people near him and threatens to walk away from the hospital, even though he requires treatment. What would you expect to happen? Who would you expect to help and stay with him? What would you think if the police were the only service to attend?

The description of events suggested to people that a PC would need to attend because the individual could turn violent, self-harming or attacking others. A PCSO was assumed to not have the credentials to cope with the situation worsening or even the powers to intervene at all. In this instance it was of less concern that the police should be the only service to attend, but opinion was divided as to how long the individual should remain the charge of the police officer. Most felt that the PC should be allowed to get back on duty and be available to respond to other incidents that were surely occurring.

9. The power of the policeman makes ‘him’ the assumed person to attend to any incidence of crime or risk to the public

The fundamental dynamic to evaluating best use of police time was people’s perception of the deployment of the two visible elements of the police force they are aware of, namely “police officers” and “community” or “support officers”.

Intuitively men and women, of all ages, default to a position that a “*proper*” police officer should – and is the best-qualified individual – be the first to attend to most incidents involving actual or potential crime or risk to people.

Police, in most people’s minds still means a police constable or officer. The policeman (the male archetype still perpetuating) is a powerful cultural icon that is ingrained into us from birth. Only this person has the power to impose their control over people and make an arrest. Because of this, only holders of such authority are seen able to effectively resolve incidents in the community whether before, during or after a crime or any risky incident. Many admit to feelings of unease when in the presence of a police officer, i.e. a concern not to put a foot wrong and find themselves judged to be on the wrong side of the law.

“When you’re driving and you see a police car behind you, you feel a bit uneasy. You think you’ve done something wrong and are always looking at the speedo.”

Female, 20s, Wales

However, such feelings ultimately serve to sustain people’s confidence in the police’s ability to protect society.

Awarding the police officer such status leads to people expecting the PC to be beyond reproach and not to abuse their power; they want the officer to explicitly show respect for the public by not assuming the worst of people.

“This guy was getting thrown out of a club. The bouncers were dealing with it. Suddenly everything built up. The police escalated the situation, grabbing the guy around the throat. All that was needed was, ‘Come on mate, that’s enough, move along.’ ”

“Yeah, I think that’s something that happens a lot with the police. Especially those more likely to get accused, my mate who’s mixed race has been stopped like 60 times in his life, I’ve never been stopped.”

Young men in conversation, 20s, West London

The general public also admit to valuing the emotional succour provided by this authority figure when attending to incidents that involve themselves as victims. It is considered part of getting over the incident. Finding the time to attend says the police are concerned and it is reassuring to meet a person who actively pursues criminals.

“No cop shows up after a burglary? No, you would want some support as well, not just the forensic person. Police are seen as having an all round training relating to members of the public, if my house had been ransacked for example.”

Female 50s Wales

“A lot of people would feel let down that you haven’t got a bobby in a hat with a badge.”

Male, 20s, West London

Such emotionally-driven demand for the presence of a “real” police officer is validated by a belief that they are the only person with the training to competently assess and resolve a situation. Many assume that, without a police officer being involved, no proper case will have been opened. Also, by attending the incident it is assumed the constable on the case has taken on responsibility for seeing it through to arrest or other appropriate resolution.

“If something happens we call the police. They don’t come every single time. He should come, it’s important a person comes.”

Male, 50s, East London

“It’s the job of the police to protect and serve. Also serve you in the sense of making you feel safe. Obviously not wrap you in cotton wool, but in the immediate aftermath you want that top dog there. So you can see that they’re reacting to it. Like the burglary, you’d want a forensic guy going around your house while you’re talking to a big boy.”

Male, 20s, West London

“I think you need an official police constable so that the force know there’s evidence there for a case to be made.”

Female, 50s, Greater Manchester

Informing people of the source of the police officer’s authority – the distinction of holding the Office of Constable – and the nature of their powers only serves to heighten perceptions of their worth and people’s aspirations for how they are deployed. Beyond confirming their powers of arrest, it implies that it is the police officer who personally gathers the evidence to achieve a conviction.

10. Faith in the tradition of the ‘bobby on the beat’

There is also desire expressed for the PC to be a visible frontline for the prevention of crime and protection of the community. The general belief is that it is good use of police time to have police officers placed in the community to act as a deterrent. Being embedded in the community implies a greater knowledge of trouble spots and troublemakers, as well as who is vulnerable, who is an ally etc. In the Tower Hamlets area comment was made that “proper” police officers appear to be keeping at arms length from the community (Male, 20s). It is accepted that their presence is not a foolproof safeguard, however it feels a more effective use of resources if they are located as near as possible to potential trouble spots. Interestingly such reflection did not challenge people’s negative observations of “parked-up police”.

Older people’s conviction of the worth of such deployment in the community is often tempered by a view that today’s younger generation has grown up less fearful of the police overall, that they lack respect, and are more informed about what they can get away with. Thus the worth of such use of officer is slightly undermined.

“Now kids know their rights and know the cost of everything, how much it’s going to cost a policeman to arrest you. They just don’t seem to care. It seems to be a generation where that fear has gone.”

Male, 50s, Greater Manchester

Confidence that the police are making best use of their time, and able to best attend to crimes and other incidents, is undermined by a shared belief that the traditional ‘bobby on the beat’ has been largely replaced by PCSOs who are known not to hold the powers of a police officer. A frequent proposal is for one PC to replace two PCSOs, which is seen as better use of a limited budget because the person on the spot has to power to act there and then. Participants instinctively believed PCSOs to be a cheap option; they were unaware that, factoring in the cost of training, the price per annum of a PCSO is similar to a PC.

“If it’s serious enough to call the police you’d want a police officer. There was an incident outside where I worked and they couldn’t do anything. There’s no police on the street like when I was young. There’s none around any more except on a big occasion like the rugby.”

Female, 40s, West London

“I want the person who can deal with that problem.”

Male, 40s, East London

11. The Special Constable

Only a few people were aware of this member of the visible police team being a fully trained constable with the full powers of the office. This knowledge was most notable in Norfolk where older men and women often knew of someone or had a family member in the past who had served as a Special Constable. Others assumed that 'special' denoted a superior officer in charge of rank and file police constables.

That people would volunteer for the job can be puzzling to some, who questioned the person's motives, suspecting they want to indulge in the powers invested in the office:

“Those are the ones who are the dickhead police. You could be the guy who enjoys the power, dishing it out. Unless you've got a real thing for helping people out, which isn't the way the world works out at the moment.”

Male, 20s, West London

A few participants reflected that such people could be considered to be a contemporary version of the local civic-minded bobby, i.e. a person who lives inside and cares strongly about the local community of fellow citizens.

On occasion the idea emerged of the Special Constable being a suitable person to follow up on a burglary, assessing the scene and taking evidence.

Some who believed they had a clear understanding of the Special Constable were, in fact, confusing them with PCSOs; these participants questioned their worth:

“As far as the city is concerned, most people would like to see more police on the street really, I understand their cutting down numbers but the Specials they can't do what normal police do.”

Male, 50s, Norfolk

12. The PCSO's role lacks clarity in the public consciousness, undermining public confidence in the police making best use of resources

In the overall discussion of the best use of police time, and who should respond and attend to incidents, the deployment of PCSOs was the most disconcerting factor for almost everyone.

PCSOs are understood to hold very limited powers, so much so that people are inclined to question their effectiveness in a preventive or protective role. PCSOs are not imagined to have any responsibility with regard to pursuit. Most understand them to be employed by the police full-time, with a minority thinking they are volunteers, in effect a uniformed version of Neighbourhood Watch. Some thought that were in training to become fully-fledged officers. Such impressions fitted with perceptions of their limited powers of policing.

“That’s all we got in my village (PCSOs), so we don’t have a police presence as such at all.”
Male, 60s, Norfolk

“I think they can detain you but they can’t arrest you, I don’t know if they can use force, their powers are very limited.”
Male, 50s, Norfolk

PCSOs are generally known to have no power of arrest; something considered essential to any individual officer’s ability to respond and resolve most situations to which the police are called to attend and resolve.

This results in a lack of confidence in their worth as first response to most incidents thought to occur on their patch. Also, they are not understood to be on call as a response unit, just able there to intervene in what’s occurring along their patrol. They are thought of as a foot patrol, sometimes using bicycles.

“The community officers – they’re not doing nothing the main police don’t. The government are wasting their money. They’re a waste of our tax. They can’t arrest, search. They’re nosy, prying in others’ business.”
Male, 20s, East London

There was a suggestion that the 101 phone number is used to summon PCSOs, whereas 999 gets you a police officer.

“So why do we have community police and not just normal police? Because they can’t arrest anyone.”
Female, 40s, Norfolk

Very few people intuitively endorse the presence of PCSO monitors as a way of

allowing PCs to make better use of their time; in the age of CCTV they are considered no deterrent and mobile communications give the general public as much ability to call in “the big boys.”

A particular theme on the minds of young and old is the inability of PCSOs to manage ASB incidents at any level as people, especially the young, are considered to hold no respect for such officers. Young participants report PCSOs wasting time challenging them in public places when no ASB has occurred; another cause to question whether the police force’s time is used effectively.

“I’m unsure what I’m meant to go to them (PCSOs) for.”

Male, 20s, Norfolk

“They (young) haven’t got respect of a policeman. They have to report to a policeman. They’re nice guys!”

Male, 40s, East London

A lack of tradition undermines the credibility of the PCSO

Several mentions were made of PCSOs being a relatively new aspect of the visible police presence and as such it was noted that the public have not yet assimilated them into their understanding of modern policing methods.

“They’re not being used correctly in the role they’re there for, which is as it says support officer. They’re put out on their own and really they’re there to support the police, they should be there as a visible presence with a policeman, not as a separate entity, there nothing wrong in that because they’re giving off a presence to people who are up to no good.”

Male, 40s, Greater Manchester

“Thought they were community safety officers – looking after people’s well being and safety. An authoritative figure without the same clout as the police. I don’t know whether anyone takes them seriously, just there to make you feel better.”

Female, 40s, West London

Prompting participants with a precise description of the PCSO role, including the statement, ‘Providing a high visibility reassurance patrol function that reinforces, but does not replace police officers’ confirmed concerns and reinforced the reasons they are called “plastic” or “fake” police. That they appear to wear similar uniforms exacerbates people’s desire to use these derogatory tags.

Good use of PCSOs’ time

In spite of the front-of-mind concerns expressed about the worth of PCSOs, when participants took time to reflect on their own past observations and encounters with PCSOs, several positive and valid roles emerged in people’s minds, mainly concerned with the more pastoral role associated with *‘the bobby on the beat’*. Participants aired the view that an officer empowered to make arrests was not required to monitor and manage community welfare; the police officer’s absence probably represented a better

use of their time elsewhere, addressing incidents and cases which required the authority of a Constable.

“A friend told me about the positive effect of Community Officers working with the youth to reduce crime.”

Male, 20s, Norfolk

“In Sale there’s one guy who’s brilliant. We don’t get much bother, but he walks passed the school and makes sure people aren’t parked wrong, the kids love him and he’s really friends with everybody. It doesn’t really stop much crime, it’s more that stopping people park on restricted areas.”

Male, 40s, Greater Manchester

“Community Officers, they look good especially to people who don’t know how much power they’ve got, especially the elderly, it gives them a sense of security. Even though they’ve got no powers you do think they are paying attention to any thing suspicious.”

Female, 50s, Greater Manchester

The older the person, the stronger and more positive the associations found between PCSOs and the tradition of the bobby on the beat. There’s good purpose found in retaining a more personal connection with the community – a person with their eyes and ears on what’s afoot.

13. Police staff and specialists

Those out of public sight tend to be out of mind as part of the active resolution team

On prompting, people acknowledged the existence of police staff, with no patrolling duties, who play an essential role in resolving crimes and incidents in the community, supporting uniformed police officers who are perceived as the hands-on crime solvers and incident managers.

And when prompted with the roles they perform such staff can be considered as a more important police resource than PCSOs for successfully responding to crimes and other incidents, i.e. investigators, forensics, detention officers, or uniform support to visible frontline staff conveying arrested people, or collecting statements.

Many consider there to be a dedicated force of traffic police, which makes sense as their particular skills are perceived to be learned and applied. So it made sense to participants that part of the visible force was made up of specialists called on to attend to specific type so crime or incident of risk, suggesting a high quality service.

“I would think there’s two different types – two different things. Policemen on the street, and those who get called out for more serious things.”

Female, 30s, West London

“I saw on the news a woman who heads up domestic violence, she’s taken the option to specialize.”

Female, 40s, West London

mentioned a few days before the recent HMIC report on domestic violence was published

Consideration of such roles within the total police workforce encouraged people to recognise that a regular, patrolling Constable was not the only person they relied on for a crime to be successfully resolved. Reflecting on this fact helped stimulate people to consider that requiring a regular PC to follow up on every incidence of crime was not necessarily the best use of police time; a more specialist resource could be an effective way to attend to some incidents where the initial crime event is over and/or there is no further risk to their safety.

“The job has changed. There’s a need for expert training – rape, mental health issues.”

Female, 50s Wales

14. Potential to make better use of police time

Across the board, people implicitly understood the necessity of fixed resources. It made sense to them that the police should be assessing how well resources are deployed and only a few spontaneously mentioned “cuts” as a motivation for such a review.

After reflecting on what they already knew about the police, and becoming more informed of the different roles within policing, people could open their minds towards workforce personnel other than a police officer responding to some after crime scenarios.

Some were open to the idea of a police staff specialist being the primary person to attend a crime scene such as a burglary, but only where the criminal has long left the scene. They noted that incidents such as car crime might be more speedily and effectively resolved by dealing directly with a designated specialist in person or on the phone.

After considering the roles of different figures within the policing world, people allowed the idea of PCSOs attending more incidents; welfare incidents, rowdy but not violent anti-social behaviour, or taking statements after a burglary if there were no threat remaining. But despite identifying opportunities for PCSOs to contribute more, many participants say that the police would make better use of financial resources employing less PCSOs, and hiring more police officers supported by specialist staff. A number of people volunteer the equation “one PC for two PCSOs”, assuming that fully qualified officer costs more to employ.

Different police forces’ priority strategies

Towards the end of the discussion participants were presented with details of their local force’s priorities, none of which surprised them. They were walked through two different police force response strategies:

1. *Depending on the profile of the area the number and nature of calls to the police control room varies, as does the degree of attendance. In some areas the police attend all crimes reported to them and any incident assessed as involving risk, harm or the vulnerable. This latter group might include ASB where the victim is at risk, concern for welfare, disturbances or a suspicious incident.*
2. *In other areas the police screen out attendance when there are no obvious opportunities to solve the crime or any risk based on the caller’s information. The force will resolve the matter at the earliest point of contact, i.e. on the telephone or online. This will result in the police attending less reported crimes*

than those forces that operate an 'attend all crime' policy.

Only participants in the Norfolk sessions assumed their local force attended all incidents. In the other three force areas it was felt that a degree of filtering applied; most people accepted this as inevitable though not always desirable. Not having any personal contact with a member of the force, other than a voice at a call centre, leaves people feeling their case will be quickly passed over and left unresolved.

"It's an absolute disgrace if police do not answer every single call in an area such as Twickenham. I'd feel pretty pissed off if my car got broken into to just get a crime number."
Male, 20s, West London

On recall

A number of participants were re-contacted a few days after the discussion group in order to see if time to absorb the ideas discussed had led to any shift in people's intuitive stance on the best use of police time and who should respond to incidents.

Everyone wanted to say his or her opinion had not changed since the group discussion, that their overall level of confidence in the police using their time effectively remained largely positive but as discussed there are aspects of policing that could be improved. They remained concerned about the effectiveness of PCSOs and at heart felt the need for a police officer to attend whenever possible.

A couple of responses were note worthy as they demonstrated how bringing the issue front of mind could positively influence people's awareness of police activity in their local area. A young man in Tower Hamlets, in the group discussion said, "*The trust between the police and locals isn't there. There's a big gap. You hardly see them around. There's no bonding there.*" On the telephone he enthusiastically reported seeing police officers, not PCSOs, engaging with his community. A participant in a Manchester group, who had reported PCSOs were rarely sighted in his neighbourhood, reported seeing a PCSO commandingly address an incident on his High Street.

Appendix

Overview of sample structure:

TRIAD	SEX	AGE	CLASS	Resident of:
1	M	18-24	BC1	Twickenham/Kingston/Teddington
2	F	35-54	C1C2	Twickenham/Kingston/Teddington
3	M	55+	C2DE	Twickenham/Kingston/Teddington
4	F	18-24	C1C2	Cardiff city and area
5	M	35-54	C2DE	Cardiff city and area
6	F	55+	BC1	Cardiff city and area
7	M	18-24	C2DE	Rural around Norwich
8	F	35-54	BC1	Rural around Norwich
9	M	55+	C1C2	Rural around Norwich
10	F	18-24	BC1	Altrincham, Timperly
11	M	35-54	C1C2	Altrincham, Timperly
12	F	55+	C2DE	Altrincham, Timperly
13	M	18-24	C1C2	Tower Hamlets
14	F	35-54	C2DE	Tower Hamlets
15	M	55+	BC1	Tower Hamlets

MBUOPT – Recruitment Screener – 10 March 2014

Fieldwork conducted between Friday March 14th and Monday March 24th

Q.1 Have you ever taken part in a market research group discussion or depth interview on any subject?

Yes		GO TO Q2
No		GO TO Q6

Q.2 When did you last take part in a market research group discussion/depth interview?

In the last 6 months		DO NOT RECRUIT
More than 6 months ago		GO TO Q3

Q.3 How many times have you taken part in a market research group discussion/depth interview?

1-3		GO TO Q5
4-6		GO TO Q5
More than 6		GO TO Q4

Q.4 When was the last time you took part in a market research group discussion/depth interview?

In the last year		DO NOT RECRUIT
1-3 years ago		DO NOT RECRUIT
Over 3 years ago		GO TO Q5

IF RESPONDENTS HAVE TAKEN PART IN MORE THAN 6 GROUP DISCUSSIONS/DEPTH INTERVIEWS, THEY MUST HAVE LAST ATTENDED A GROUP/DEPTH OVER 3 YEARS AGO.

Q.5 What subjects have you been interviewed on before?

	Continue	STOP
Health issues		
Food shopping		
Transport		
Computers		
Emergency services		STOP
Police services		STOP
Home Security		STOP
Politics		STOP
Public security		STOP
Justice, e.g. court cases, sentencing		STOP

Q6. Please tell me if :-a) you or b) any of your friends/relatives; work or have ever worked in any of the following trades/professions or for any companies mentioned here?

	a)	b)		a)	b)
Market Research			Emergency Fire service		
Marketing			Ambulance services		
Journalism			Police (uniformed or support staff)		
Advertising			Government Ministries such as The Home Office		
Public Relations			Government agencies such as HMIC, Ofcom		
Security industry					

IF ANY OF THE ABOVE TRADES/PROFESSIONS MENTIONED – DO NOT RECRUIT.

Q.6 a. Please tell me if any of the following apply to you **currently or in the past**

	YES	NO
Worked as a Police Officer,	STOP	

Worked in a support staff role for the Police	STOP	
Have applied to work as a police officer or as support staff but was not accepted	STOP	
Worked as part of the Justice system, e.g. Courts, prisons, parole service etc	STOP	

Q.7. Do you hold a British Passport?

Yes	Continue
No	Stop

Q. 7a Do you live in or around _____

Yes	Continue
No	Stop

Q.8. Which of the following statements apply to you and your close family

	Applies to me	Does not apply to me
Never been <u>arrested and charged</u> by the police for any kind of offence	Continue	Stop
Not been <u>questioned</u> by the police about a crime in the last 5 years	Continue	Stop
Never been the <u>victim</u> of a <u>serious</u> crime	Continue	Stop
Never been the <u>victim</u> of any kind of <u>minor</u> crime in the last 5 years	Continue	Stop

Q.9. Sex: **Male** **See spec sheet**
 Female **See spec sheet**

Q.10. Please tell me your age:

Under 18	STOP
18 - 24	Consider – see sample
25 - 34	STOP
35 - 44	Consider – see sample
45 - 54	Consider – see sample
55 - 64	Consider – see sample
65+	Consider – see sample

Q.11 Could you please tell me your occupation or that of the head of household?

Write in occupation:		
A		Consider for none
B		Recruit – see sample
C1		Recruit – see sample
C2		Recruit – see sample
D		Recruit – see sample
E		Recruit – see sample

Q. 12 Ethnic group – no filters on ethnic group apply but aim to recruit to reflect the profile of your neighbourhood. Please record

White	
Mixed ethnic group	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
Black African	
Black Caribbean	
Arab	
Other	