

Public Confidence in Policing

1 FORWARD

The Police and Crime Panel has a critical dual role to play in both scrutinising and supporting the Police and Crime Commissioner. We carry out proactive scrutiny work, investigating a particular policy issue in detail and make recommendations to support the Commissioner in policy development, and in this way, I am delighted to chair the Panel this year as we conducted an inquiry into 'Public Confidence in Policing'.

We acknowledge that the last 18 months have been very challenging in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic both for the public and the police, but the Panel nevertheless engaged with community stakeholders and members of the public to ascertain their views. I feel truly privileged to have been part of the process to pull together this important report with my fellow Panel members and thank all contributors for their valuable input.

We now call upon the Police and Crime Commissioner to take on board the recommendations that we have proposed and look forward to a fruitful working relationship with him to help him deliver on these alongside his own Police and Crime Plan.

Councillor Suky Samra – West Midlands Police and Crime Panel Chair 2021-2022

2 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF INQUIRY

The West Midlands Police and Crime Panel is made up of local elected councillors from across the region and independent members. It acts as a 'critical friend' to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to ensure they are effectively holding the police to account, addressing local community safety issues, and working with community safety and criminal justice partners to fight crime and help victims. The Panel conducts in-depth scrutiny inquiries into policing and community safety topics to inform its scrutiny of the PCC.

In September 2020, the Panel learnt that the Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2020) revealed a 6-percentage point drop in public confidence in West Midlands Police (WMP), from 71% in 2018/19 to 65% in 2019/20. The survey also showed the decline in public confidence in WMP was more dramatic than similar forces and below the national average.

The Panel was keen to examine the issues behind the data and seek assurances from the PCC on the steps he was taking to address the issues that undermine public confidence.

Former PCC David Jamieson welcomed the inquiry, and the Panel was pleased to learn that Simon Foster (elected West Midlands PCC in May 2021), was also committed to addressing public confidence in policing. The recommendations identified in this inquiry aim to support the PCC in fulfilling this commitment.

Confidence is a key measure of the relationship between citizens and the police; public confidence in the police underpins public consent and cooperation. The police inspectorate HMICFRS defines a legitimate force as one in which the public sees consistently behaving fairly, ethically and within the law. Police legitimacy more broadly represents a sense of trust and shared values with the public.

Scoping the inquiry terms of reference highlighted the wide range of complex and interlinked factors that have an impact on public confidence in policing. We learnt that public confidence is multi-faceted: It might be a reflection of direct experience with the police, or experience of the wider criminal justice system. It can be based on perceptions of crime levels and fears of becoming a victim, or shaped by views about authority and justice.

During this inquiry new responsibilities placed on the police to enforce national Covid-19 restrictions generated much public debate about police legitimacy. High profile incidents, such as killing of George Floyd restrained by a US police and the rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving MET police officer also focussed national debate about structural racism and misogynistic culture within policing and wider society.

The information the Panel collected during its inquiry also highlighted that public confidence was influenced by day-to-day encounters with local police. We heard about the value residents placed on a visible police presence in local neighbourhoods for reassurance that police were part of the community, understood local concerns, and to act as a deterrent to criminal activity. We heard about the importance of keeping victims apprised about the progress of their case. We also heard that the ease of being able to contact the police, particularly through the non-emergency channels, showed residents the police were there when they needed them.

We welcome the WMP and PCC Fairness and Belonging Plan programme to understand perceptions of fairness within different communities and address disproportionality in the way police carry out their duties and in the wider criminal justice system. Our examination of the stop and search data found that disproportionality continues to be a factor and we heard feelings of being targeted by the police without sufficient cause was a key issue impacting on public confidence in the police in certain communities.

Finally, this inquiry reflected on the focus on having a police service at all levels that is representative of the communities it serves by improving the fairness of recruitment, retention, and promotion.

3 OUR INQUIRY QUESTION AND SCOPE

The Panel defined its key question as:

“What steps is the Police and Crime Commissioner taking to address the issues that undermine public confidence in the police?”

The inquiry set out to:

- understand the factors that impact on public confidence in the police
- seek assurances from the PCC on the progress towards the 2016-2020 Police and Crime Plan target “to increase confidence in West Midlands Police”

- ensure the Panel is well informed to make recommendations to the new PCC to consider when developing the 2021-2025 Police and Crime Plan

When scoping the inquiry, the Panel agreed to focus on four key themes:

- communication with the public
- the victim experience and crime outcomes
- public expectations of a modern police force
- building public trust and legitimacy

This report will address each of these areas in Section 7, but first will set out our approach (Section 4), some wider context (Section 5) and results from the survey conducted by the Panel (Section 6).

4 OUR APPROACH

Panel meetings throughout 2020/21 provided members with the opportunity to pose questions to the PCC on a range of issues including police recruitment, stop and search and use of force data, crime outcomes data, the Force Contact Centre, as well as the collaborative approach to tackle the root causes of violent crime co-ordinated by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) also provided an extensive portfolio of information that included reports considered by the PCC's Strategic Policing and Crime Board (the body that assists the PCC in holding the Chief Constable to account) on customer and victim satisfaction, WMP recruitment, use of stop and search powers, and reporting and recording of hidden crime.

To complement this written evidence and the discussions at Panel meetings, members gathered views and comments from community-based organisations. A short survey was disseminated via community development teams and an evidence-gathering roundtable session was held to explore the issues raised in the survey in more depth.

Whilst the survey methodology was not developed to produce a statistically representative data set, it enabled the Panel to tease out issues to inform further debate.

A list of Panel members, organisations and individuals who contributed to this piece of work can be found in the appendix to this report.

5 CONTEXT

5.1 THE ROLE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Police and Crime Commissioner has a crucial role in building public trust and confidence in the police. PCCs are elected by the public to hold the Chief Constable and the Force to account, making the police answerable to the communities they serve. PCCs have the legal power and duty to:

“provide the local link between the police and communities, working to translate the legitimate desires and aspirations of the public into action”
Policing Protocol Order, 2011

The PCC must produce a Police and Crime Plan setting out the strategic police and crime objectives for the region; the tasks the PCC will work with WMP and partners on; and the resources made available to the Chief Constable and other funding plans.

Police and Crime Plan 2016-2020

The 2016-2020 West Midlands Police and Crime Plan included specific targets for raising and addressing disparities in public confidence in the police. The PCC made a commitment to monitor public trust and confidence in the police and push for further improvement:

“I expect to see confidence in policing to increase over the course of the next four years. There are also disparities of confidence in different areas across the force, this must be understood.” *West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2016-2020*

In March 2021, David Jamieson presented his End of Term report to the Panel and provided a progress update on these commitments and target measures. Referring to public confidence in the police he reported:

“Public confidence in policing is declining, and I believe this is in part because the public see the police struggling to cope with some of the challenges now evident.” *End of Term Report (WMPCC, March 2020)*

Police and Crime Plan 2021 -2025

Simon Foster PCC presented his draft Police and Crime Plan 2021-2026 to the Panel in October 2021. He acknowledged the importance of public confidence:

“Everyone in the West Midlands should be confident that West Midlands Police acts fairly and lawfully, and in a just and proportionate way. If people have confidence in the police, they are more likely to act to help make their community safe, report crimes, and come forward to support investigations.”
West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025

The Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025 includes a range of targets and measures relating to public confidence. The Panel look forward to regular updates on the progress of these.

5.2 UNDERSTANDING THE DATA AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

There are several ways that data on public confidence in the police is collected. The Panel looked at the Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2020) which provided police force area estimates for perceptions and confidence in local police.

Comparing perceptions of WMP with national data and similar forces

HMICFRS groups police forces with similar demographic, social and economic characteristics, and comparable levels of crime into Most Similar Forces Groups (MSFG).

This enables statistical comparisons to be made. West Midlands Police is grouped with Greater Manchester, Merseyside, and West Yorkshire forces.

Chart 1 plots the WMP confidence data between 2017-2020 against the national rate for England and Wales and the MSFG. In 2020 confidence of people over 16 years old in West Midlands Police was 65%, 9 points below the national average (74%) and below the rest of the MSFG (Greater Manchester 70%, Merseyside 74%, West Yorkshire 72%).

Comparing the trend in confidence over the period 2017-2020, there is a general decline in public confidence for all, however the decline is more dramatic in the West Midlands. From 2019 other forces seem to be picking up.

Chart 1

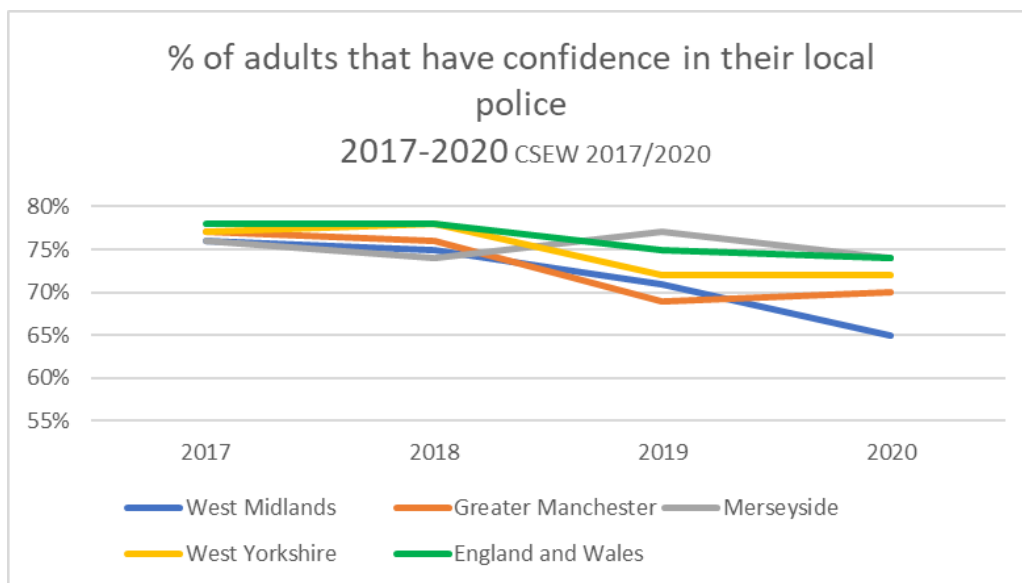
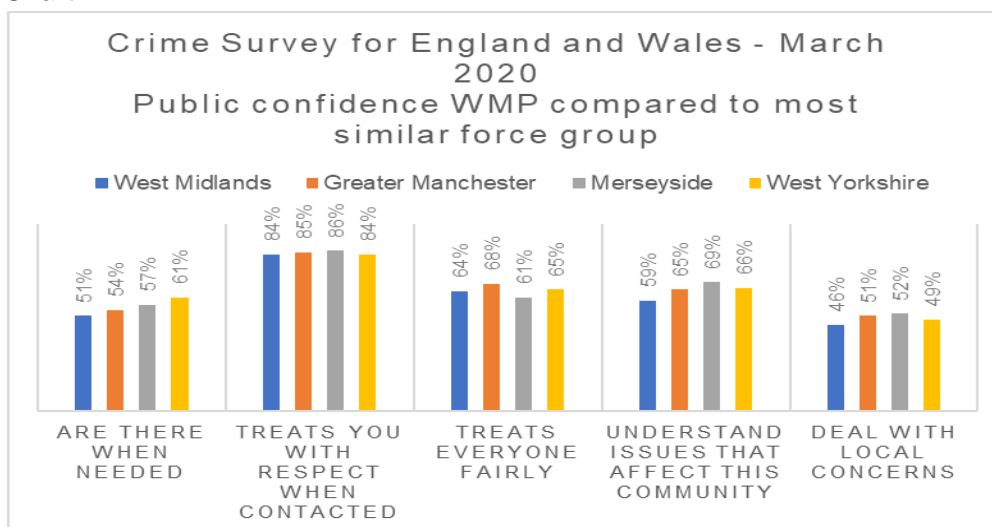


Chart 2 compares specific perception ratings across the MSFG. The Panel was concerned that WMP has lower confidence ratings than the other forces for reliability, understanding of community issues, and taking action on local issues.

Chart 2



Deeper analysis of public confidence data

Analysis of the national level CSEW data into public confidence in the police provided the Panel with further insight that confidence levels vary across different ethnic groups by age, gender, and socio-economic status.

The Panel learnt that the overall national rate of confidence in the police was 74%, this compared to a 77% confidence level of Asian respondents, a 75% confidence level from 'other' ethnic groups, a 74% confidence level of white respondents, a 71% confidence level of respondents with mixed ethnic background and a 64% confidence level of respondents within the black ethnic group. However, these broadly defined ethnic groupings masked more nuanced differences. Most notably, within the black category, overall confidence in the police of black Caribbean respondents (54%) was 20 percentage points below the national average and that of white respondents. Within the Asian grouping, Pakistani respondents had less confidence (69%) in the police than Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese or other sub-groups.

The Panel ask the PCC to report back on local analysis into the rate of decline of public confidence in WMP in relation to the national average and similar forces. (Recommendation 2)

Capturing local data on public confidence

The PCC's Strategic Policing and Crime Board (SPCB) receives regular customer satisfaction reports from WMP. Through these reports the Panel learnt that WMP collected a range of data including: a citizens' survey disseminated on the WMNow digital portal, online victim satisfaction surveys emailed to victims 6 weeks following the closure of cases, and SMS feedback from LiveChat users. We also heard of plans to develop a caller feedback survey.

In January 2021, it was reported to the SPCB that WMNow membership stood at 48 members per 1000 of population over 16 years old, and efforts continued to increase WMNow registrations.

The PCC's 'End Of Term Report' reported in March 2021 that response rate of the victim's satisfaction survey had seen a decreasing trend down from 9.6% in 2019, to 6.3% completing the survey in 2020.

Our brief examination of locally collected data into public confidence in the police raised the question as to whether there was a clear and representative local picture of public confidence to inform policy and monitor impact. Similarly, the PCC reflects on current monitoring and understanding of public confidence, and makes a commitment to improvement:

"West Midlands Police need to improve how it monitors and understands wider public confidence in policing and the satisfaction of people who interact with its services. I will work with the Force to develop how it measures, analyses and improves public confidence and satisfaction, particularly for victims who have reported a crime to the police." West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2021-2026

We ask the PCC to update the Panel on his work with WMP to develop a new methodology to measure and analyse public confidence and satisfaction. The Panel is keen to understand how views of the diverse communities across the West Midlands will be captured to ensure the data collected is representative of the geographic, age and ethnicity profile of the region. (Recommendation 2)

The Panel notes that efforts to increase registrations to the WMNow public communication portal. However, considering the findings West Midlands Digital Roadmap (West Midlands Combined Authority, 2021) that the region has the highest number of non-internet users in the UK (20% of its population), with a further 20% of the population classed as limited internet users, increasing use of digital methods for surveying confidence and satisfaction must consider the limitations for digital survey reach. We seek assurances from the PCC that the views of those unable to access digital surveys will be captured. (Recommendation 2)

Public access to local confidence and satisfaction information

The Panel noted development by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) of a Public Voice Dashboard allowing the public to track MET police performance over time, look at data on the key drivers of satisfaction, and understand victim satisfaction and perceptions by different demographic groups.

We believe that public access to confidence and satisfaction information provides valuable evidence to enable transparent public scrutiny. We encourage the PCC and WMP to ensure locally collected data on public confidence and victim satisfaction is publicly available and is presented in an accessible format (Recommendation 3).

In addition, we suggest the PCC sets out in the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025 how he will hold the Chief Constable to account on actions identified through citizen and victim satisfaction surveys to improve public confidence in WMP, and how the impact of actions will be measured. (Recommendation 4)

6 PANEL SURVEY

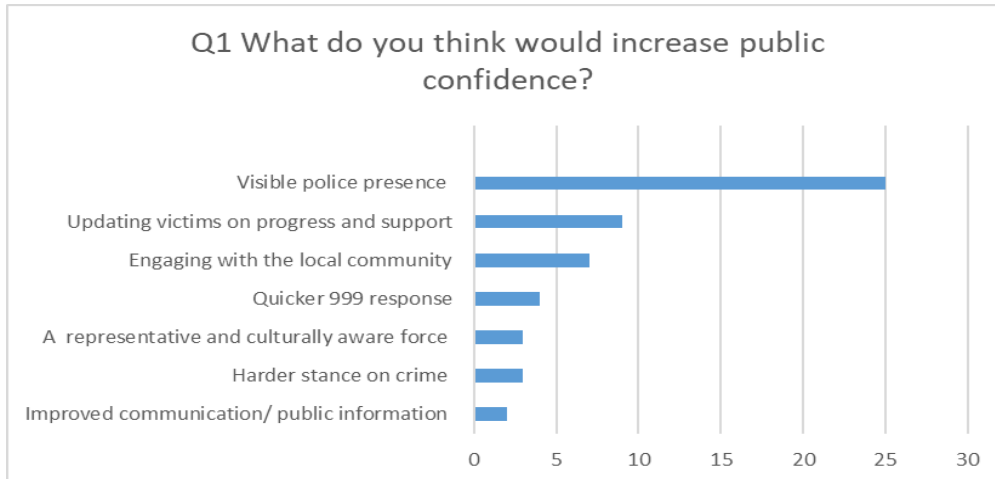
6.1 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Panel members felt it was important to conduct their own research into local views on the factors that impact on public confidence in the police and what could increase public confidence. A short survey was disseminated via community development teams and 41 responses were received. Whilst this was a small sample it did enable the Panel to tease out recurring issues to inform further debate. An evidence gathering session was also held to explore the issues people raised in more depth.

6.2 SURVEY FINDINGS

We asked respondents to tell us what they thought would increase public confidence in West Midlands Police. This was an open question allowing free text answers. The responses we received are grouped on Chart 3.

Chart 3



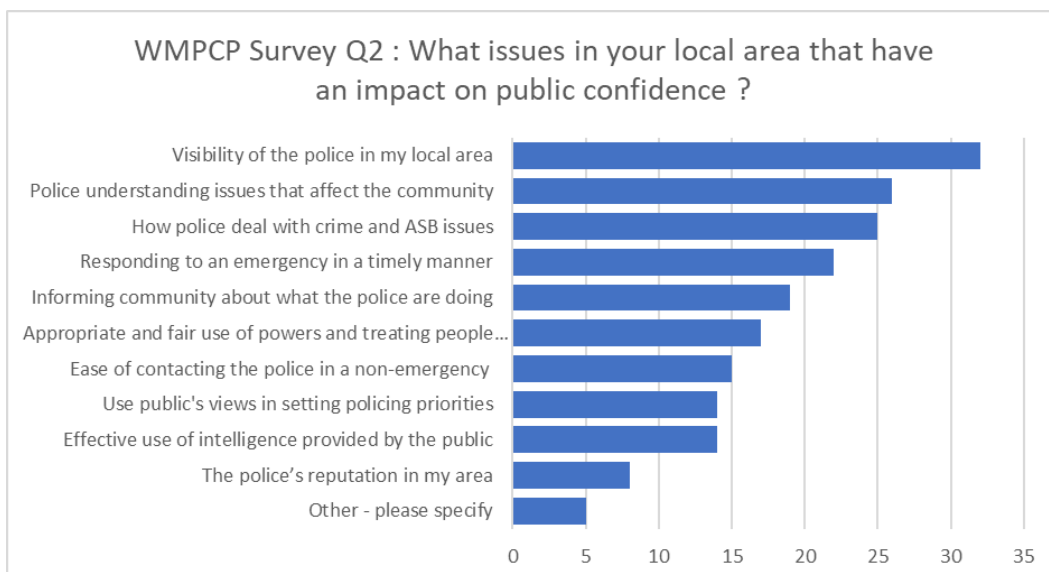
Greater visibility of police was the top thing that respondents felt would increase public confidence. The second highest response focussed on victims, in particular updating victims on the progress of reported crimes, officers having greater awareness of victim needs and what support was available to victims.

Expanding police engagement with their local communities, grass roots organisations and schools was the next suggestion to increase public confidence. We were also told that a quicker police response to 999 emergency calls would increase public confidence. Respondents also felt public confidence would increase by having a force representative of the community, as well as expanding cultural awareness training for officers.

The final two issues respondents felt would increase public confidence were taking a harder stance on reported crime, and improved communication and information to the general public about the work of the police and the outcomes of reported crimes.

The survey's second question asked respondents choose their top five issues in their local area they believed had an impact on public confidence in the police. A list of 10 issues was provided, with the option to specify alternative issues. The responses are set out in Chart 4.

Chart 4



Our survey found the key local issue impacting on public confidence was visibility of police in their local area.

Police understanding the issues that affect the local community, and how the police deal with crime and anti-social behaviour were the next highest rated responses.

Responding to emergencies in a timely manner, and informing the community what local police were doing, also made the top five local issues respondents felt impacting on public confidence in the police.

6.3 ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The Panel met with a small group of survey respondents to discuss the survey results and the following points were raised during the discussion. These key themes are explored in Section 7.

Police visibility

Police visibility in the local area was the top response to both the survey questions. The group discussed the reasons for this and suggested that the physical presence and patrols by police officers and PCSOs act as a deterrent for some crimes, create a sense of safety, and reassure the public that the police were part of and understood their local area.

We were also told that an absence of visible police presence can leave young people feeling vulnerable and scared of becoming a victim. This results in some carrying weapons for self-defence.

Engagement with the community to understanding local issues

We heard that in some areas the community had a very good relationship with local officers, but this was not working in all areas. Those we spoke to thought there was scope for local officers to engage more with their local community to identify and address crime and community safety issues.

“If you used us better, we have hundreds of eyes you could use”.

Some we spoke to had good and regular contact with local officers and PCSOs. Others suggested the police could do more to actively engage and become part of the community, for example by attending local community events.

Communication with victims

We heard from victims of ‘less serious crimes’ who felt a lack of police contact and support. We were told that victims wanted to know the police were interested in their reported crime and be reassured that the matter would be taken forward by the police.

“.... recognising the importance of bigger crime, it is still frustrating....victims of small criminal acts feel there is more support for criminals than them...”

We were told that WMP mobile technology pinpoints crime report locations to enable local officers to visit when nearby, but in-person officer visits to victims were not routine.

Our roundtable session also suggested expanding online case tracking enabling victims could track progression their case, in a similar way to an online order or pizza delivery. However, it was acknowledged that not everyone had digital access, so the option for in-person officer visits should also remain.

Better public information about police pressures

Our roundtable discussion acknowledged that the police had to balance resources and prioritise responses. It was suggested more public information about the context in which the police worked in could improve public understanding of these pressures.

“...the public could be better educated ... to help them understand the strains and stresses on the police force.”

Non-emergency call waiting

The discussion highlighted frustrations with long waiting times on the 101 non-emergency telephone number.

“...When it comes to reporting crime, the non-emergency number is useless as it is overwhelmed...”

Building the trust of young people

We heard that young people can be reluctant to speak to the police through fear of being labelled within their own communities. Our roundtable discussion talked about importance of the police establishing relationship with young people from an early age and noted that an absence of trust in the police can deter people coming forward as witnesses or considering a career with the police.

“many young people don’t have positive role models or grow up in communities that have bad experiences with the police. Police talks at schools can explain what police do and build a rapport before gang culture gets a grip on young people...”

Fair treatment by the police

The Panel heard examples of negative experiences of young people approached by the police. Some felt the police judge them and their family. It was reported to us that there was a sense of unfairness and injustice in stop and search, and that feelings of being targeted on the basis of race or social background were too common.

7 KEY ISSUES EXPLORED

7.1 COMMUNICATION: CONTACTING THE POLICE IN A NON-EMERGENCY

During our inquiry Panel members recounted their direct experience and complaints they had received from their constituents of long waiting times on the 101 non-emergency number. The same issue was also raised in our roundtable session. The Panel was concerned about this loss of trust in the 101-telephone service, and questioned whether it was fit for purpose, so decided to focus on this aspect of communication between the public and WMP.

In December 2020, the Panel met the Head of Force Contact. We learnt more about the volume of emergency and non-emergency calls (a national issue) and WMP development of alternative non-emergency contact channels such as LiveChat, Bob-E and online self-service.

We heard about progress towards the WMP digital channel shift ambition in line with the National Contact Strategy. Non-emergency demand handled via telephony had reduced from 92% in 2018, to 68% in October 2020. LiveChat had increased from 6% to 28%, and online reporting of crimes had increased from 2% to 7% in the same period.

We heard that callers came directly through to a highly trained omni-competent handler, rather than a switchboard. This approach saw 75-78% of calls resolved at the first point of contact. Contact handlers were able to switch between responding to 101 calls, LiveChat and 999 emergency calls. Daily and hourly monitoring was undertaken to balance resources between the contact channels, with priority always given to 999 calls.

It was reported to the Panel that in December 2020 the average time to answer 70-80% of 101 calls was 3.38 minutes, but waiting times fluctuated and could stretch to an hour at busy times when 999 calls peaked and were prioritised. In July 2021, it was reported to the PCC's SPCB that in May 2021 56% of 101 calls and in July 2021 40% of 101 calls were answered within the three-minute service standard. It is important to provide some context to the 2021 data; WMP reported that in May 2021 the volume of 999 calls and 101 calls, as well as LiveChat regularly passed 6000 records a day.

The Panel raised concerns about the number of abandoned 101 calls. It was reported to us that 26% of non-emergency calls were ended by the caller before being answered, after an average wait of five minutes. We were advised that data on abandoned calls included callers who hung up and subsequently had their issue resolved using another non-emergency channel and included intercoms to police buildings.

The Panel is unclear about the proportion of 101 abandoned calls due to a caller simply giving up and failing to engage with the police, or the proportion of 101 callers that switch to 999 rather than chose a digital channel.

Our concerns correspond with the HMICFRS assessment about the national volume of 999 calls and its suggestion: -

... the public is making less use of the non-emergency 101 number; some forces can't answer calls to 101 in their target time and they don't always offer another way of making contact – so the public is losing confidence in 101 and using 999 instead" (HMICFRS A call for help - Police contact management through call handling and control rooms in 2018/19)

Given the WMCA research that 1 in 5 of the West Midlands population do not use the internet, the telephone remains a key communication channel. We seek assurances from the PCC that the 101-telephone service remains fit for purpose alongside the digital channel strategy.

The Panel calls for the PCC and WMP to develop an action plan to address public confidence in the capacity of WMP to respond to the volume of 999 and 101 calls, alongside

the development of alternative non-emergency contact and information channels. To inform the picture of demand, we suggest further analysis into the reasons for abandoned 101 calls, including the proportion switching to 999, and the proportion of 101 callers that are redirected to other services. (Recommendation 5)

The Panel heard that demand was becoming more complex, and handlers were dealing with people in mental health crisis and presenting with other multiple issues. We support the PCC in his commitment to work in partnership with the appropriate services to develop a collaborative response for such vulnerable citizens.

We also heard that there was a significant use of 101 and 999 contact channels that did not have a policing purpose or required a police response (such as reports of noise nuisance and abandoned vehicles) and handlers regularly redirected such callers to the appropriate agencies. We believe on a practical level the resources redirecting non-police matters could be alleviated by expanding on the current WMP “if it’s not 999 go online” public information campaign to educate the public about ‘what services to contact when’, similar to the NHS “Choose Well” (pharmacy, GP, A&E) campaign. We suggest the PCC is well placed to facilitate the development of this joint public communication strategy with WMP, local authorities, Community Safety Partnerships, other public services. (Recommendation 6)

7.2 THE VICTIMS’ EXPERIENCE

The Panel recognises the key focus of the PCC to improve support services for victims, and we welcome the PCC’s recent appointment of a dedicated Victims’ Commissioner.

During this inquiry the former PCC published a Vulnerable Victims Report (WMPCC, October 2020) that identified several ways in which police services could be improved to ensure that victims of crime felt empowered to come forward, report crimes and get support. Our survey found some concerns about police communication with victims, and we would welcome an update on the implementation of actions contained in that Vulnerable Victims Report. (Recommendation 7)

Our survey and roundtable discussion provided examples of victims of ‘less-serious, lower-level crimes’, such as car theft and garage break-ins, unhappy with a lack of police contact and case updates and frustrated with case progression.

The roundtable session acknowledged that police contact with victims of such crimes was less likely to be in person, and that the police were just one part of the criminal justice system, but believed the timeliness of progress updates from WMP, and provision of information about support to victims was vital for victim reassurance and their confidence in the police.

The Panel learnt that The Victims’ Code placed obligations on the police, including the provision of information to victims on investigations and prosecutions. We are keen to understand the PCC’s role in oversight of the WMP compliance with the Victims’ Code, in particular the right to be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution. (Recommendation 08)

Our roundtable session suggested expanding online case tracking and simple cases updates similar to that provided for online deliveries. We encourage the PCC to work with

WMP and victims to identify any improvements to current arrangements for communicating progress of cases including extending online tracking of recorded crimes. (Recommendation 08)

7.3 CRIME OUTCOMES

During this inquiry Panel members provided examples of public frustration with the police when crime investigations failed to identify a suspect or did not result in charges being brought. We note the YouGov survey that found lack of confidence in the police to solve crimes and that the suspect would be found guilty and convicted (YouGov February 2020). Panel discussions on crime outcomes have highlighted that the police are one element of the criminal justice system. It was suggested to us that the public was unclear which outcomes fell within the police remit and which were associated with other aspects of the criminal justice system, such as the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Panel examined ONS datasets on crime outcomes and noted the high percentage of case outcomes categorised as ‘unresolved due to evidential difficulties’ or ‘no suspect identified’. Data showed that for the year ending March 2020, half of recorded offences in England and Wales were closed with no suspect identified (in the West Midlands it was 54% of offences - two thirds of which were thefts). Just 7% of all crimes resulted in a charge and summons (in the West Midlands it was 8%). Evidential difficulties led to 35% of cases closed (in the West Midlands this was 32%).

We acknowledge the PCC’s stance that the greatest effort should go into detecting the most serious offences, protecting the most vulnerable victims, and bringing to justice the most dangerous repeat offenders. We note the PCC’s commitment to work in partnership locally to improve the criminal justice system.

7.4 PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS OF THE POLICE FORCE

Our survey found that a visible police presence in local areas was a significant factor impacting on public confidence.

The Panel acknowledge that the police are operating with stretched resources and rising demand particularly in complex crimes and crimes not in the public space, such as domestic abuse, safeguarding and cybercrime. However, our survey and roundtable session highlighted calls for visible policing in local communities, or “bobbies on the beat”, to provide reassurance that the police were also focussed on resolving local community safety issues and could act as a deterrent to violence and knife crime.

This corresponds with the findings in the Strategic Review of Policing - policing and the public: understanding public priorities, attitudes and expectations (Police Foundation, 2020) where analysis of public opinion surveys and focus group research found the public want more visible police and suggest this is linked to a widespread sense of local town centre deterioration and concerns about knife crime.

In addition, Panel acknowledge much of police work is focused on crime prevention and protecting the vulnerable from the risk of harm, that is not ‘visible’ to the public. Significant number of police officers are working in the fields such as public protection, serious organised crime, and counterterrorism, again not ‘seen’ by the public.

The Panel reflected on comments made by the HMICFRS that the 20,000 police officer uplift programme "...will create higher public expectations, particularly in relation to police visibility – for example, calls for a greater deterrent police presence..." State of Policing HMICFRS, 2019

We welcome the commitment made by Simon Foster PCC to 'rebuild community policing' as his core mission and aim to put 450 additional officers into neighbourhood policing.

"I will expect to see the investment in community policing lead to reductions in the fear of crime, crime and anti-social behaviour and the total amount of harm caused by crime in Impact Areas."

The Panel ask for further updates on the PCC's rebuilding community policing programme, its roll out across the region and the impact it is having. (Recommendation 1)

7.5 TRUST AND LEGITIMACY

Police legitimacy to use the powers that they hold is based on trust and confidence of the public. The police killing of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020 sparked a renewed focus on issues of racism and disproportionality in policing and the criminal justice system in the UK.

The MacPherson public inquiry into the racially aggravated murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 uncovered major failings in the MET police investigation and in the way Stephen Lawrence's family were treated. It made 70 recommendations including measures to transform police attitudes towards race relations and improve accountability.

In July 2021, the Home Affairs Select Committee assessed progress. 'The MacPherson Report: Twenty-Two Years on' (Home Affairs Committee 2021) concluded that the gap in confidence in the fairness of policing between black and white adults had widened in recent years. The police were not representative of their communities and had failed to meet recruitment targets. Also, the use of stop and search was more disproportionate than two decades ago, with no adequate explanation or justification for the nature and scale of racial disparities.

Fairness and Belonging Plan

PCCs play a pivotal role in tackling inequality to improve trust and confidence and ensure the local criminal justice system is fair and effective for all. In November 2020, the Panel welcomed the launch of the joint WMP and PCC Fairness and Belonging Plan that focussed on building an understanding of perceptions of fairness within different communities and the impact of key police interventions. It consisted of 11 diversity and inclusion projects looking at recruitment and fair representation, training and cultural awareness, promotion, equitable service delivery, the fair use of police powers, engagement, and contributing to a fairer criminal justice system.

The Panel would like to receive an annual update report on the PCC's oversight of the development of the 11 Fairness and Belonging plan projects and implementation of actions. (Recommendation 9)

Stop and Search

We were also keen to understand how the PCC and WMP were scrutinising the use of the police stop and search powers to ensure it was lawful and appropriate.

Stop and search is a tool to detect and investigate crime and remove weapons from our streets. However, our roundtable discussion highlighted a feeling of unfairness in the use of stop and search on younger black and ethnic minority people that was damaging their confidence in the police.

In February 2021, HMICFRS published the report 'Disproportionate use of police powers: a spotlight on stop and search and the use of force' which highlighted that disproportionality continued to be a factor in the use of stop and search powers and its impact on police legitimacy.

“Without a proper explanation, members of the public may see the disproportionate use of powers as a sign of discrimination, and so police legitimacy may be undermined.”

The Panel examined national data and analysis set out in the PCC's End of Term Report (WMPCC, March 2021). We learnt that in the West Midlands during 2019/20 a total of 24,585 stop and searches were conducted, expressed as a rate of 8 per 1,000 of population. This was higher than in 2018/19 when 18,420 stop and searches had been conducted, a rate of 6 per 1,000 of population.

In terms of outcomes of stop and searches by WMP, we saw that 26% of stops and searches resulted in some form of action taken in 2018/19, it was 25% in 2019/20, and rose to 28% in 2020/21. The PCC's End of Term report noted a higher proportion of stops and searches in the West Midlands result in some form of action being taken than that of similar forces.

The Panel examined the SPCB Stop and Search Report (June 2020) which identified areas of disproportionality against a number of key protected characteristics, particularly ethnicity. It found that a member of the Asian population was 2.5 times more likely to be stopped than a member of the white population, and this increased to 3.9 times more likely for a member of the black population.

The Panel heard that the deployment of stop and search is a source of public concern, and the impact of disproportionality on public confidence in the police was significant. We learnt that WMP and the PCC undertake detailed oversight of the use of stop and search, including community Stop and Search Scrutiny Panels that review WMP use of stop and search by examining anonymised stop and search records and body-worn camera footage. We also heard about the Stop and Search workshops to 13–19-year-olds to support the understanding of young people around why and how the police use stop and search.

We welcome the commitment of WMP and the PCC to improve use and oversight of stop and search powers through a focussed project within Fairness and Belonging Plan and specific targets and measures set out in the West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2021-25. We look forward to seeing progress made.

7.6 RECRUITMENT AND PROGRESSION OF BME OFFICERS AND STAFF

The MacPherson Inquiry report recommended that police forces should be representative of the communities they serve, and so set targets for recruitment, progression, and retention of police officers from black, Asian, and other ethnic minority backgrounds. By 2020 levels of representation were still far below the 14% ethnic minority population in England and Wales, with 7% of officers, and only 4% of these officers at or above the rank of chief inspector.

Improving workforce representation in the police is intrinsically linked to police legitimacy with the public. We examined how ethnicity and gender of officers in WMP compared with that of the population it serves. In March 2021 the Panel was disappointed to learn that 13.5% of WMP officers had black, Asian, and other ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to 30% of the population. Breaking down the composition of these officers shows the 11% had a black ethnic background, 63% Asian, 24% mixed ethnic background, and 2% other minority ethnic background. Data showed there were 4813 male and 2374 female WMP officers in March 2021.

The National Police Officer Uplift Programme has provided an opportunity through recruitment to address the representation of the force. In November 2020 David Jamieson, former PCC and the Chief Constable pledged to recruit “1,000 Black, Asian and minority ethnic police officers over the next three years”.

We heard in March 2021 about the range of recruitment and communications initiatives underway to encourage applicants and improve the diversity of the force. We were told that of the 782 new recruits between April 2020 and January 2021 43% were women and 19% were from a black, Asian, or other minority ethnic group. We note that efforts to improve workforce representation is dependent on public trust of the police. We heard that this would involve overcoming deep-rooted and historic mistrust of the police in certain communities.

The PCC acknowledged the importance of the issue

The public need to see that West Midlands Police is taking active steps to become more like the public it serves, and thereby accessing all the available talent and experience. Everyone should feel able to try to seize the opportunity presented by a career in policing (West Midlands Police and Crime Plan 2021-26)

The Panel notes that recruitment is just half of the story and career progression is essential to being a truly representative force. Data on the distribution of the 883 officers of a black, Asian, or other minority ethnic background showed there was 1 chief officer, 1 chief superintendent, 4 superintendent 14 chief inspectors 33 inspectors 118 sergeants and 712 constables.

The Panel would like to receive further reports on the recruitment, retention and career progression of police officers and staff for a force representative of the community it serves. (Recommendation 10)

8 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Panel respectfully requests that the PCC consider the recommendations set out below and provides a response to these by 31 March 2022 and reports annually on progress thereafter.

Recommendation 01: Police visibility, the ability to contact the force and a representative and fair force

The PCC respond to the findings reached in this report that visible policing, the ability to contact the force, and seeing a representative force and a fair force are fundamental principles that impact on public confidence and demonstrate with an action plan how these will be improved over the next 3-year term.

Recommendation 02: Collection and analysis of local public confidence data

That the PCC report back to the Panel on actions taken to improve the measurement and analysis of public confidence in West Midlands Police and victims' satisfaction, addressing the following areas of focus suggested by the Panel:

- Local analysis into the rate of decline of public confidence in WMP in relation to the national average and similar forces.
- Analysis to understand disparities in public confidence in the police across the West Midlands.
- Reassurance that views of the diverse communities of the West Midlands are captured to ensure data is representative of the geographic, age and ethnicity of the region.
- Measures taken to capture the views of those unable to access digital surveys and voice their opinion in that way.

Recommendation 03: Public information of confidence and satisfaction

The PCC works with West Midlands Police to ensure locally collected data on public confidence in the police and the satisfaction of victims is made publicly available in an accessible format to enable the public to understand how the police is performing against local objectives to address public confidence.

Recommendation 04: Holding the Chief Constable to account on action

The PCC outlines in his Police and Crime Plan how he will hold the Chief Constable to account on actions identified through citizen and victim satisfaction surveys to improve public confidence in West Midlands Police, and how the impact of actions will be measured.

Recommendation 05: 101 non-emergency contact

The Panel is concerned about a public loss of trust in the 101-telephone service and whether it is fit for purpose. To inform the picture of demand, we suggest analysis into reasons for abandoned 101 calls including the proportion of callers switching to 999 after abandoning 101, and the proportion of 101 callers signposted to other public services.

We suggest the PCC seek to develop an action plan with WMP to address public confidence in the capacity of WMP to respond to the volume of 999 and 101 calls, alongside the development of alternative non-emergency contact and information channels.

Recommendation 06: Joint public communication strategy

We suggest the PCC facilitate the development of a joint public communication strategy with West Midlands Police, local authorities, Community Safety Partnerships, and other public services to inform and educate the public about ‘what services to contact when’, similar to the NHS “Choose Well” communication strategy.

Recommendation 07: Implementation of the Vulnerable Victims Review

The PCC report to Panel on the progress of implementation of the action points identified in the 2020 Vulnerable Victims Review to ensure that victims of crime feel empowered to come forward, report crimes and get the right support they need.

Recommendation 08: Victims Code compliance

The PCC report back the Panel on his oversight of West Midlands Police compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims’ Code), in particular, Right 6: To be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution.

We suggest the PCC consider working with West Midlands Police and victims to identify any improvements to current mechanisms for communicating progress of cases and expanding online tracking of recorded crimes.

Recommendation 09: Fairness and Belonging Plan

The PCC brings an annual report to the Police and Crime Panel on his oversight of the implementation of the 11 projects within the Fairness and Belonging Plan.

Recommendation 10: Recruitment and progression for a representative force

The PCC brings half-yearly reports to the Police and Crime Panel on the progress of recruitment and retention, and career progression of police officers and staff for a force representative of the community it serves

9 CONCLUSIONS

Our inquiry set out to understand the factors that impact on public confidence in the police and inform recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

We focused on the issues identified in our survey and roundtable discussion that related to concerns about the capacity of the 101 non-emergency telephone service, how the police service supports victims of crime, the public demand for visible police presence, and a workforce representative of the community it serves that is procedurally fair.

Our examination of the data on public confidence in the police has highlighted a need for greater local research and analysis of the reasons why public confidence in WMP has declined at a sharper rate than other forces to inform policy to improve.

During this inquiry the killing of George Floyd by a US police officer and the wider injustices it exposed elevated the debate about public trust and confidence in the police in the UK. We welcome the commitments made by the PCC and WMP to address race disparities in areas including Stop and Search, the use of force, recruitment, progression, and retention. The Panel calls for regular reports on the implementation of the WMP PCC Fairness and Belonging projects and their impact on public confidence.

Other high-profile cases of police misconduct, in particular, the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Met police officer whilst this inquiry was underway “struck a hammer blow to police legitimacy in England and Wales” (HM Inspector Zoe Billingham, 30 September 2021). The case highlighted widespread failings in police response to violence against women and girls, as well as organisational factors around officer vetting and culture. The Panel notes the comments made by Chief Constable Dave Thompson in his blog on 4th October 2021:

“Police officers have extraordinary powers and the fact these powers have been used to commit these crimes has damaged public trust.”

We welcome his acknowledgement of misogynistic attitudes within policing and his commitment to challenge this situation.

We note the wide range of policy areas that impact on public confidence that an inquiry of this size and nature could not adequately examine. However, we welcome the fact public confidence in the police is a key strategic theme of Simon Foster's Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025. The Panel's ongoing monitoring of the fulfilment of the Plan will provide an opportunity to examine progress of these policy areas and their impact. Our inquiry recognises the focus to develop new methods of public contact, the leadership and co-ordination of the victim's agenda through the appointment of the West Midlands Victims' Commissioner, and the PCC's commitment to rebuild neighbourhood policing.

Our recommendations have been developed in the capacity of a 'critical friend' seeking assurances that the PCC is addressing the issues that undermine public confidence in the police.

10 APPENDIX

West Midlands Police and Crime Panel Members contributing to the inquiry:

Cllr Pervez Akhtar (Coventry) 2020/2021
Cllr Paul Bradley (Dudley) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Mick Brown (Birmingham) 2021/2022
Cllr James Butler (Solihull) 2020/2021
Cllr Yvonne Clements (Solihull) 2021/2022
Cllr Daniel Gibbin (Solihull) 2021/2022
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal (Wolverhampton) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Richard Jones (Sandwell) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Abdul Salam Khan (Coventry) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Narinder Kaur Kooner OBE (Birmingham) 2020/2021
Kristina Murphy (Independent Member) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Waheed Rasab (Walsall) 2021/2022
Cllr Suky Samra (Walsall) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022
Cllr Farut Shaeen (Sandwell) 2020/2021
Cllr Shafique Shah (Birmingham) 2020/2021
Cllr Saima Suleman (Birmingham) 2021/2022
Cllr Dave Tyler (Dudley) 2020/2021
Lionel Walker (Independent Member) 2020/2021 – 2021/2022

Contributors:

Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner
David Jamieson, Police and Crime Commissioner 2016-2021
Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
Chief Superintendent Fisher, Force Contact
Survey respondents from across the West Midlands
Engage Youth Empowerment Service
The Haven Refuge
Catch-22 Violence Reduction Service
Neighbourhood Watch

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