



Public Survey on Police Reform: Results

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September 2026

Wiltshire and Swindon
pcc

Survey arrangements

The future structure of policing in England and Wales is undergoing significant change. The Government's Police Reform White Paper, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*, sets out proposals for major reform, including reducing the existing 43 police forces to a smaller number of larger regional forces, alongside changes to policing governance and the future delivery of neighbourhood policing.

While the proposed reforms are intended to improve efficiency, consistency and specialist policing capabilities, they also raise important questions about how larger regional forces could affect local policing. These include police visibility, local knowledge, accountability, community engagement, emergency response and the ability of policing to respond effectively to the priorities of individual communities.

In August 2026, Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner Philip Wilkinson launched a public survey to ensure the views of residents across Wiltshire and Swindon were heard as discussions about the future of policing continued nationally. The survey sought views on the potential impact of a regional police force and whether residents supported Wiltshire Police merging with neighbouring forces to create a larger regional organisation.

The survey received 1,100 responses, providing valuable insight into residents' views, priorities and concerns about the proposed changes. This report sets out the findings of the survey and provides a summary of what residents told the Commissioner about the future of policing in Wiltshire and Swindon.



Sample size

The survey consultation period was open for six weeks, from 4 August 2026 to 13 September 2026.

Based on ONS population projections, the combined population of Wiltshire and Swindon is estimated to be 759,954.

With 1,110 responses, the survey achieved a margin of error of $\pm 2.94\%$ points and a 95% confidence level. This provides a statistically significant sample size for the combined Wiltshire and Swindon population.

However, it is important to note that respondents were self-selecting and, as such, their views may not be fully representative of the wider population.



Executive summary



75%

were already aware of Government plans for police reform.



Only **25%**
support a regional merger.



Nearly **2/3** (66%)
want Wiltshire Police to
remain a standalone force.



80%

say retaining locally shaped neighbourhood policing is “very important”.



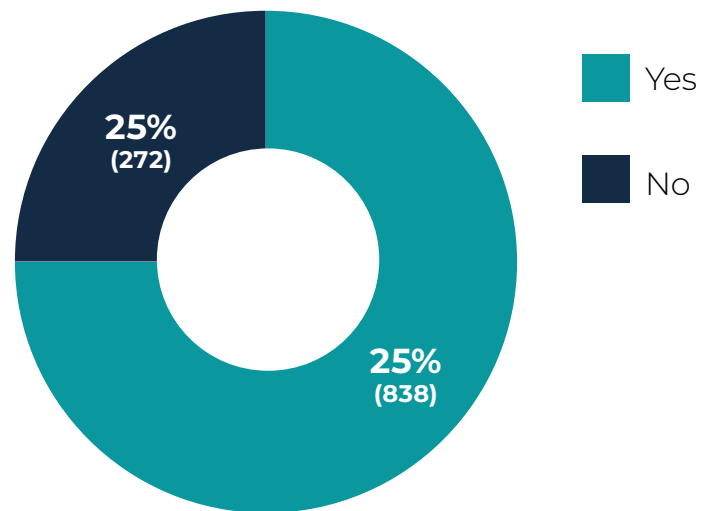
Respondents consistently
feel a larger force would
weaken local knowledge,
visibility and responsiveness.



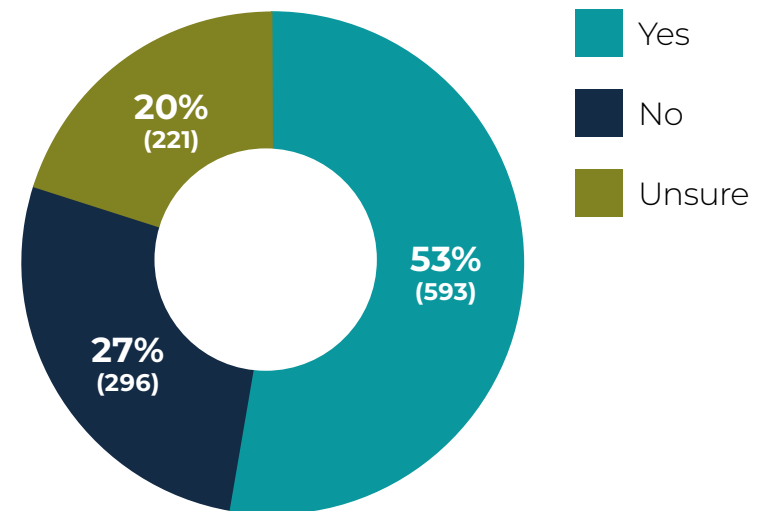
The main perceived benefit
is stronger specialist
policing capability.

Awareness of reform plans

Before completing this survey, were you aware that the Government has proposed merging police forces across England and Wales?



Do you understand why the Government is seeking to merge police forces?



Analysis of results

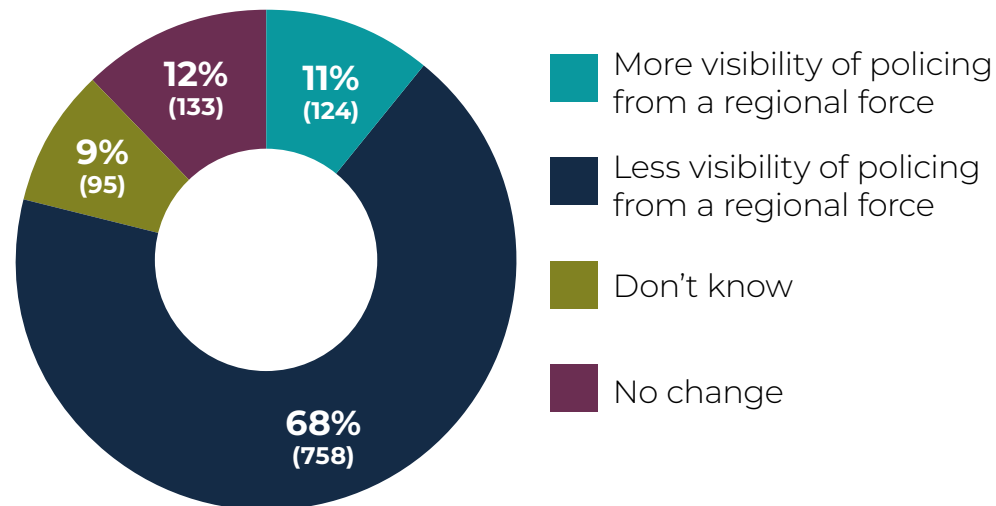
Respondents were generally well informed about the Government's proposed police reforms, with 75% aware of the plans to merge police forces. Despite this, understanding of the rationale behind the proposals was more mixed, with almost half of respondents either not understanding or unsure why the changes are being considered.

This indicates awareness of the debate is high, but knowledge of the intended benefits is less established.

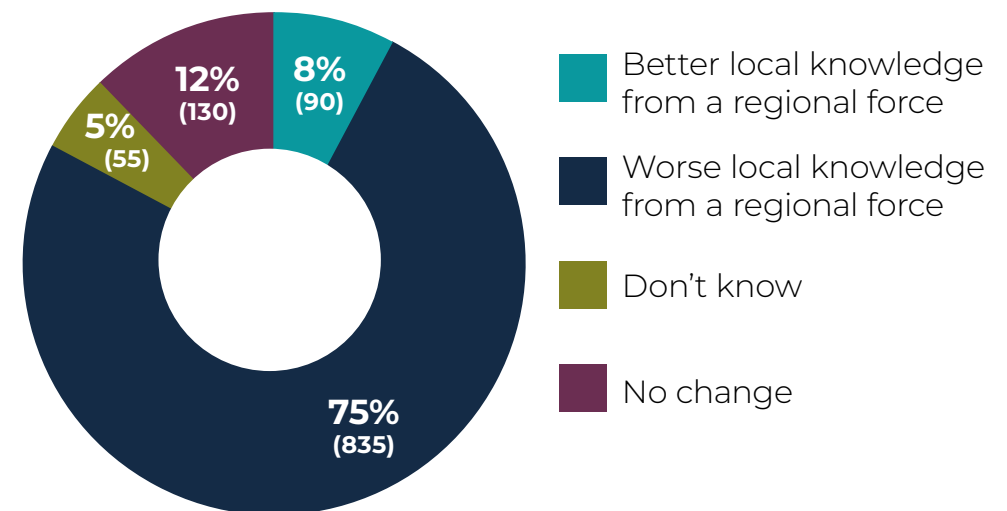
Impact of police force merge in Wiltshire

What do you think might be the impact of merging Wiltshire Police into a larger regional police force?

Visibility of policing?



Policing knowledge of local area



Analysis of results

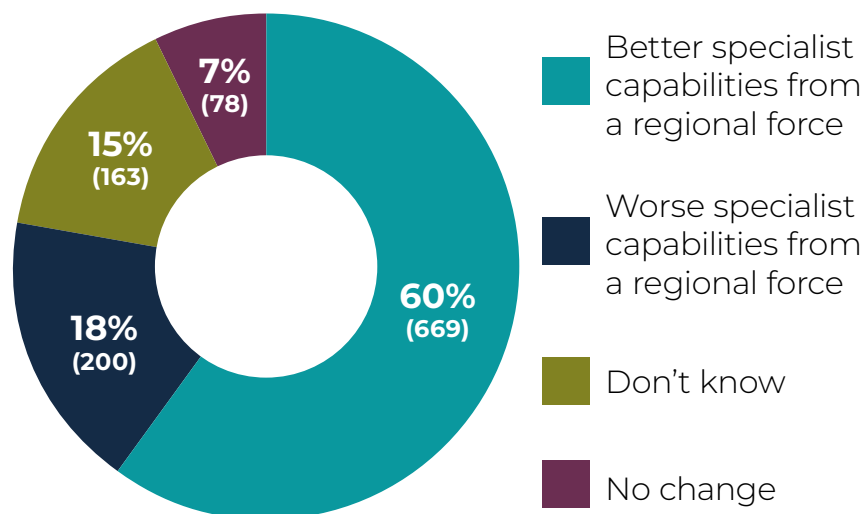
Respondents expressed significant concern about the potential impact of police reform on local policing. More than two-thirds (68%) believed that a larger regional force would result in less visible policing, compared to just 11% who felt visibility would improve. A further 12% anticipated no change, while 9% were unsure.

Concerns were even stronger regarding local knowledge. Three-quarters of respondents (75%) believed a regional force would have worse knowledge of local communities and issues, with only 8% expecting local knowledge to improve. Just 12% anticipated no change and 5% were unsure.

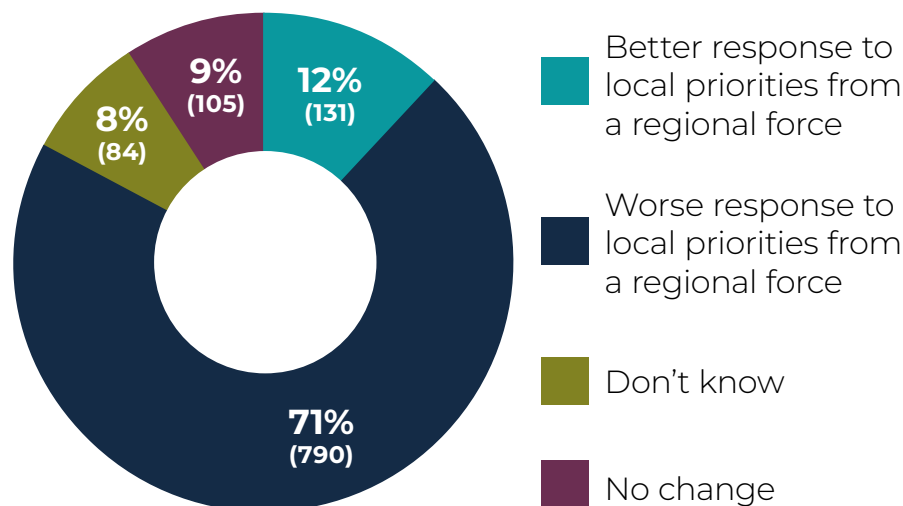
These findings suggest that respondents view local presence and understanding of communities as key strengths of Wiltshire Police and are concerned that these could be weakened through the creation of a larger regional force.

What do you think might be the impact of merging Wiltshire Police into a larger regional police force?

Specialist capabilities (such as cybercrime or firearms)



Responding to local policing priorities



Analysis of results

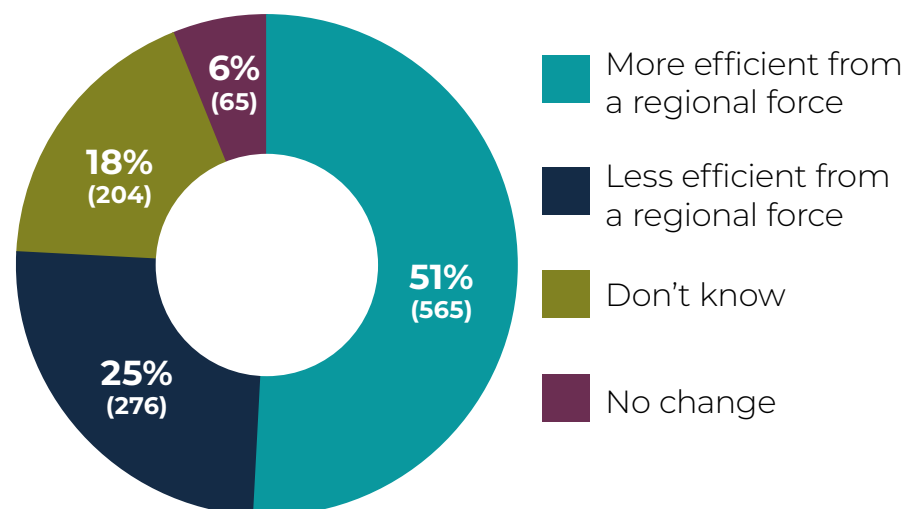
Respondents identified specialist policing capabilities as the area most likely to benefit from police reform. Six in ten respondents (60%) believed a larger regional force would provide better specialist capabilities, such as cybercrime investigation and firearms policing, compared to 19% who felt these capabilities would be worse. A further 14% were unsure and 7% anticipated no change.

In contrast, respondents expressed strong concerns about the impact of reform on local policing priorities. More than seven in ten (71%) believed a regional force would provide a worse response to local policing priorities, with only 11% expecting an improvement. A further 10% anticipated no change and 8% were unsure.

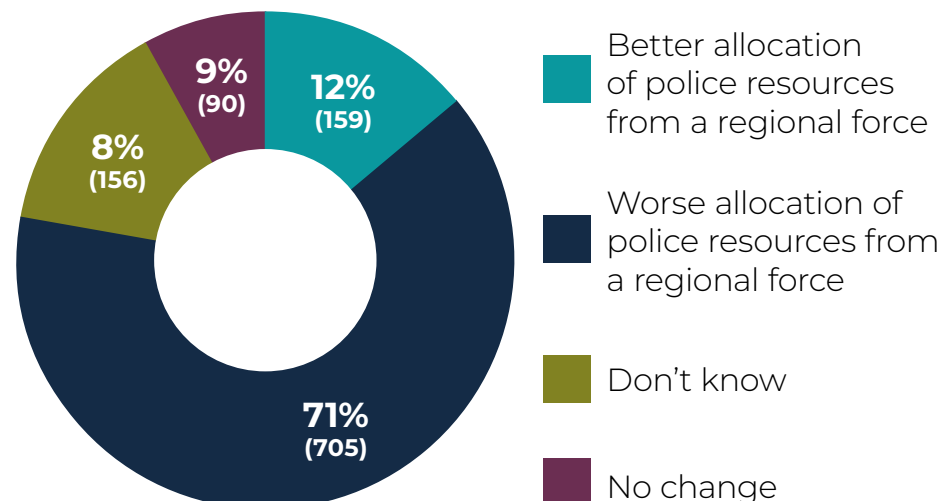
These findings suggest that respondents recognise potential benefits from police reform in areas requiring specialist expertise and resources. However, these perceived advantages are outweighed by concerns that a larger regional force may be less able to understand and respond to the needs and priorities of local communities across Wiltshire and Swindon.

What do you think might be the impact of merging Wiltshire Police into a larger regional police force?

More efficient corporate functions (e.g. Finance, HR etc.)



Allocation of police resources for my local area



Analysis of results

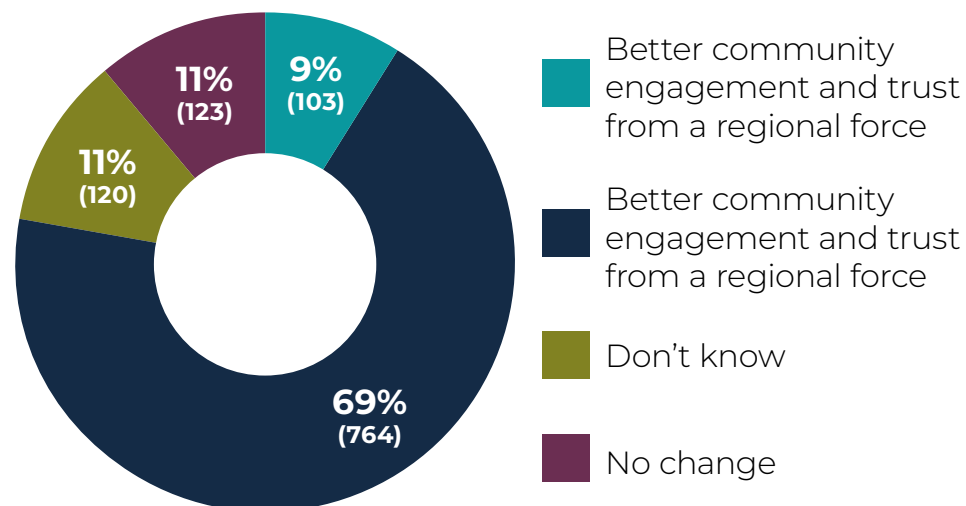
Respondents were generally more positive about the potential impact of police reform on back-office and support functions than on frontline policing. Just over half (51%) believed a larger regional force would deliver more efficient corporate functions, such as finance, human resources and administration, compared to 25% who felt these functions would become less efficient. A further 18% were unsure and 6% anticipated no change.

However, views were considerably less positive when respondents considered the impact on the allocation of police resources within their local area. Nearly two-thirds (64%) believed a regional force would result in a worse allocation of resources for local communities, while only 14% felt resources would be allocated more effectively. A further 14% were unsure and 8% anticipated no change.

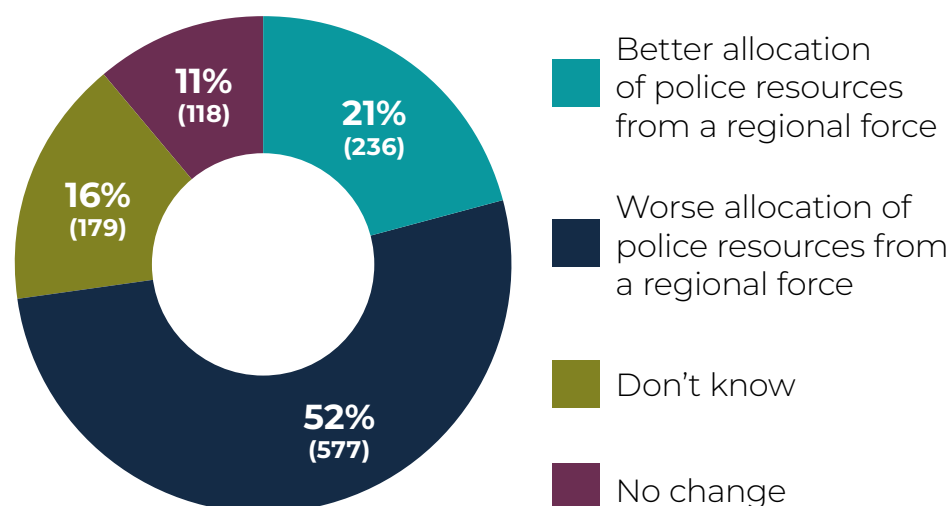
These findings suggest that respondents recognise potential efficiency benefits from consolidating support services within a larger organisation. However, there are significant concerns that any efficiencies achieved could come at the expense of local resource allocation, with many respondents fearing that policing resources may be diverted away from Wiltshire and Swindon to meet wider regional demands.

What do you think might be the impact of merging Wiltshire Police into a larger regional police force?

Community engagement and trust



Responding to emergencies.



Analysis of results

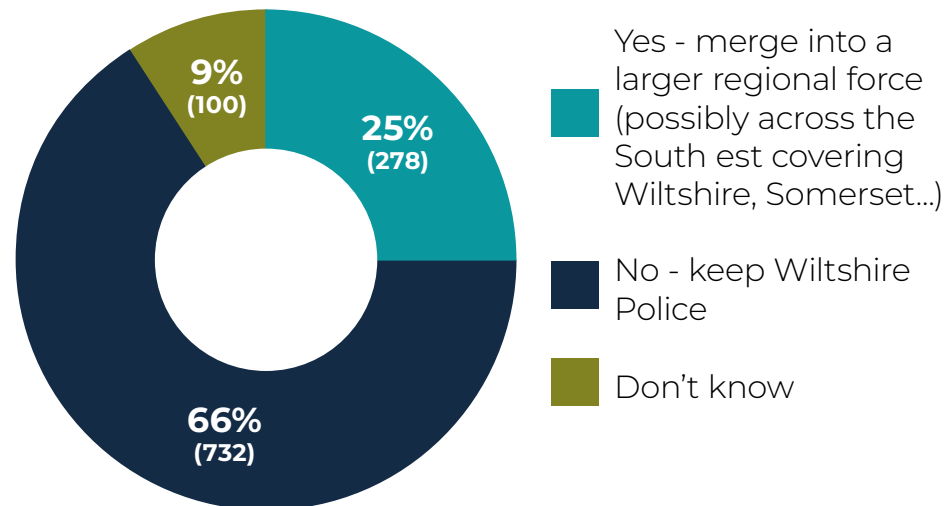
Respondents expressed significant concern about the potential impact of police reform on community relationships and public confidence. More than two-thirds (69%) believed that a larger regional force would result in worse community engagement and trust, while only 9% felt engagement and trust would improve. A further 11% anticipated no change and 11% were unsure.

Views were more balanced when considering emergency response, although opinion remained predominantly negative. Just over half of respondents (52%) believed a regional force would provide a worse response to emergencies, compared with 21% who expected emergency response to improve. A further 11% anticipated no change and 16% were unsure.

These findings suggest that respondents place significant value on the relationships and trust built between Wiltshire Police and local communities and are concerned that these could be weakened within a larger regional organisation. While some respondents recognised that a larger force may offer benefits in responding to major incidents and emergencies, overall concerns about responsiveness and maintaining strong local connections remained more prominent.

Wiltshire Police regional force merge

Do you think Wiltshire Police should be merged with other forces to create a larger force?



Nearly three times as many respondents support keeping Wiltshire Police as a standalone force than support a regional merger.

Analysis of results

The survey identified a clear preference for retaining Wiltshire Police as a standalone force. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) stated that Wiltshire Police should remain as it is, while 25% supported merging Wiltshire Police into a larger regional force. A further 9% were unsure.

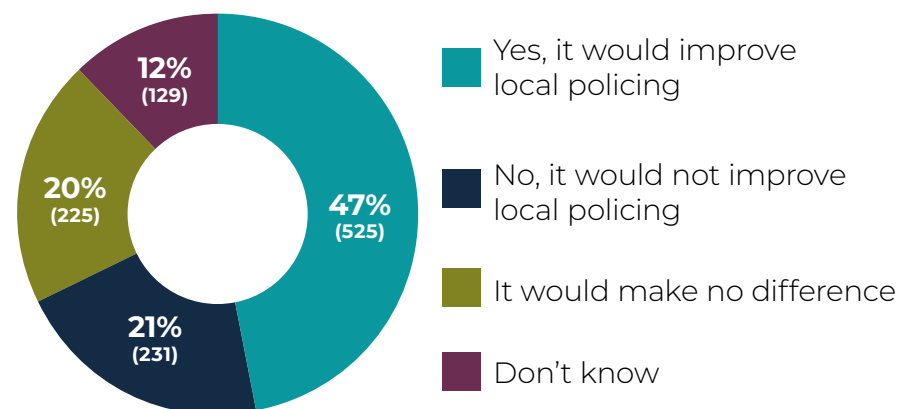
This represents a difference of more than 40 percentage points between those opposed to and those in favour of a merger, indicating a strong level of public concern about proposals to replace Wiltshire Police with a larger regional force.

The findings suggest that respondents place significant value on maintaining a locally focused police force, with concerns throughout the survey consistently centred on the potential loss of local visibility, local knowledge, community engagement and responsiveness to local priorities.

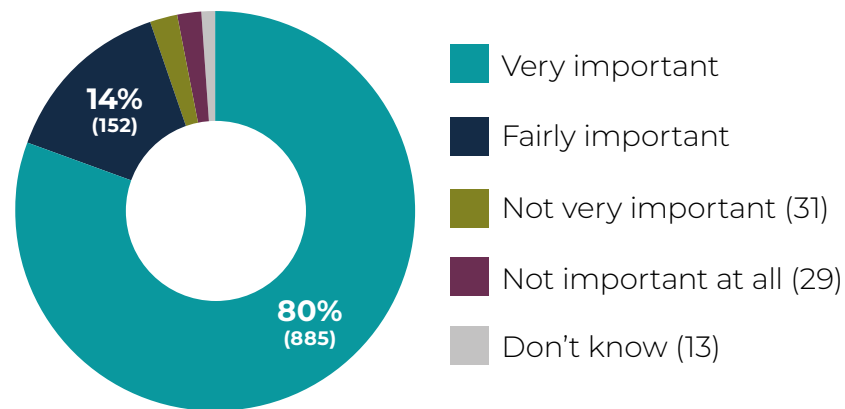
While respondents acknowledged potential benefits associated with specialist capabilities and organisational efficiencies, these advantages were generally not considered sufficient to outweigh concerns about the impact on local policing.

As the principal question within the survey, the results indicate that public opinion amongst respondents is clearly weighted towards retaining Wiltshire Police as an independent force rather than pursuing regional force merger proposals.

The Government has proposed creating dedicated Local Policing Areas with ring-fenced neighbourhood policing teams focused on visible local policing and community problem-solving. Do you think this would improve policing in your local area?



How important is it that neighbourhood policing remains shaped by local communities and local priorities, even if wider police reform takes place?



Analysis of results

The survey found strong support for maintaining a local focus within policing, even if wider police reform takes place.

Nearly half of respondents (47%) believed that dedicated Local Policing Areas with ring-fenced neighbourhood policing teams would improve local policing in their area, while only 21% felt such an approach would not lead to improvements.

At the same time, respondents expressed an overwhelming desire for neighbourhood policing to remain shaped by local communities and local priorities. Four in five respondents (80%) described this as very important, with a further 14% stating it was fairly important. Overall, 94% of respondents considered locally influenced neighbourhood policing to be important.

Taken together, these findings suggest that respondents are not opposed to reform in principle where it strengthens visible local policing and community problem-solving. However, the results also demonstrate a clear expectation that any future changes to policing structures must preserve local accountability, local decision-making and policing priorities that reflect the needs of Wiltshire and Swindon communities.

This theme is consistent throughout the survey findings, with respondents repeatedly expressing concerns about the potential loss of local knowledge, visibility and responsiveness should policing become more regionalised. While some aspects of reform were viewed positively, there is a clear preference for retaining a strong local policing presence that remains closely connected to the communities it serves.

Qualitative feedback from social media engagement

Whilst the survey focused on collecting structured responses to specific questions, residents also shared their views through comments on OPCC social media posts relating to police reform. Although these comments were not submitted as part of the formal survey process, they provide additional insight into public perceptions and the themes underpinning survey responses.

The comments were reviewed and grouped into common themes. Whilst they should not be considered statistically representative, they offer useful qualitative context and help illustrate the issues that matter most to those engaging with discussions around police reform and potential force mergers.



Themes most frequently mentioned in social media feedback

Preserving local policing and local knowledge

This was by far the strongest and most frequently raised theme.

Many contributors expressed concern that a larger regional force would be less connected to local communities and less understanding of local issues, particularly in rural areas. Respondents frequently referenced the importance of local knowledge, local officers and policing that reflects the distinct needs of Wiltshire communities.

"Far rather keep local police who know and understand rural Wiltshire."

"Local police with local knowledge."

"They won't know local areas."

"Policing needs to be local, not regional."

Concerns about reduced visibility and community policing

Many comments focused on the desire for increased neighbourhood policing and visible officers within communities. Respondents regularly referred to “bobbies on the beat” and concerns that larger policing structures could reduce accessibility and local presence.

This theme directly aligns with survey findings relating to policing visibility and community engagement.

“We want local community policing that is visible in the community.”

“Bring back local bobbies back in schools and communities.”

“Officers need to be mixing with the public and being seen at grassroots level.”

Concerns about resource allocation and rural communities

A recurring concern was that resources would be concentrated in larger towns and cities at the expense of smaller communities and rural areas.

Several contributors felt that Wiltshire and Swindon’s needs could become secondary within a larger regional organisation.

“The cities and large towns will sap resources from people out in the small country towns.”

“The countryside and small towns will be ignored.”

“Police resources may be drawn away from local communities.”

Accountability and public influence	
Many contributors questioned whether local voices would continue to influence policing if governance became more regionalised. Respondents frequently raised concerns about losing local accountability and expressed scepticism about whether public views would influence final decisions.	 "Costs will go up and local accountability will be lost" "How does it improve local accountability and local knowledge?" "It won't make any difference what the public think."
Potential benefits through efficiency and shared services	
Whilst less common than concerns about local policing, some respondents acknowledged that reform could improve efficiency, reduce duplication and strengthen specialist capabilities. Several comments specifically supported the idea of sharing back-office services whilst retaining local policing functions.	 "It makes sense to combine non-operational support functions." "Just imagine the savings on those salaries." "Shared intelligence but local forces."

Key observations

The strongest themes emerging from social media engagement were the importance of retaining local policing, concerns about the loss of local knowledge and visibility, and fears that resources could be diverted away from Wiltshire and Swindon under a larger regional structure.

Whilst some contributors recognised potential efficiency benefits and opportunities to strengthen specialist policing functions, these advantages were generally viewed as secondary to maintaining locally accountable policing services. These themes closely mirror the formal survey findings, providing additional confidence that the concerns and priorities identified through the survey reflect wider public sentiment amongst those engaging with the police reform debate.

Survey awareness and engagement campaign

To maximise awareness of the Police Reform Survey and encourage participation from residents across Wiltshire and Swindon, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner delivered a comprehensive communications and engagement campaign using a range of digital and face-to-face channels.

This activity combined community engagement, targeted digital communications and bespoke campaign assets to ensure the survey reached a broad audience and provided residents with multiple opportunities to have their views heard on the Government's police reform proposals.



Activity included:

- Public engagement with residents at community events and engagement sessions across Wiltshire and Swindon.
- An extensive social media campaign delivered across OPCC channels, including both organic and paid content targeted at local audiences.
- Dedicated content published on the OPCC website, providing information about police reform and access to the survey.
- Press releases and PCC blog articles developed and distributed to raise awareness of the survey, with coverage achieved through local and regional media outlets.
- Digital advertising placed across local online news websites and advertising networks to increase awareness among Wiltshire and Swindon residents.
- Community messaging distributed through the Neighbourhood Alert system and other community communication channels.
- The development of bespoke visual assets and campaign branding to improve visibility, consistency and engagement across all communications activity.

The campaign adopted a digital-first approach, enabling information to be shared quickly and cost-effectively while reaching residents through the channels they use most frequently.

Reach and Awareness

Through the combined use of community engagement, digital communications and targeted promotion, the survey achieved significant visibility across Wiltshire and Swindon.

Campaign Reach

Social media organic reach	22,000	@
Digital paid advertising reach	97,300	@
Community Messages sent	59,550	megaphone
Media releases reach	68,000	heart
Public engagement footfall	1,260	group of people

This activity contributed to the survey receiving **1,110 responses**, exceeding the minimum sample size required for statistically significant results.



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