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UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES FOR POLICING

ANDY HIGGINS
NOVEMBER 2019

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About the Police Foundation

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

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An appendix pack supporting this report is available at <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/project/understanding-the-publics-priorities-for-policing/>

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SUMMARY

A strong relationship between the police service and the public has always been central to the British policing model but there are growing concerns that a *mismatch* has developed between the priorities of the former and the expectations of the latter (HMICFRS, 2019a) and about the health of *the police covenant with the public* (NPCC, 2018). The recent announcement of 20,000 new police recruits offers an opportunity to narrow the gap but police leaders face difficult decisions about how to use new resources, not only to improve public safety but also to address people's security concerns and service expectations.

Concerns about a public disconnect arise from a period in which funding cuts and a reorientation towards vulnerability and 'hidden' harm have led to aspects of 'core', public-facing policing effectively being 'deprioritised'. While the public have noticed the difference, it is less clear whether they understand the context, realise what is being done instead or – crucially – whether they *would* agree with the decisions being made if they knew and were engaged more.

In the first half of 2019 – supported by seven English and Welsh Police and Crime Commissioners, whose police force areas became our research sites – the Police Foundation set out to develop a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the public's priorities for policing. Our methods were principally **qualitative**, consisting of 28 focus groups, in 16 local authority areas, across seven police forces, in which over 250 members of the public took part. In addition to exploring respondents' *existing* opinions, our approach included '**deliberative**' elements that sought to understand how people's views and priorities changed in the light of new contextual information and when given the chance to consider the issues in depth and with their peers. Additionally, with a view to exploring the diversity of public opinion and understanding people's viewpoints more 'holistically', we made use of **Q Methodology**; a robust quantitative technique for studying subjectivity using ranked sorting exercises and 'by person' factor analysis.

These investigations revealed a public which is unsettled, to varying degrees, by a '**turn for the worse**' they perceive in their local towns and public spaces. For many people, familiar places feel less cared for, less overseen and increasingly populated by the marginal, unpredictable and menacing. Coupled with a troubling national knife crime narrative, these anxieties

fuel instinctive **calls for a greater deterrent police 'presence'**, running counter to the **recent experience of police withdrawal and 'absence'**. This impression of 'less policing' relates not just to police visibility, but also to perceived reductions in: responsiveness to calls for assistance, crime investigation, victim service and local focus, leaving an overall sense of uncertainty about what the police 'offer' to the public currently comprises.

Within our focus groups we heard caveats to the clamour for visibility, including a recurring narrative that diminished social deference, over-empowered youth and criminal justice leniency have robbed visible policing of its usefulness as a deterrent. But for the most part, the public ask is for the police to move closer again, even though they broadly understand, and are sympathetic towards, the resource conditions that forced them to pull away.

This 'mood music' has a bearing on people's thinking about *what the police should prioritise* as one part of a more complex set of influences and considerations. When presented with a wide-ranging set of policing issues, drawn from a survey of contemporary public and professional commentary on police priorities, (in the form of a 'Q sort' exercise), **people emphasised the importance of police responding quickly in an emergency, providing a presence on the streets and dealing with public place drugs activity (often seen as a marker of local deterioration). But above all, the public feel that the police should prioritise tackling serious and sexual violence, including by investigating when it occurs. They also give high priority to fighting terrorism and organised crime, protecting children and others vulnerable to 'hidden' abuse** and (to a slightly lesser degree), to providing justice and 'redress'.

When respondents' priority choices are viewed 'on aggregate', acquisitive crime tends to attract a mid-level ranking, while community policing, 'managerial' matters and more 'progressive' concerns have comparatively less public resonance. **It is particularly notable that examples of the 'low level' crime and antisocial behaviour, often taken to constitute 'public policing priorities' (illegal parking, fly tipping, nuisance motorbikes, shoplifting, aggressive begging and the like) consistently fall to the bottom of the public's priority list.** This should

give us cause to question how we conceptualise and address these ubiquitous public ‘nuisance’ issues.

In explaining their priority decisions, participants showed a ready willingness to take on the role of citizen policy-makers rather than demanding consumers of policing. Although they recognise and draw on their personal experiences, values and concerns, with only minimum direction toward the normative, people tend to hold these in check and ‘universalise’. Sometimes respondents consciously applied ‘strategies’; prioritising issues they feel have potential to unlock broader social benefits. But more prominently they tended to make assessments of the *harm* or *impact* of different issues (particularly where this is direct and concentrated ‘on the person’) and draw on a set of (relatively traditional) preconceptions about the police role and remit, which stand in relation to the perceived responsibilities of other agencies, citizens, communities and businesses. These two criteria, **impact and remit, do substantial work in explaining the public’s considered priorities for policing; if an issue is perceived to be highly impactful and unequivocally ‘police business’, it will likely be judged a high priority, if it is neither, it will probably be judged low priority; if it is either one but not the other, it will tend towards the middle of the list.**

Drawing strongly on this framework, the public display notable consistency in their priority choices. Although we acknowledge some sampling blind-spots in our research coverage, when split by gender, age group or location, it is clear that participants’ priority choices are remarkably similar, particularly at the top end of their lists. Q Methodology however, is particularly adept at identifying the attitudinal differences and ‘fault-lines’ that exist within groups, and, at the local level, we regularly found some. In six of the seven police force areas studied, factor analysis revealed a set of subtly different distinctive local ‘viewpoints’ around which participants tended to cluster. These local ‘types’ provide a basis for thinking about a more ‘segmented’ approach to public engagement and about the diversity of policing needs, ‘offerings’ and public messaging that police forces might seek to address and provide.

Looking across the research sites, some ‘family resemblances’ between these local perspectives are apparent, which can be built towards a **general qualitative schematic**. Most places, for instance, have a group which associates with a more traditional ‘law and order’ view of policing; these people tend to

give greater priority to dealing with acquisitive crime and lower priority to partnership working and more ‘progressive’ concerns. In contrast, other local groups give more weight to harm and vulnerability, but among these there are variations between those that are more ‘principled’, ‘parental’, ‘modern’ or ‘managerial’ in orientation. A further set of local viewpoints, also with some internal variation, exhibit a more community-oriented focus, including two minority groups that stand apart, and together, as ‘radical’ advocates for a different way of doing things.

Although a useful organising device, the working typology sketched out above relies on *qualitative* judgements about the aspects of similarity and difference that are most meaningful for understanding the range of local viewpoints identified. Statistical analysis¹, that takes account of the *whole perspective* represented by each local viewpoint, showed that the overall variation between them can best be understood in terms of just **two broad groupings**. The first, and by far the largest of these, revolves around the central principle of prioritising according to *impact* and *remit* (described previously), leading to a ‘mainstream’ priority focus on serious and sexual violence, terrorism, organised crime and emergency response. This shows that at a national level, and **with one notable caveat, the public’s priorities for policing tend to cohere around a single shared perspective rather than cleaving apart into distinct ‘factions’.**

The exception is minor but important. The second general perspective, containing just the two ‘radical’ local viewpoints (mentioned above), represents a **distinctive minority call for community-oriented reform and innovation**. Like the ‘mainstream’, this group want the police to focus on violence and organised crime, but they also emphasise the importance of doing this with community involvement, partnership, a well workforce and by using criminal-justice alternatives. This is a strategic perspective that emphasises the *how* of policing as well as the *what*. **It is also a ‘beacon’ position, towards which other people move as they think more deeply and hear new information.**

Providing participants with contextual information about contemporary police resources, demands, trends and activities tended to increase public support and recognition of the difficult trade-off decisions currently being faced. However, it also revealed a **heightened sensitivity toward examples of apparent mis-**

1 Specifically, a second-order factor analysis that treated each of the 27 local viewpoints (identified in the force-level analyses) as if it were a participant in a secondary, combined analysis.

prioritisation or over-policing; events policing, traffic enforcement and stop and search operations are among the areas susceptible to the view that: *'surely the police have something more important to be doing?'*

Views about the operational mechanisms used by police to prioritise calls for service and crime investigations – when set in context – broadly met with public agreement. The practice of 'triaging' emergency calls according to *threat, risk, harm* and *vulnerability* (although generally accepted as necessary 'common sense') provoked some concerns about the skill and judgement needed to assess risk in dynamic situations, and about the possibility of a 'retreating threshold'. 'Screening out' routine investigations to focus on more serious cases, drew concerns that victims 'in need' might be neglected and about the potential impact on local crime rates, criminal escalation and public mood.

Although recognising the importance of policing as a 'generalist' emergency service, **information about the extent of 'non-crime' public safety and welfare demand tended to provoke some 'remit discomfort' among respondents and often prompted calls to limit police involvement to what was 'crime-related' or 'just the immediate crisis'**. Rather than accept routine 'remit-drift' into territory more naturally and expertly covered by other agencies, respondents saw this information as evidence of a need for **wider systemic reform**. This included suggestions for better funding for other services, the creation of new agencies, teams or departments and new expectations about how the public should interface with public services. **Although people initially tend to hold fairly traditional views about what the police and other agencies (should) do, this is largely habitual rather than ideological, and once they understand more about the complexity of the modern demand profile, they are broadly receptive to the idea of substantial service redesign.**

Having considered and discussed new contextual information, participants took part in a group exercise to determine how limited resources should be divided between five functional areas of policing. More often than not, this resulted in resources being taken from neighbourhood policing to protect emergency response and (to a lesser degree) public protection functions. Although there were some strong advocates, and while participants recognised the contradiction with their call for more local 'presence', **neighbourhood policing was generally felt to be the least essential aspect of policing.**

At the end of each session participants were asked whether they wished to make adjustments to their earlier priority choices (as expressed in their initial Q sorts) to reflect any *change* in their views that had occurred during the course of discussion. Most made some alterations, and while the impact of these on the overall (aggregate) priority picture was relatively modest, there were some clear trends. First, **having thought in depth, discussed with their peers and considered new information, respondents tended to move further towards consensus**; issues given high initial importance (like knife crime, organised crime and emergency response) tended to receive *even* greater priority at the end of the session, while issues often argued to be either lower impact (like vehicle crime) or 'non-core' (like mental health demand) tended to be deprioritised. Second, there were also **marked increases in the priority given to partnership working, and community oriented approaches, reflecting an increased appreciation of complexity and the need for a longer-term strategic focus on prevention.** Third, combined with other shifts, this resulted in a quantifiable shift in the direction of the minority 'radical' viewpoint. Qualitatively, respondents tended to report that thinking through the issues confronting the modern policing had a positive impact on their respect and support for the service and felt that greater public awareness and engagement would be socially beneficial.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of these findings we make a number of recommendations for local and national decision-makers (summarised below and presented in full in Section 10).

Recommendation 1

There is a need to reconsider how persistent ‘low level’ crime and ‘quality of life’ issues are conceptualised and addressed. These may constitute valid local *demands* and *concerns*, but the public do not consider them police *priorities* and we should not refer to them as such; **the language used in public engagement strategies, Police and Crime Plans, guidance documentation (and similar) should therefore be revised.** In addition, we echo HMCIC Winsor’s call for an “*open and honest debate about what the public should expect from the police*” (HMICFRS 2019a) and advocate that this **debate should focus on whether and how these local concerns are dealt with, and by whom the response to them should be coordinated and delivered.**

Recommendation 2

Those responsible for setting the police priority framework, at all levels, should recognise the potential for police priorities to demonstrate ‘moral alignment’ with the public, and by doing so to generate legitimacy, cooperation and pro-social, law-abiding behaviours. In particular, the broad priority *consensus* we have identified suggests the value of the police doing this both locally, but also as an *institution*, and therefore national strategic processes should also take these mechanisms into account.

Recommendation 3

Police and Crime Commissioners and police community engagement leads should seek to develop a more ‘segmented’ understanding of the policing needs, concerns, priorities and viewpoints that exist among the local public. Q Methodology, as well as other research techniques, can assist here; there appears to be particular value in approaches that engage people in the *process* of prioritisation rather than just expressing their own concerns.

Recommendation 4

Police leaders should be advocates for a substantial redesign of existing public service provision. This will need to involve honest, and perhaps uncomfortable, public assessments of the adequacy of ‘traditional’ police/criminal justice methods, and of the existing service configuration. However, when people understand more about the current challenge, there is clear public appetite for doing things differently.

Recommendation 5

The lack of explicit priority given to neighbourhood policing by the public, affords some scope for **police forces to reconsider the form and focus that a reinvigorated local policing offer should take on.** This research suggests a focus on:

- A *targeted* increase in police visibility, coupled with ‘problem solving’ to address the visible indicators of ‘deterioration’.
- An emphasis on community involvement, engagement, resilience, and partnership prevention.
- A focus on the role of community engagement in tackling violence, organised crime, terrorism and hidden abuse and on the places where the threat of these is greatest.

Recommendation 6

Police and Crime Commissioners should explore and champion deliberative processes as part of the process of setting police priorities and in relation to other locally contested, emergent and under-explored policing issues. These have potential both to supplement and strengthen representative democratic accountability and also to access a more thoroughly informed and considered – and therefore arguably more *legitimate* – set of public concerns and objectives than conventional survey-based consultation methods are able to provide.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE PUBLIC, THE POLICE AND PRIORITIES

1.1 A MISALIGNMENT OF UNDERSTANDING OR VALUES?

“The things that the force want us to do...are not necessarily the things that the community want us to do. So we’ve got force objectives [around] safeguarding, CSE [Child Sexual Exploitation], missing from homes, organised crime groups. But if you ask the community what they want us to be doing; they want us to be targeting parking, speeding drivers, antisocial behaviour, drug dealing at the end of their street. And those priorities don’t sit well... We’ve got, like, a parallel world going on at the minute where the stuff that the community and councillors and the officers from the council want...is not the same as the stuff that the force want us to deal with.”

These reflections, from a neighbourhood police officer in an English police force², speak of the uncomfortable pull being felt on the frontline, away from the ‘public ask’ and increasingly towards what is judged to be ‘in the public interest’. The officer is not alone in raising concerns of a disconnect. In his most recent assessment of the *State of Policing* (HMICFRS 2019a) HMCIC Sir Tom Winsor identified a ‘mismatch between public expectations and the police’s priorities’ and called for ‘an open and honest debate about what the public should expect from the police’. Several months earlier, (now) Dame Sara Thornton, (then) chair of the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), spoke of the pressure on ‘core-policing’ and ‘the police covenant with the public’ being applied by the combination of funding cuts and expanding remit expectations (NPCC, 2018). Sensing mounting public unease, particularly about knife crime and local visibility, new Prime Minister Boris Johnson has made recruiting 20,000 new police officers one of his headline policy pledges (Gov.uk, 2019).

These developments follow a period in which police chiefs and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have had to balance public expectations against the realities of a 19 per cent real terms funding cut (NAO, 2018). They have done so while also responding to the growing imperative to address myriad forms of vulnerability, risk and ‘hidden’ harm, through work that is often less publicly visible and moves away from traditional preconceptions of ‘what the police do’.

As a result, aspects of the police service once considered ‘core’ have increasingly come within the scope of prioritisation decisions. For instance, while extra police resources have been put into dealing with unprecedented volumes of rape (ONS, 2019a) and domestic abuse reports (HMICFRS, 2019b), the trade-off has been that large volumes of ‘routine’ crimes have been ‘screened out’ or ‘written off’ with minimal investigation (Marsh and Greenfield, 2018; Dearden, 2019). Similarly, while models such as THRIVE³ have been developed to prioritise police responses to emergencies, long delays have been reported in responding to some important calls for service (HMICFRS, 2018a) and while prevention is increasingly framed in terms of multi-agency safeguarding, risk management and early intervention, visible patrol, proactive enforcement and local problem solving have been eroded (HMICFRS, 2017).

To the extent that they are discretionary, these decisions draw on a now well-established value paradigm framed around the primacy of *threat, risk, harm* and *vulnerability* (eg NPCC, 2017) – including and increasingly where this is ‘hidden’ or ‘latent’ (HMIC, 2016) – alongside more managerial concerns for *demand reduction*. Inevitably this has meant that, in broad terms, policing services to the ‘general public’ have been pared back, in order to focus on the (often) less visible and audible few, who are most in need, most at risk, most harmed or most vulnerable – and an overlapping group, considered most likely to generate future demand on services.

2 Interviewed in summer 2017 for a previous Police Foundation research project (see Higgins, 2018).

3 See: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/glossary/thrive/>

Unsurprisingly, the public have noticed the impact. In 2018/19 police visibility⁴ in England and Wales was at 16 per cent, down from a high of 39 per cent in 2010/11, victim satisfaction⁵ was at its lowest in a decade, and public confidence and ratings of local police were lower than at any point since comparable questions were first asked in 2011/12 (ONS, 2019b). But while the public are increasingly aware of what has been taken away it is less clear whether they understand the context, are aware of what is being done instead or – crucially – whether they *would* agree with these decisions if they knew more.

It has largely been taken on trust that the public *would* support the general turn in police priorities if they understood the context. This is the assumption embodied by HMCIC Winsor's assessment that the '*clamour for 'old style' policing*' results from a public blindness to the critical threats and risks that exist behind closed doors and online (HMICFRS 2019a), and that police leaders therefore need to better communicate the *reasons* behind their priority choices, so that *fair expectations* and public confidence can be restored (HMICFRS, 2018b.).

This leaves aside the more concerning possibility that even once communicated and understood, the reasons *in themselves* and the value-shifts that underpin them, may not be entirely in line with contemporary public thinking. This is a possibility that Dame Sara – in her conclusion that '*giving clarity to the public about core policing is a priority – and it has not received enough attention in recent years*' – appears prepared to contemplate, at least at the margins of the expanding set of '*deserving and desirable*' causes demanding police attention (NPCC, 2018).

It is to these questions of the public's expectations, priorities, understanding and values, with regard to modern policing, that this study seeks to add empirical insight.

1.2 WHY IT MATTERS: IDEOLOGY, PRAGMATISM AND DEMOCRACY

Whether it is rooted in a mismatch in understanding or values, the apparent gap between police and public priorities should be of concern for (at least) three reasons.

First, ideologically, the British policing model holds the relationship with the public at its core. The Peelian ideals that *the police are the public and that the public are the police*, and that police power is drawn from public cooperation, approval and consent, remain fundamental to the identity of the service (APCC and NPCC, 2016; Home Office, 2012). This does not, of course, mean that the police should slavishly adhere to popular demands in a simple, linear service-model; 'public value' is recognised as comprising both *what the public values* and *what adds value to the public sphere* (Bennington, 2011). It does mean however that the police must remain alert to indicators of potential misalignment and strive to maintain a nuanced and current understanding of the public's wishes, concerns, mood and expectations. More so than in other policing traditions, and perhaps also other areas of British public service, the police must constantly hold the public in their sight.

Second; more pragmatically, there is a substantial body of recent empirical and theoretical literature linking public *trust* in the police, and perceptions of police *legitimacy*, to a broad set of law-abiding and pro-social behaviours (eg Tyler and Jackson, 2013; Bradford and Jackson, 2011). This work has largely centred on the potential for *procedural justice* to underpin more effective and efficient, as well as morally preferable, crime control strategies. These theories draw on evidence from survey data modelling that links public perceptions of fair treatment by the police, to a sense of both 'moral alignment' and obligation to obey the police and the law. These attitudes, in turn, have been shown to predict self-reported compliance and law-abiding behaviour (Jackson et al 2012). This evidence gives weight to the powerful idea that when the police – as potent representatives of the social group – treat people fairly, decently and respectfully, they communicate a sense of 'shared values', group membership and '*being on the same side*' that in turn activates positive public actions towards that group.

We should also recognise the potential for these mechanisms to be activated in ways other than through direct interaction with police officers (Bradford and Jackson, 2011, p.6) and a plausible link can also be hypothesised between the police demonstrating *priorities* (through formal communication or action) that are aligned with the public's sense of '*what's most important*' to 'moral alignment', group identification and pro-social, law-abiding public attitudes and behaviours.

4 The proportion of people who say they see police patrolling at least once a week

5 The proportion of crime victims fairly or very satisfied with police actions. Not statistically significant.

In summary, we should take seriously the possibility that demonstrating publicly-aligned police priorities may lead, *in itself*, to less crime, reduced demand and greater public confidence.

Third, democratically, since 2012 formal mechanisms have been in place through which directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (or their equivalents) 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) including by setting objectives and priorities (following public consultation) in a Police and Crime Plan and holding chief constables to account for delivery. An emerging disconnect between public aspirations and police priorities would clearly run counter to the intentions of these democratic arrangements, and insights or new approaches that can help us understand why it has arisen and how it might be addressed – either at a local or national level – would surely be welcome.

1.3 POLICE PRIORITIES – A CONCEPT IN FLUX

The idea that the police should have ‘priorities’ has emerged and been in constant flux in recent decades, and continues to grow in complexity. Once connoting little more than attention to centrally set crime reduction targets, operational prioritisation at the police force and Command Unit level, was introduced as a key feature of the National Intelligence Model (NIM), (the general business process introduced throughout policing in the early 2000s). As part of this, periodic, data-led Strategic Assessments based on ‘PESTELMO’ criteria⁶ (or similar), were undertaken – often running alongside similar processes for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)/Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) – to identify a small set of crime types for focused attention within a Control Strategy (NCIS, 2000).

During the same period, the political imperative towards localism, growing concerns about antisocial behaviour, the influence of signal crime theory (Innes and Fielding, 2002) and the successful pilot of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (Tuffin et al, 2006) all combined to initiate new processes for (ultra)local, publicly-engaged, priority setting. Through these, ‘neighbourhood’ priorities, often focusing on ‘lower level’ ‘quality-of-life’ issues, were nominated by

residents for attention by newly formed Neighbourhood Policing Teams. The importance placed by government on responding to local public wishes and concerns was emphasised by the introduction of survey-based public confidence targets, first in combination with other metrics, and then as the single measure of police performance.

The legacy of these early-century innovations persists, with Strategic Assessments, Control Strategies, local ‘PACT’ meeting priorities and public confidence measures all remaining part of the policing landscape, (although patchily so). However, reforms introduced since 2010 have added new layers of conceptual complexity.

Most formally, with the confidence target scrapped, Police and Crime Commissioners were invested as the principal owners of the police-public relationship, with the aforementioned duty to reflect local conditions and aspirations in the objectives set in Police and Crime Plans. These priorities exist within a complex web of ‘*have regard to*’ relationships with other strategic processes at national, police force and CSP levels (Hales and Higgins, 2017). They have also been influenced in their scope, form and content by PCCs’ broader criminal justice remit, the rejection of the quantitative targets to which priorities were often previously tied (Curtis, 2015) and the growing imperative to address the cross-agency, ‘wicked’ problems implicated in driving crime and generating ‘non-crime’ police demand.

Perhaps most significantly however, *prioritisation* has taken over from *efficiency* as the principle frame for responding to austerity. Public acknowledgements that the police service simply cannot meet all the demands placed on it and that difficult ‘priority’ choices therefore need to be made, have become common utterances by police chiefs (Dearden, 2018, Dodd, 2015; Press Association, 2019), Inspectors of Constabulary (HMIC 2018b. p.17) and politicians – former Chancellor Phillip Hammond memorably reacting to a call for more funds to tackle knife crime with the analogy that “*If your house is on fire you stop painting it and start pouring water on the fire*” (Simpson and Ford, 2019). If responding to crisis now means choosing something to stop doing, it is all the more important that we understand where the public stand on what those things should be.

Police prioritisation then, is a complex, multi-dimensional and perhaps at times nebulous conceptual space; our survey of current public and professional

6 political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal, media and organisational.

commentary on the subject (see Section 2.3) identified material relating to: crime (of many kinds), terrorism, antisocial behaviour, efficiency and improvement, victim care, community engagement, cohesion and resilience, protecting the vulnerable, drivers and causes of crime, reducing reoffending, road safety, police ethics and complaint handling, partnership collaboration, emergency response, protecting human rights and staff welfare. It is clear that many things – and many *types* of thing – are spoken of as police priorities.

Within this conceptual range there is some breadth in how we might interpret and research the *'public's priorities for policing'*. On the one hand, we could think about public priorities in terms of the individual sets of (probably) locally focussed needs, desires and demands for police services that members of the public hold. We might ask people *what's important to you?* or, *what are the problems where you live?* and then assemble their individual shopping-lists to form a composite sense of the public 'ask'. This approach would fit best with a 'customer oriented' or 'citizen focused' (NPIA, 2008) take on public priorities for the police.

On the other hand, we might treat police prioritisation as a value-led public policy-making exercise and engage members of the public in bringing their own values, experiences and judgement to bear on what are, at least in part, moral questions about how public resources should be administered and exceptional powers deployed for the 'public good'. Here the question is not *what's important to you?* but *what's most important?* or *what should be done?*

With debate about how limited police resource should be 'prioritised', increasingly featuring in public discourse, we have consciously focused our enquiries towards this second interpretation – although we are also interested in how people's socially proscriptive 'policy' choices interconnect with their personal concerns and experiences of local crime and policing issues. We return to these themes in discussing the 'deliberative' elements that have influenced our research approach in Section 2.2.

1.4 A WORD ON THE *PUBLICS*

The Peelian tradition and the language of democracy predispose us to talk in terms of a singular *public*, when in reality there are many publics – or at least many facets to the public. Local accountability in itself implies the need to differentiate police priorities on a geographic basis, not just due to local differences in crime, but based on the differing needs, preferences and values of people in different places. Policing, by

its nature, operates in the places where interests are contested and values come into conflict, and we must constantly be alert to variation and difference. We know for instance, that there are differences in public attitudes and confidence in the police between people from different ethnic backgrounds (Gov.uk, 2018), and that preferences for 'modes' of policing differ according to gender, ethnicity and life-stage (Bradley, 1998). Avoiding populism and addressing the needs of a diverse and plural society, means that, in exploring the public's policing priorities, we must attend to variation as much as consensus.

1.5 RESEARCH AGENDA

These considerations can be distilled into a set of research questions, which this report sets out to address. Specifically:

- What do the public want and expect from the police in 2019 and beyond? What do they think the police should prioritise, and what trade-offs are they prepared to make?
- How and on what basis does this vary, including (but not exclusively) demographically and geographically?
- To what extent do the public understand the functions of, and demands on, modern policing? Do they understand and agree with current trends and directions in police priorities and practices?
- *Would* the public agree with and support these shifts in approach and activity if they knew and were engaged more?

In late 2018 the Police Foundation reached out to English and Welsh Police and Crime Commissioners to seek support for a programme of research to explore these questions. Seven, whose police force areas became our research sites (and who also benefited from bespoke local reporting), generously agreed to assist. They represented the police force areas of:

- Derbyshire
- Dorset
- Gwent
- Hertfordshire
- Humberside
- Northamptonshire
- Nottinghamshire

1.6 WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T

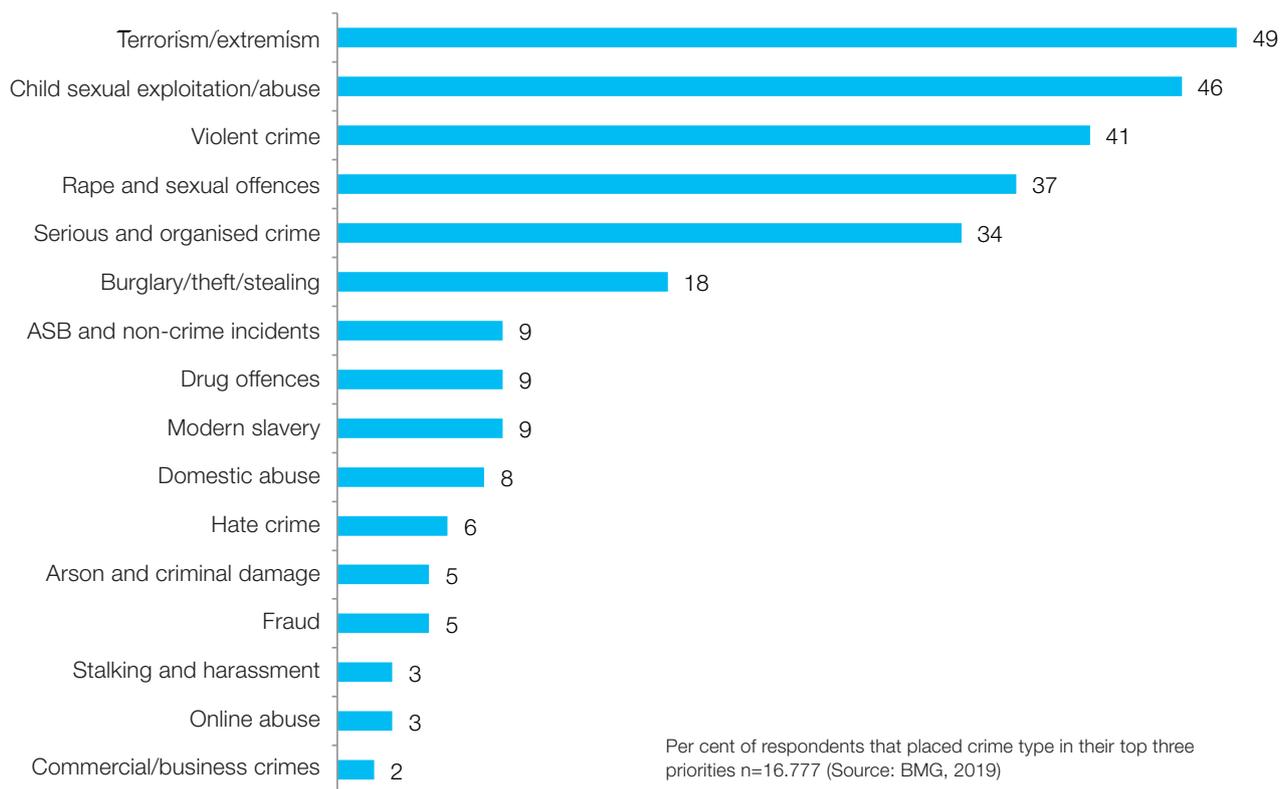
Of course, we do not approach these questions afresh. A number of public opinion surveys have asked the public which crimes, issues and demands they think the police should prioritise (Greenhalgh and Gibbs, 2014, Hadjipavlou et al, 2018, Ipsos MORI, 2016, 2017, 2018). The most comprehensive, recent and robust of these, commissioned by HMICFRS (BMG Research, 2019) and undertaken in mid-2018, asked a representative sample of almost 17,000 English and

Welsh respondents to determine the relative priority of 15 areas the police might focus on at the national level. Reproduced in Figure 1, the findings show a clear public orientation towards emergency response policing, dealing with crime and terrorism and, to a lesser extent, tackling gangs, child-protection and finding missing people. Perhaps surprisingly, less emphasis is given to uniformed patrol or community engagement. When crime in particular is considered (Figure 2) respondents emphasised terrorism, child abuse, sexual offending and organised crime as areas for priority attention.

FIGURE 1: Areas that HMICFRS/BMG survey respondents feel police should prioritise



FIGURE 2: Types of crime HMICFRS/BMG survey respondents feel police should prioritise



Although they provide a starting point and a robust basis for generalisation, opinion surveys such as these offer only partial insights, for three reasons.

First, while they may tell us something about the ‘top-line’ of the public’s policing priorities they offer little insight into *why* people identify these areas for primary attention, or into the values, beliefs, experiences and preconceptions that underpin their views. They do not tell us what factors influence people when they make priority choices or how they go about deciding what should be prioritised. Our purposes require a more exploratory approach and our methodology is therefore largely qualitative.

Second, even when (as in the example cited here) surveys employ more sophisticated methodologies,⁷ they generally only capture *instinctive* responses or ‘top of mind’ answers – they do not provide respondents with the time or resources to think through what can be complex value-led decisions on matters they may not have previously considered in detail. Our ambition has been to go beyond ‘gut reactions’ by introducing ‘deliberatively informed’ elements to our research (which are described in Section 2.2).

Finally, quantitative opinion surveys tend to impose particular conventions on the aggregation and disaggregation of respondents’ reported opinions. Generally, polls tend to focus attention on the majority view, or the average or ‘aggregate’ position – where the sample group came out ‘overall’ on an issue. Under such conditions the divergent minority can easily get overlooked. At the same time, surveys also tend to ‘disaggregate’ individuals’ ‘whole’ perspectives. Their views on one issue (the importance of foot patrol for example) tend to be treated separately and in isolation from their other opinions (on antisocial behaviour, terrorism or violent crime for instance) – and in doing so we risk overlooking the rich, internally meaningful viewpoints from which these fragments of opinion are detached and collated with others. With an interest in hearing and understanding different and distinct views, rather than just the agglomerated wisdom of the mass, and in retaining a sense of the ‘holistic’ perspectives which give rise to these, we have made use of a process known as Q Methodology, which is also described in detail in the method section (2.3).

⁷ In the example shown in Figure 1 the researchers used a Max Differential model. Respondents were presented with the options in several small sets and asked to identify the highest and lowest priority in each. Their answers were used to generate a probability model of the likely priority each item would be given relative to others.

2. METHOD

2.1 FIELDWORK FORMAT

Fieldwork consisted of 28 focus groups conducted in the police force areas overseen by the seven Police and Crime Commissioners who supported the project, (four groups in each of Derbyshire, Dorset, Gwent, Hertfordshire, Humberside, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire police areas).

In each area, the groups were split between two contrasting 'high' and 'low' demand localities (selected in consultation with PCCs' offices).⁸ Each focus group had a target composition of eight to ten local adults who had been resident in the session's catchment area (defined at the Local Authority area level, but generally with more participants living close to the session venue), for at least the last two years. Target attendance was achieved in 26 out of the 28 groups, with the other two containing six participants each. In total, 259 people participated in the research.

Each set of force-area groups was additionally structured according to age group/life-stage, with the different permutations of high/low-demand locations and age-groups/life-stages rotated across the seven police force areas. Groups were recruited to contain an approximately equal number of men and women (although, it proved more difficult to recruit men, resulting in an overall three to two sample bias toward women), and to be broadly representative of catchment areas in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic background. All participants were registered to vote and a small set of occupational exclusions (including current and former police employees and their close families) were applied. The overall research structure and participant numbers are summarised in Table 1.

Fieldwork took place between late January and late April 2019. Each session lasted 90 minutes and all participants received a cash incentive to cover expenses and in return for their time. Recruitment

TABLE 1: Research programme structure and participant numbers

Police force	Catchment area		Participants (women, men)				Police force area total
	High demand	Venue location	Age/life-stage group			Retired (60+)	
	Low demand		18-30	31-45	46-65		
Derbyshire	Erewash	Sandiacre	10 (5,5)	-	9 (4,5)	-	36 (20,16)
	High Peak	Buxton	-	8 (6,2)	-	10 (7,3)	
Dorset	'Conurbation'	Bournemouth	-	10 (7,3)	-	10 (5,5)	35 (22,13)
	'County'	Blandford For.	6 (4,2)	-	9 (6,3)	-	
Gwent	Newport	Newport	-	9 (6,3)	-	9 (6,3)	36 (25,11)
	Monmouthshire	Chepstow	9 (6,3)	-	9 (7,2)	-	
Hertfordshire	Stevenage	Stevenage	9 (5,4)	-	-	-	39 (22,17)
	Watford	Watford	-	-	-	10 (5,5)	
	North Herts.	Stevenage	-	-	10 (5,5)	-	
	Three Rivers	Watford	-	10 (7,3)	-	-	
Humberside	N. E. Lincs.	Grimsby	10 (7,3)	-	10 (6,4)	-	36 (20,16)
	East Riding	Beverley	-	6 (3,3)	-	10 (4,6)	
Northamptonshire	Northampton	Northampton	9 (6,3)	-	10 (4,6)	-	38 (24,14)
	South Northants.	Towcester	-	9 (7,2)	-	10 (7,3)	
Nottinghamshire	Nottingham	Nottingham	-	10 (6,4)	-	9 (4,5)	38 (22,16)
	Newark & Sher.	Newark	9 (5,4)	-	10 (7,3)	-	
Total			62 (37,25)	62 (40,22)	67 (39,28)	68 (40,28)	259 (156,103)

8 In Hertfordshire, at the request of the PCC, groups were drawn from four different Local Authority areas; two with 'high' and two with 'low' demand profiles.

was carried out by a commercial fieldwork recruitment agency in accordance with the standards and regulations of the Market Research Society.

Respondents were not informed of the research topic in advance of the session, being told only that it related to public services in their area. This prevented respondents self-selecting either in or out of the research based on their interest in, or views about, policing. The nature of the subject matter was fully explained at the beginning of each group and informed consent was obtained from each respondent in writing.

Group discussions were moderated by the lead researcher/report author according to a semi-structured discussion guide (see Appendix 1), following the structure set out in Figure 5. Discussions were audio-recorded for analysis, with the outcomes of exercises recorded as photographs. Direct quotations from respondents are included throughout the report to illustrate findings and are labelled according to police force, catchment area and age group/life-stage.

2.2 A 'DELIBERATIVE' APPROACH

As well as investigating *existing* public views and opinions, the focus group sessions set out to explore how participants' perspectives and judgements *changed and developed* in the light of new contextual information about modern policing, and when given the opportunity to consider and discuss police priorities with their peers – an issue many may not previously have given explicit attention.

This approach was informed by 'deliberative' practices which seek to: '*produce a representation of what the public **would** think under good conditions for thinking about it*' (Fishkin cited in Burchardt, 2012 emphasis added). In the context of democratic policy-making, deliberative processes, such as Citizens' Juries (forums in which a 'representative' sample of the public consider policy questions together and in depth, reflecting on a balanced set of evidence and cross-examining expert witnesses (Maer, 2007)), have been advocated as a powerful means of enhancing representative democracy, both by sharpening the public mandate on particular issues and providing an additional form of legitimacy, analogous to that conferred by a jury in a court of law (Taylor, 2018a, 2018b). As a research tool, deliberative exercises can provide new insights by revealing the public's *considered* opinions and

judgements on complex issues, as an aid to value-based policy-making (Burchardt, 2012)⁹.

Although the constraints of the fieldwork format precluded the multi-day exercises and 'expert witnesses' sometimes used in deliberative citizenship exercises, the methodology sought to include a 'deliberatively inspired' component that gave participants an opportunity to develop their initial, 'instinctive' responses, by providing them with new information and an opportunity to process it in a group setting.

To do this, once initial views had been captured and explored (including through the Q-sorting exercise described next), participants were introduced to a set of contextual information highlighting some of the key challenges confronting modern policing. This stimulus material was presented as a series of nine boards/slides (see Appendix 2), broadly based on the analysis of police demand in the 'typical' (median) police force, produced by the College of Policing in 2015. This information was substantially updated and supplemented, to include illustrative, up-to-date data on police resourcing, incoming demand, trends in crime and police investigations, 'non-crime' policing issues (such as mental health-related demand), and the range of 'ongoing' police activities (including safeguarding, proactive investigation and neighbourhood policing). Where time permitted, key points were also illustrated using a series of short excerpts from the BBC Panorama documentary '*Police under pressure*' (originally aired in May 2018).

Participants were encouraging to respond to, discuss and debate the implications of this information and were then asked to take part in a joint decision making exercise, which involved allocating limited resources among a set of competing police functions.

At the end of the sessions, the extent and nature of any *change* in views was assessed and explored (described in more detail below).

2.3 Q METHODOLOGY

At the beginning of each session (after only introductory discussion, and before any new information was introduced), respondents' individual views on police prioritisation were captured and investigated using a process known as Q Methodology (henceforth 'Q') (Stephenson, 1935; Watts and Stenner, 2012; McKeown and Thomas, 2013)¹⁰.

9 The democratic, as opposed to research methodological value of deliberation is discussed in more detail in Section 10.

10 See also <https://qmethod.org/>

First proposed by William Stephenson in 1935, Q is a rigorous, quantitative technique for examining human subjectivity. It requires participants to produce a 'self-referent' model of their viewpoint on an issue by completing a ranked sorting exercise. This involves arranging a set of items (usually a selection of statements presented on cards – known as the 'Q set'), into a pre-specified grid formation, based on a given criteria (eg strength of agreement, perceived importance etc). The layout of the grid, (typically presented in the shape of an inverted 'normal' distribution), forces participants to assign only a small number of items to the most extreme (high and low) ranks, with a greater number in the middle part of the distribution, denoting average importance/neutral agreement.

Once completed, the relative positions assigned to each item by a (typically fairly small) cohort of respondents (known as the 'P set') are translated into numerical scores and subjected to statistical analysis (specifically, inter-correlation and 'by person' factor analysis).

The output is a set of 'factors' which represent any distinctive *common* or *shared* viewpoints identified as being present within the P set. The factors revealed by Q are best conceptualised as 'abstract' points of view that manifest in different combinations and concentrations (both positively and negatively) within individual participants. Respondents whose Q sorts strongly approximate (or significantly 'load onto') specific factors/viewpoints can be identified, and their (weighted) Q sorts used to generate 'factor arrays'. These are idealised item rankings that illustrate the perspective associated with that factor. The demographic and other information (e.g. qualitative comments) of those respondents that significantly (and uniquely) approximate each factor can also be used to inform an interpretation of the perspective reflected by the array.

Q has been used across numerous research contexts where the emphasis is on identifying the *existence and nature* of different viewpoints within a specified group, rather than on estimating the *prevalence* of opinions across a wider population. In relation to policing, it has been used (for example) to explore the views of adolescent boys from different ethnic backgrounds towards the police (Waddington and Braddock, 1991), officers' attitudes towards promotion (Gaines et al, 1984), international differences and similarities in police culture (Bayerl et al, 2019) and views about police priorities among police officers, partner practitioners and members of the public (Vo et al, 2017).

In the current study, Q has been used to examine whether different and distinctive shared viewpoints about police priorities could be identified within the local 'dip samples' of the public that took part in our focus groups; first at the local, and then at the national level. Our methodology builds on Vo et al's conclusion that Q constitutes a useful tool for investigating views on police priorities, but differs, in particular, in the more moral/directive framing of the instruction put to participants; what *should* the police prioritise, rather than what is most important to them personally – and in its combination with other forms of exploratory investigation.

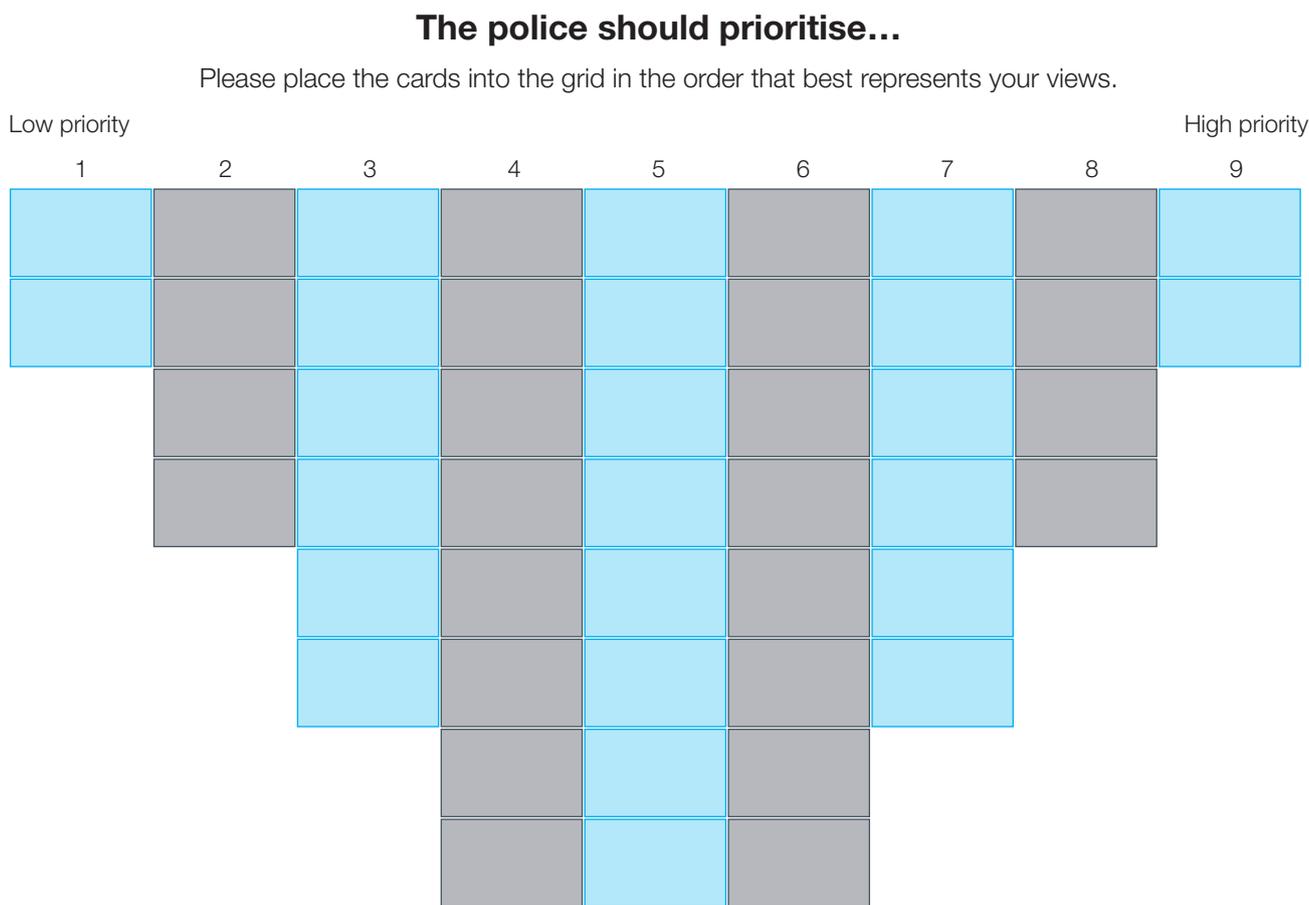
Procedure

At the beginning of each focus group, each participant was asked to complete a Q sort exercise by arranging a set of cards into a graduated nine-column grid (see Figure 3). The Q set consisted of 48 phrases, each a different ending to the statement "*The police should prioritise...*" (which was written at the top of the grid). Columns were numbered from '1 (low priority)' on the left of the grid to '9 (high priority)' on the right. Respondents were asked to examine the cards and arrange them into the grid in the order that best represented their views about the *relative* priority each item should be assigned by the police.

Participants completed the sorting task separately and simultaneously (ie each had their own Q board and card set). Once complete, a photographic record was made of each sort, with a referencing system allowing each Q sort to be linked to the demographic information and qualitative comments of the participant who completed it. Based on piloting, respondents were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the exercise, with almost all able to do so comfortably within the allotted time.

At the end of each group, once participants had considered and discussed the new information presented on the cards/slides and video clips, and completed the resource allocation exercise, they were given a further five minutes (approximately), to make additional alterations to their board (if they wished), to reflect any *change* in views that had occurred during the session. These end positions were also recorded for analysis with a second referenced photograph.

FIGURE 3: The police prioritisation ‘Q-board’ used in the study



Developing the Q-set

Q uses the theoretical concept of the ‘concourse’; the full range and breadth of views, statements and utterances relating to the issue under examination (Watts and Stenner, 2012 (p.31-34), McKeown and Thomas, 2013 (ch. 2)). Any Q set of statements will necessarily be a partial and incomplete reduction of the concourse, and constructing a Q set has been described as ‘*more an art than a science*’ (Brown cited in Watts and Stenner, 2012 (p.58)); however it is important that the items selected are ‘representative’ of the semantic range of the concourse, and provide thorough and even coverage of its scope and subject matter. Q sets should therefore be grounded in a comprehensive survey of the existing material (or theory) relating to the issue in question, and constructed in a methodical way.

In assembling a Q set to represent the full range of contemporary discussion and opinion about police priorities, content was drawn from a wide-ranging survey of a material, including:

- National strategic policing documentation and reports (such as the Strategic Policing Requirement and Policing Vision 2025).

- Police and Crime Plans (including ‘headline’ priorities from all English and Welsh Plans (compiled in *Revolving Doors*, 2017) and detailed analysis of Plans from five of the participating forces.
- Relevant articles from a selection of local and national news sources, published online during 2018.
- Items included in several published public opinion surveys relating to police prioritisation.
- A sample of local ‘neighbourhood’ level police priorities relating to the participating forces and a random sample of those from other locations (sourced via the www.police.uk portal).
- Responses to an open invitation, made via the Police Foundation’s social media channels, for public views about ‘*what it is most important that the police focus on*’.

A total of 1,015 statements relating to police priorities were extracted from these sources and subjected to thematic coding using a two-tier iterative coding framework (statements assigned to multiple codes were duplicated, giving a total of 1,171 coded items).

Q set statements were then developed to cover a selection of the 20 codes and 90 sub-codes, chosen according to a set of criteria including:

- Breadth and spread of coverage.
- Prevalence within the surveyed source material (ie number of coded items – although it is acknowledged that these totals are, to an extent, the product of arbitrary choices, such as the number of sources of each type to include within the survey).
- Likely relevance to the public (for example, relatively few ‘managerial’ items were included as it was considered this area would have limited public resonance).
- Relevance to prominent debates and areas of contention and potential to indicate individuals’ perspectives and values.

Where possible, the wording of Q items was drawn from (or reflective of) the surveyed source material (most often as a composite of two or more sources) and was edited and refined for brevity, clarity, appropriate breadth and grammatical form. The full set of Q sort statements used in the study is shown (in randomised order) in Figure 4. The category codes and sub-codes applied and the prevalence of each code within the surveyed material is included in Appendix 4.

Analysis stage 1: Police force area Q analysis

Data analysis was initially conducted on an area-by-area basis. The photographic records of all usable (opening) Q sorts, completed by participants in the four sessions in each force-area, were collated, and the position allocated to each item by each participant, manually entered into an Excel datasheet, (as a score between 1 and 9).

This data was used to produce simple descriptive summaries (such as mean ranking scores for each item) and subjected to the correlation and factor

analytic techniques characteristic of Q, using the Ken-Q application.¹¹ Further methodological details for each set of analysis are provided in Appendix 6.

This resulted in seven separate sets of factors and factor arrays being generated, to describe the common viewpoints identified within each force-area participant group. Five factors/viewpoints were identified in two force-area participant sets; four were identified in four area P sets and, for the seventh set, a single-factor solution was identified as the best statistical explanation.

Analysis stage 2: Second-order factor analysis

To examine whether any statistically robust cross-area similarities or differences could be identified between any of the local factors/viewpoints, a second-order factor analysis was then conducted.

Q Methodology tends not to embrace large participant groups (Watts and Stenner, 2012 (p.71-73)) however, the outputs of multiple studies that use the same Q set and sorting instructions, can be brought together by treating the factor arrays generated in the initial studies as Q sorts in a second study (Watts and Stenner, 2012 (p. 54), for examples see Van Damme et al, 2017, Wong et al, 2004).

The 27 factor arrays generated during the seven (first stage) force area analyses were collated and entered into a secondary factor analysis. Further methodological details are provided in Appendix 7.

Assessing change in views

Photographic records of any adjustments made by participants to their Q sorts at the end of each session were manually entered into Excel datasheets and compared against their original sorts to assess the extent and nature of any change in views. The way participants’ views changed and developed was also explored qualitatively.

11 Available at <https://shawnbanasick.github.io/ken-q-analysis/>

FIGURE 4: Q sort items

The police should prioritise...

1.	Identifying and tackling modern slavery and people trafficking
2.	Reducing alcohol-related crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour
3.	Improving efficiency by using technology and collaborating with other organisations
4.	Investigating crimes that cause serious physical and emotional harm like rape and serious assaults
5.	Targeting those who commit online frauds and scams
6.	Dealing with people who sell or use drugs in public places
7.	Encouraging crime reporting, especially where victims lack confidence to come forward
8.	Providing reassurance and making sure people feel safe
9.	Preventing residential burglary
10.	Tackling knife crime and serious violence
11.	Ensuring offenders face consequences for their actions
12.	Dealing with people in mental health crisis whose behaviour is causing concern
13.	Reducing the incidence, risk and impact of domestic abuse
14.	Reducing repeat victimisation
15.	Working with communities and involving the public in policing and community safety
16.	Promoting road safety by addressing speeding and dangerous driving
17.	Treating people fairly, including when using police powers like stop and search
18.	Protecting those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to crime, harm or abuse
19.	Diverting young people who commit minor crimes into support services rather than formal prosecutions
20.	Supporting people who experience traumatic crimes to cope and recover
21.	Reducing the harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse
22.	Investigating reports of sexual abuse where the alleged offender has died
23.	Tackling aggressive begging
24.	Dealing with rural crimes (e.g. poaching, wildlife persecution and thefts from rural properties)
25.	Reducing shoplifting
26.	Ensuring ethical standards are upheld and complaints against the police are handled properly
27.	Investigating organised crime such as drugs and gun smuggling and organised exploitation
28.	Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations
29.	Preventing and responding to hate crime
30.	Tackling thefts of and from vehicles
31.	Responding to environmental crimes such as fly-tipping
32.	Providing a visible police presence on the streets
33.	Putting crime victims first
34.	Responding quickly to public calls for urgent assistance
35.	Tackling sexual violence, abuse and rape
36.	Offering 'restorative justice' (contact between victims and offenders to seek resolution and repair harm)
37.	Engaging and listening to communities to build trust and understand people's concerns
38.	Reducing re-offending by managing and rehabilitating offenders
39.	Looking after the welfare and wellbeing of police officers and staff
40.	Dealing with illegal parking
41.	Keeping people in police custody safe and recognising those with particular needs
42.	Building strong, resilient and cohesive communities
43.	Keeping children and young people safe
44.	Protecting the public from terrorism and preventing radicalisation
45.	Dealing with nuisance motorbikes, mopeds and off-road bikes
46.	Dealing with online abuse and bullying
47.	Solving more property crimes like burglary and vehicle theft
48.	Finding missing people who might be at risk

FIGURE 5: Focus group format

1 Moderator introduction:

Welcome, purpose, coverage and format of session, informed consent, housekeeping.

2. Participant introductions:

Including brief discussion of 'what's great' and 'what's not' about living in their area.

3. Initial Q-sort exercise:

Instructions given and individual Q sort completed (see section 2.3).

4. Police priorities discussion:

Reflecting on Q sort exercise, the issues given high and low priority and the reasons behind choices.

5. Local module:

Exploring relevant local issues (as specified/agreed with PCCs' offices – not covered in this report).

6. Introduce information:

Presentation and discussion of contextual information boards/slides and video clips (see section 2.1 and Appendix 2). Discussion of operational prioritisation.

7. Resource allocation group exercise:

Participants asked to decide collectively how they should allocate limited resources between five broad areas of policing (see Appendix 3).

8. Final Q sorts:

Respondents asked to consider whether they wished to make any adjustments to their Q board, based on the information provided, exercises completed and discussions within the group.

9. Final reflections:

If and how views have changed during the session and what had been learned.

(See Appendix 1 for full discussion guide)

3. MOOD MUSIC: PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

Focus groups began with a short introductory discussion about the positive and negative aspects of life in each area. There were many local nuances, but also considerable consistency. Across locations people value good neighbours and strong communities, local amenities, access to nature and ‘peace and quiet’. On the other hand, as well as grumbles about traffic and poor transport links, respondents gave voice to a recurring set of concerns about local ‘deterioration’, often linked to the visible condition of town-centres and other public spaces, but also to the behaviour that occurred in those spaces and the implied general and specific risks to personal safety associated with it.

Across many (but not all) locations, respondents mentioned empty shops, civic disrepair, street homelessness and visible drug and alcohol misuse as signs of a local ‘turn for the worse’, and saw these changes as indicators of an increased threat to their safety. The quotations below, and throughout this section, are drawn from these opening comments and later exchanges on similar themes.

“You just see people dealing drugs and smoking, you just see it all, you see people fighting, it’s just disgusting. You go through town and there’s barely any shops, people begging, they’ve got no shoes and socks on. It’s just not a nice place to be anymore, not at all.” (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

“I went to town Wednesday after work...I parked my car...and I wanted to walk through the market place. I chose to walk all the way around because I felt intimidated by some louts drinking with a dog. If I can’t walk through at half past four in the evening it’s a bad thing.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

“[There is an] undercurrent of crime, drug taking, things that happen in the park. I just feel that it is constantly bubbling.” (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 46-65)

“You can’t come into the town...because there’s gangs standing on the street drinking and doing whatever... come and look up my street there’s drug dealers on the corner, the bins are all out, there’s rubbish on the road, they’ve got little yellow notices on them saying ‘environmental

crime’ but it doesn’t solve the problem does it?” (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

“There’s a lot of drinkers, but also, in the day, there’s a lot of probably drug-induced or alcoholic people around and I wouldn’t feel particularly safe...In a sea-front environment, it’s the heart of the resort, it stands out like a sore thumb.” (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 18-30)

For some, the perceived increase in public place drug use was a particular indicator of societal decline.

“The more it [smoking cannabis in public] happens, the more normal it becomes, and that’s what’s wrong, because from that being normal, other things follow.” (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

In other places the sense of local threat was linked to antisocial behaviour by groups of young people.

“I think the kids at the minute have control...I won’t walk down the street after its dark because I’m scared of a 13 year old! It’s ridiculous, but that’s just the way it is.” (Humberside, East Riding, 31-45)

In addition, a small minority made the (always very carefully worded) suggestion that declining behavioural standards were linked to particular immigrant/ minority groups. All of which amounted to a pervasive impression that danger and violence were closer than they used to be, fuelled, to some extent, by a background national media narrative around knife crime.

“As an innocent bystander, the days of going over and getting involved and trying to help somebody, for me, are a little bit over...I just think ‘you could have a knife, you could be crazy’, and I think drugs are more prevalent now...so you don’t know whether someone’s crazed and off their head on whatever.” (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

“Before it always used to be far away in London... now it’s like people in Watford, in [my local village]...people that you know are really getting affected by these things...10 years ago it used to

be far, far away and now it's someone I went to school with." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"We had a very worrying incident last week in the park, where there were some knives, and I don't want to stop my children from going out, but it is worrying for me. It terrified me actually ...to think that she was out there." (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

For many, the emotional and instinctive response to this sense of eroding security was to call for a greater public policing presence, based on an enduring, implicit belief in the power of visible deterrence and 'control' of the streets. The perceived lack of this, and the belief that there used to be more, generated a widespread public sense of a policing 'absence'.

"If you go down my road a little bit it starts getting a bit ropey, and it just never used to be like that. Kids will be kids and they're always messing about, but it wasn't like drugs and – someone was stabbed at the bottom of the road, like what the hell! That's not what I'm used to and I think that there would be less [crime] if there was a higher police presence." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

"Where I live we get a lot of issues with kids on stolen mopeds, people delivering drugs...it's a known area but you never see a local bobby, never see somebody on the beat like you used to, just putting people off as a deterrent more than anything, they are always having to react to something that has already happened." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

"I think there should be more of a presence; I just think they do so much when they are out and about, even if they are doing nothing, to put that in your mind; that creates a picture of so much more." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

"And the bobbies on the beat now, there's never going to be that again is there? ...they always have to cut back on things where it's the ordinary people that are getting it in the neck. ...what they can do I don't know, but they make me feel better!" (Hertfordshire, Watford, 60+ retired)

"My 14 year old could probably name 20 people who carry knives. Do the police do stop and search? Do you ever see police? Y'know, it's a big thing and I think young people think they are untouchable now." (Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

As a caveat, it is worth noting that the perception of a general shift in societal attitudes to authority, particularly among young people, (as expressed in this last quotation and those below), was encountered across locations and life-stages, and was sometimes developed into a counter-argument to the call for greater police presence. If police officers and other authority figures were no longer respected or 'feared', then – it was repeatedly suggested – the deterrent presence of visible police might no longer be an effective preventative mechanism.

"You go back to the days when people used to be quite scared of the police, I don't necessarily think that's the case anymore, I think people still take some comfort from the fact police are visible... I still panic when there's one driving behind me... but I can imagine that there's a lot of people in this town who just have zero respect...that might be because they've grown up and they [police] aren't on the streets." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 18-30)

"See, I don't think the visible presence does anything at all. People have no respect for the police whatsoever, they couldn't care less. I've watched people...light up a joint in front of a policeman as they're walking past...I don't think that works nowadays, because there is so little respect for the police force". (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

This fitted into a broader recurring narrative about less social deference and diminished respect for authority, linked, by some, to modern parenting approaches, lack of discipline and the advent of the children's rights agenda.

"I think, a lot of the problems that the police have got, it literally is a case of the parents of kids need to wise-up and they need to sort their kids out, it's not the police's responsibility to discipline these kids...leave the kids be, go and arrest the parents and fine all of them." (Humberside, East Riding, 31-45)

"In my opinion it's our generation that have got it wrong; too lenient...if we'd instilled more into them about the consequences and been stricter. If we'd have disciplined them more in the home, it would follow through." (Dorset, 'county', 46-65)

"I blame Esther Rantzen; it went too far with Childline and everything. It's gone too far their way. Nobody dare do anything or say anything." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

Public security anxieties and concerns about societal breakdown and disrespectful youths are, of course, not new; nor are calls for a greater police presence. However, the contemporary set of public concerns does appear to be additionally characterised by widespread feelings of police ‘withdrawal’ and the perception of a diminished protective buffer.

Across multiple dimensions, study respondents reported experiencing a reduced service from the police, in contrast to what they once got. This applies not just to visibility and presence in public space, but also:

Responses to calls for service;

“I was living next to a neighbour for two years and she used to scream abuse at us...It was parties; it was drugs, smashing my garden up... She terrorised me and a couple of other neighbours. Multiple times we have phoned the police because she is...screaming and shouting, threatening everybody and never once, over two years have the police come out... y’know, it wasn’t life threatening but it would have been nice, if somebody had come out and said, y’know, ‘we’re here’.” (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

“And you ring them [the police] and you say ‘they’re there now, they’re dealing [drugs], you can see them’. Three hours later you’re still waiting for them to come out.” (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

Crime investigation;

“They’re quite lazy, there’s quite a few builders who have had their vans broken into and all their kit robbed and, without video evidence or catching the bloke red-handed, they don’t care. They’ve actually told my mate who’s had it done, the [name of the] actual bloke who’s doing it – so, ‘sort it out yourselves’, sort of thing, ‘because we can’t prove it’.” (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

“The police just weren’t interested, so you’re best to try to solve it through Facebook.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

“Nothing’s being done about it... this is just my belief, that there’s a certain level of crime which is just ‘oh well’, it’s kind of acceptable.” (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

Victim service;

“I remember when I was younger, I was absolutely gutted because I had my favourite video stolen out of the video player, and when we got back I remember the police doing finger-printing, like, really taking the time to make you feel like the police were really doing a good job. And now...it’s literally just crime reference number for insurance, because they can’t do any more than that.” (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

And police station provision and local focus;

“It’s like they are withdrawing from the town, bit by bit... I get the feeling that they would rather not be in that messy day to day crime that we experience, they’d much rather be dealing with the gun trade or the sex trade...they’d rather be doing that.” (Hertfordshire, Watford, 60+ retired)

This amounted, overall, to a lack of certainty about the current ‘settlement’, in terms of what could be expected, and, sometimes, to a heightened imperative to self-reliance – manifesting both positively and occasionally in more problematic ways.

“The impression is a lot of these things just go into a black hole and you get a crime number and a leaflet to say there’s your victim support ...It feeds into the not seeing anyone around, police stations being closed, it’s just that sense of ‘I don’t really know what response I’m going to get if I have to call, is it worth me doing it, is there any point?’.” (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 31-45)

“We’ve now got our own Neighbourhood Watch and because of that, crime is down in our area, we don’t have the drunks coming through because people will come out at night and tell them off. Not just one, you’ll have four or five people coming out backing everybody up”. (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

“I’m at the situation where I’m self-protecting my house unfortunately...I’ll go to prison, if anybody breaks into my house, that’s it...And a lot of people of my age think the same.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

Frustrations at the apparent lack of police efficacy were exacerbated, for some, by a perceived lack of support from other parts of the criminal justice system.

"What I feel sorry [for] about the police is, when they do an investigation, all the paperwork that takes them forever and a day, and then it goes to court and they say 'don't worry about it love'. That must be soul-destroying, when you've done all that." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

"We just see so many prolific offenders and I know it's not the police's fault because obviously they are not getting sentenced long enough." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

Across locations, there was widespread public understanding of the resourcing factors that underlay these shifts in provision, as well as considerable (although not quite unanimous) support for the police, and sympathy with the unenviable position police leaders found themselves in (both of which tended to intensify throughout the discussions as the challenges became better understood). There was also, on occasions, considerable frustration, even anger apparent, at the political conditions it was widely believed had given rise to the current situation.

"The police are under extreme pressure, quite wrongly, but you can't do anything to make them do twice as much work in any one day." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 60+ retired)

"They are underfunded massively, just how the country is in general, everything is underfunded." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"It's very worrying, we need more money [for policing] don't we, because it's important. Why is there a [funding] reduction?...its crackers isn't it?" (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

"It is down to the priorities of government, they think it is OK to underfund the police and then complain that crime's going up. Their priorities are all wrong; mental health they've underfunded it, and now we've got these massive problems that the police are having to deal with that – and they've been underfunded...it is the government, the buck stops with them." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 46-65)

These reflections and illustrations of the public 'mood' provide the context for the exploration of public policing priorities, set out in the following sections. As we shall see, these concerns and impressions clearly impact in people's priority choices, but only as part of a more complex set of preconceived ideas and value judgements.

KEY FINDING: A recurring impression of local 'deterioration' and the recent national narrative around knife crime have heightening public security anxieties, fuelling instinctive calls for a greater deterrent police presence. This is set in stark contrast to the typical experience of police withdrawal from public space and service reduction across other aspects of public-facing policing. There is a general public recognition of the funding conditions underlying these deficits and considerable sympathy with the police predicament.

4. THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES FOR POLICING

4.1 AGGREGATION

As described in the method section, after introductions and initial thoughts on the best and worst aspects of local life, each participant was asked to complete a Q sort exercise to represent their views on what “*The police should prioritise...*”. Across the 28 groups, 253 out of 259 participants produced usable Q sorts.

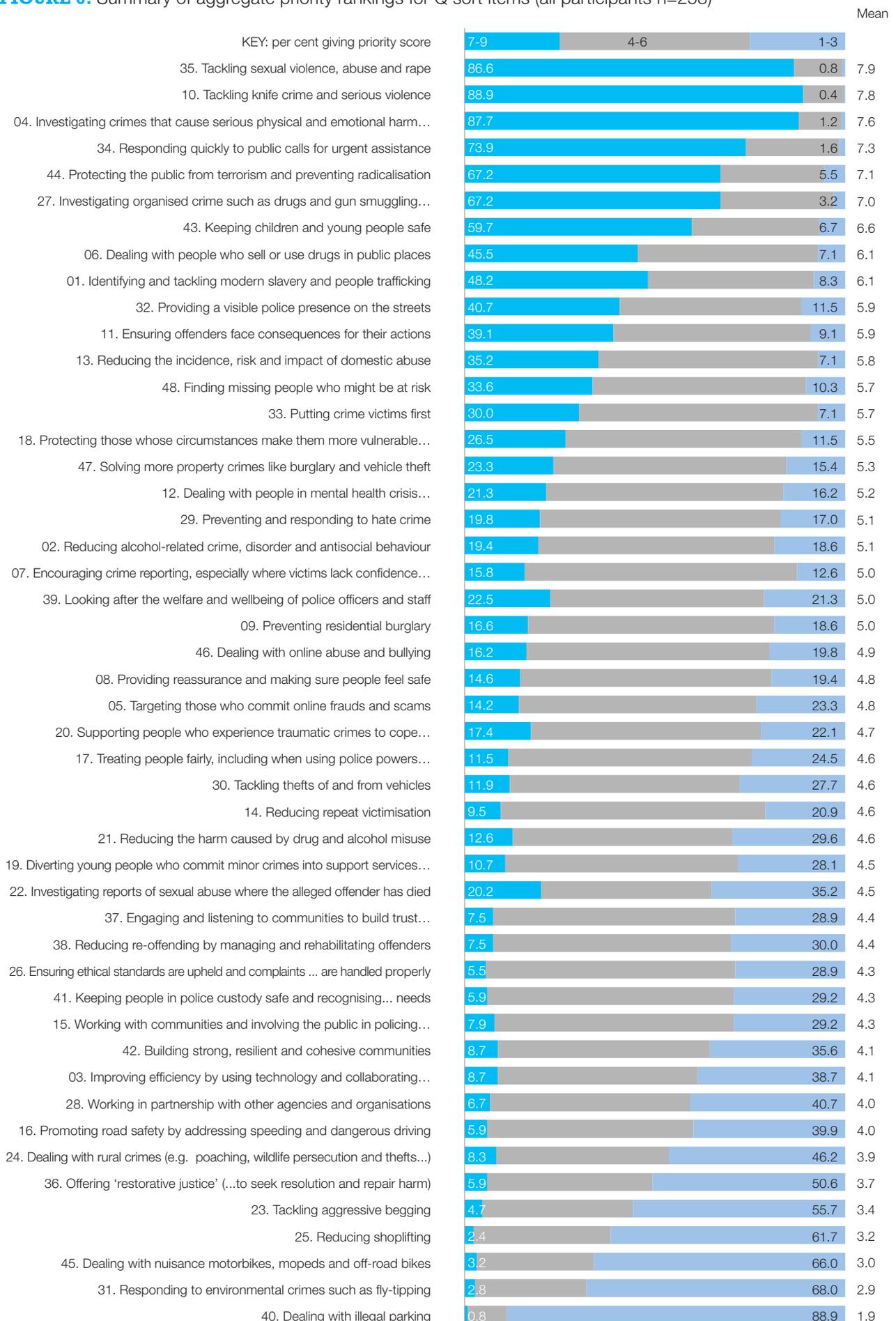
Q Methodology, with its small participant sets, non-random sampling and unique data collection tools, is not designed for aggregation; it is a technique for identifying and describing differing viewpoints rather than summarising and generalising – and we will come to this in Section 5. That being said, in this case, given the quantity of data collected it is instructive to inspect it first in summary form (as simple mean priority-ranking scores and proportions of participants), and in this section we present these ‘aggregated’ findings.

Although we must be careful of drawing conclusions about the wider ‘public’ from this relatively small and geographically patchy participant set, when viewed in summary form, our respondents’ sorting choices indicate a clear and generally consistent consensus on what the police should prioritise. This is illustrated in Figure 6 (and Appendix Table 5a), with key points summarised below.

1. Tackling serious and sexual violence (35: 7.9 and 10: 7.8¹²) and investigating these when they occur (04: 7.6) are viewed as top priorities for the police; almost nine in 10 respondents placed these three items within the top quarter of their Q board (i.e. gave each a priority score of seven, eight or nine out of nine).
2. There is a strong consensus that responding to public calls for emergency assistance (34: 7.3) is among the highest priority police functions; almost three quarters of respondents gave this a ranking score of seven or higher.
3. Fighting terrorism (44: 7.1) and organised crime (27: 7.0) are also seen as high priority police functions.
4. Other items that, on aggregate, received generally higher priority rankings related to:
 - *Protecting the vulnerable and addressing ‘hidden’ harm*; particularly in relation to child protection (43: 6.6), modern slavery (01: 6.1), domestic abuse (13: 5.8) and missing people (48: 5.7).
 - *Control of the streets*; in particular dealing with public place drugs activity (0.6: 6.1) and providing a visible presence (32: 5.9).
 - *Justice and ‘redress’*; ensuring offenders face consequences (11: 5.9) and putting victims first (33: 5.7).
5. Addressing acquisitive/property crime came out, on average, as a mid-level police priority, with *investigation* (47: 5.3) given greater importance than *preventing* burglary (09: 5.0) or *tackling* vehicle crime (30: 4.6).
6. With the exception of providing a visible presence (32: 5.9), items relating to neighbourhood policing and community engagement emerged as lower aggregate priorities; providing reassurance (08: 4.8), engaging and listening (37: 4.4), working with communities (15: 4.3) and building resilience (42: 4.1) all appeared in the mid-to-lower part of the composite ranking.
7. ‘Managerial’ concerns such as improving efficiency (03: 4.1) and working in partnership (28: 4.0) had little public resonance.
8. ‘Progressive’ concerns such as fair treatment (17: 4.6), youth diversion (19: 4.5), ethical standards (26: 4.3), custody safety (41: 4.3) and restorative justice (36: 3.6) were not generally seen as high priorities, relative to other items, with between a quarter and a half placing each of these in the bottom quarter of their Q board, and most of the rest putting them in the middle part.
9. Antisocial behaviour and ‘petty’ offending; aggressive begging (23: 3.4), shoplifting (25: 3.2) nuisance motorbikes (45: 3.0), fly tipping (31: 2.9) and illegal parking (40: 1.9) were generally seen as the lowest priorities for police, with at least half of respondents placing these in the bottom quarter of their board.
10. Investigating non-recent sexual abuse (22: 4.5) was one of few polarising issue; one in five respondents allocated it to the top quarter of their board while one in three place it in the bottom quarter.

12 Brackets contain the relevant statement number and the mean priority scores for that item (between 1 and 9).

FIGURE 6: Summary of aggregate priority rankings for Q sort items (all participants n=253)



Overall, and in terms of their top priorities in particular, demographic sub-sets of participants show considerable similarity.

The top six priority items for men and women (i.e. those that would be placed in columns eight and nine of a composite Q board) were identical, and the top 12 spots (columns seven, eight and nine) differ only at the margin. For the four age/life-stage subsets, only seven different items appear in the top six places of the composite rankings for any age group, and only 15 appear within any group's top 12. Broken down by the seven police force areas; again only seven different items make any area's top six, and 15 make the top 12 (see Table 2 and Appendix Tables 5b,5c and 5d).

In the middle and lower parts of their priority rankings, and when viewed *holistically*, across the full set of items, there are indications of some nuanced sub-group differences.

By gender

Women, for example, tend to give slightly higher priority to some (but by no means all) of the items relating to hidden or potential harm and wellbeing (including domestic abuse (13: 7)¹³, mental health (12: 6), police

wellbeing (39: 6), supporting recovery from trauma (20: 5)), and also to some more 'progressive' concerns (fair treatment (17: 5), youth diversion (19: 5) and custody safety (15: 4)). Men gave slightly greater emphasis to acquisitive crimes such as burglary (9: 6), vehicle crime (30: 5) and fraud (5: 6).

By age/life-stage

In terms of life-stage, younger age groups attach a little less importance to police visibility (32: 5) and policing public place drugs activity (6: 6), while the 18-30 group appears most different from others, notably in the slightly lower importance attached to investigating acquisitive/property crime (47: 5) including online fraud (5: 4) and the greater emphasis placed on psychological wellbeing (mental health (12: 7), feeling safe (8: 6) and recovery from trauma (20: 6)).

By police force area

At the police-area level there are some minor variations, but no clear signs of particular local concerns or geographic characters emerging, perhaps because each force-area subgroup is a composite of participants from two contrasting locations (see Appendix Table 5c).

TABLE 2: Top priorities by sub-group (Q values based on rank of mean scores)

	All (n=253)	Women (n=154)	Men (n=99)	18-30 (n=62)	31-45 (n=60)	46-65 (n=65)	60+ Retired (n=66)	Derbs. (n=37)	Dorset (n=36)	Herts. (n=37)	Humberside (n=34)	Gwent* (n=36)	Northants.* (n=38)	Notts.* (n=37)
35. Tackling sexual violence, abuse and rape	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8
10. Tackling knife crime and serious violence	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9
4. Investigating crimes that cause serious physical and emotional harm...	8	8	8	8	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9
34. Responding quickly to public calls for urgent assistance	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	8
44. Protecting the public from terrorism and preventing radicalisation	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	8	8	7	8	8
27. Investigating organised crime such as drugs and gun smuggling...	8	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	8
43. Keeping children and young people safe	7	7	7	6	8	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	7

13 The brackets here contain the reference number for the statement and the Q value that would be assigned to it in a composite Q board, based on the mean priority scores given by the sub-group in question. For example item 13, 'Reducing the incidence, risk and impact of domestic abuse' received the tenth highest mean priority score from women participants. If arranged on Q board, this would equate to a Q value of seven, hence (13: 7).

4.2 UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES FOR POLICING

Before we turn to inspect the attitudinal ‘fault lines’ that Q reveals within our datasets, it is worth pausing to reflect on the clear and relatively consistent messages about police priorities that our participants express when we look at their responses in aggregate form.

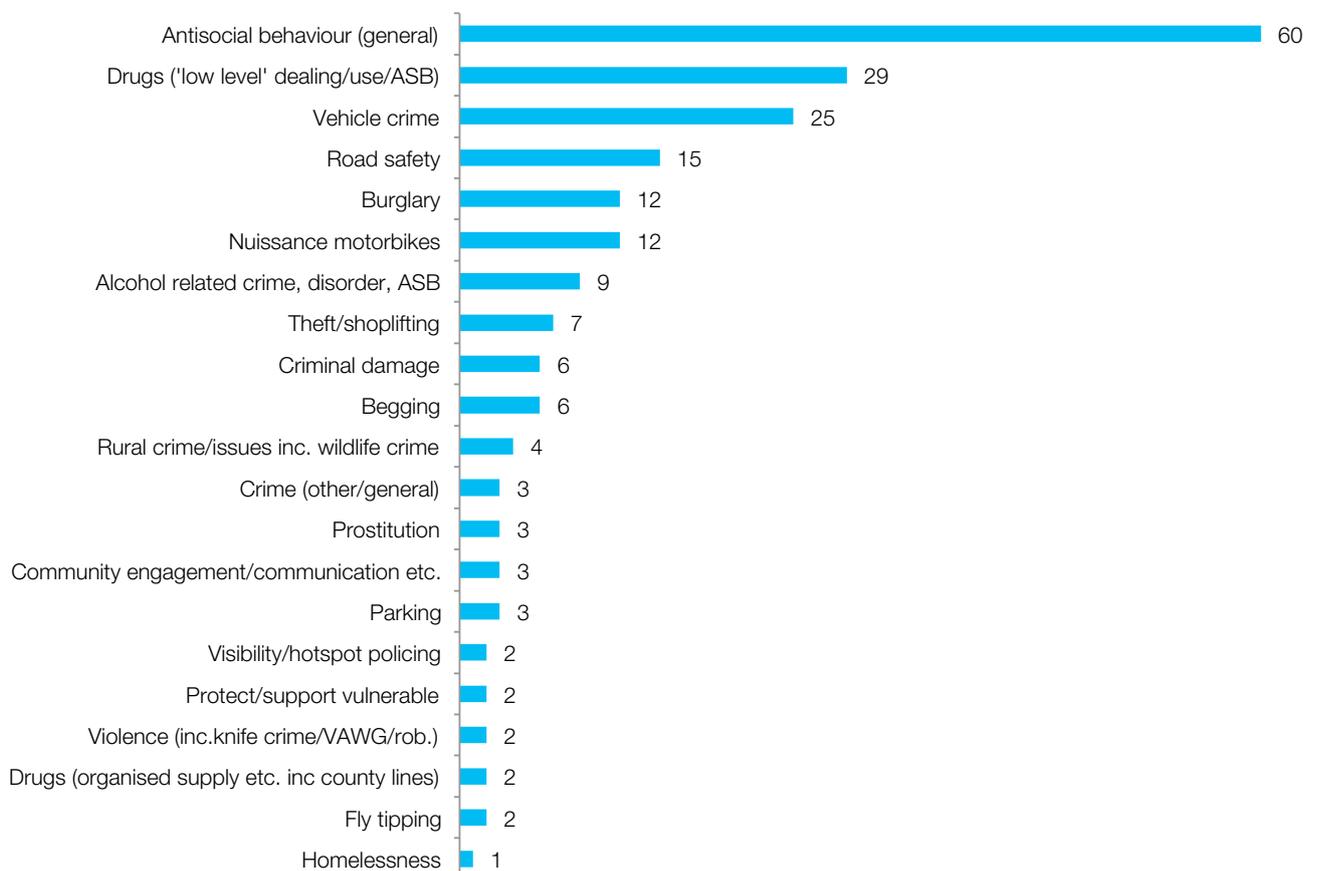
First, with reference to the caution expressed previously about generalising from our participant groups to the population more widely, we take some encouragement from the consistency observed within the study group, particularly when compared across locations. Our data also triangulates well with much larger and more statistically robust surveys, such as the HMICFRS/BMG Research survey (reported in Figures 1 and 2). In particular, the high priority given by our respondents to tackling serious and sexual violence, responding to emergencies, tackling crime and terrorism, protecting children, and investigating organised crime accord strongly with that survey’s findings – as does the lower priority afforded to community engagement, road safety and online abuse. We therefore take some confidence in making tentative statements about ‘the public’ based

on our analysis – although the gaps in our coverage, in particular the under-representation of the most urban locations (and consequently the lack of ethnic diversity in our participant base), is acknowledged.

Second, we see in the priority profile a general orientation towards *issues/crimes/harms* (eg violence (item no. 35), terrorism (44), modern slavery (01) domestic abuse (13)) rather than police *methods/activities/enablers* (eg partnership working (28), engaging with communities (37), treating people fairly (17)); suggesting that generally greater importance is attached to ‘the what’ of policing than ‘the how’. We might interpret this as a largely uncontroversial acceptance of police methods by the public, alongside public recognition of the wide-ranging set of pressing threats.

Third, it is possible to detect the influence of the pervasive set of background concerns about local social ‘deterioration’, the ‘absence’ of policing and the narrowing proximity to violence (described in Section 3) on participants’ Q sorting decisions. The top priority given to addressing violence (35: 7.9, 10: 7.8, 04: 7.6), and the importance attached to ‘coming quickly’ (34: 7.3), providing ‘presence’ (32: 5.9) and dealing with public place drugs activity (06: 6.1) can all be seen as reflections of these anxieties. The (comparatively)

FIGURE 7: Coded summary of dip sample of 208 local neighbourhood priorities



high rankings given to ensuring consequences for offenders (11: 5.9) and prioritising victims (33: 5.7) can be interpreted as reflecting frustrations about seemingly disempowered criminal justice mechanisms. Similarly, the lower rankings for 'progressive' issues such as custody safety (41: 4.3) or youth diversion (19: 4.5) can be viewed as a rejection of the impediment to police efficacy that these might be taken to imply.

Fourth, and perhaps most strikingly, the composite public priority profile revealed here appears to contrast substantially with the array of 'low-level', 'quality of life' complaints about antisocial behaviour, minor crime, incivility and nuisance, that are typically (perhaps stereotypically) associated with the policing demands of the general public – particularly at the local level. The lower average rankings for illegal parking (40: 1.9), fly-tipping (31: 2.9), nuisance motorbikes (45: 3.0), shoplifting (25: 3.2), aggressive begging (23: 3.4), rural crime (24: 3.9) and speeding and road safety (16: 4.0) will stand in contrast to the typical mailbags and inboxes of many PCCs, MPs and neighbourhood policing teams. By way of illustration, Figure 7 shows the coded content of a dip sample of local (neighbourhood) policing priorities, extracted from the police.uk website – all (presumably) derived from some form of local consultation or public representation¹⁴; the contrast with the priority choices made by our respondents (in Figure 6) is striking.

We might explain this contrast, in part, by a shift in geographic focus from the specifically local to the more general (participants were asked to consider what *'the police'* should prioritise, and if they asked for geographic clarification were told to think in terms of their home police force). However, we also need to consider a more far-reaching conclusion; that when asked to consider what *the police should prioritise* people do something fundamentally different from what they do when they engage with neighbourhood police about local problems, attend PACT (or similar) community meetings, appeal to their elected representatives or respond to Police and Crime Plan consultations.

Respondents' experiences of completing the Q sort task were explored during the focus groups, providing insights into what it is people *do* do when asked to make considered choices about police priorities.

KEY FINDING: When presented with a broad set of policing issues and a little time to consider, study participants delivered a clear and consistent verdict on what the police should prioritise: tackling serious and sexual violence, fighting terrorism and organised crime and protecting children and other vulnerable people, while also responding quickly to emergencies, being present on the streets and dealing with public place drugs activity.

They place less emphasis on tackling acquisitive crime and give little priority to community policing, managerial matters or 'progressive' concerns. They consistently give lowest priority to the 'low level' crimes and antisocial behaviours often assumed to be 'public priorities'.

4.3 CHANGING THE QUESTION

Asking respondents to complete their Q sorts at the beginning of each session ensured that their decisions were based on the information, concerns and values they 'brought into the room' with them. That is not to say however, that their choices were reflections of *pre-existing* positions; in fact the sorting and ranking activity, *in itself*, tended to generate a level of active engagement and constructive thought about issues that had often received little previous explicit attention.

Respondents frequently reflected on the challenging nature of the prioritisation task and expressed a new-found appreciation of the difficult judgements and workload challenges it conveyed about modern policing.

"I underestimated just how much they really do. You just assume it's the big things, but there are so many little things on here [Q items on the board] – I say little things, they are not, they are all actually really significant...so you can't really put anything as low priority. I don't know how they do it." (Dorset, 'county', 18-30)

"It is hard because, everything the police do is important and for them to try and prioritise must be really difficult." (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

14 This sample formed part of the 'concourse' survey, used to inform the development of the Q set statements. It includes all local priorities added to the police.uk website during 2017 and 2018 relating to all neighbourhoods within five of the participating police forces and a random sample of 50 other neighbourhoods in non-participating forces. A total of 208 entries were extracted for coding. Some neighbourhoods (and indeed entire forces) do not currently enter local priorities on the site.

"It's really opened my eyes up because you think of the police dealing with the big stuff...but just how much they deal with...we are too quick to complain." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"You look at it from the perspective of someone trying to plan a shift within a police force and it would be mission impossible." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 31-45)

For some, the exercise made them aware of the contingency and subjectivity of their own responses and the extent to which personal experiences or values, professional knowledge or local contexts affected their decision making.

"It's very circumstantial. A lot of these things people don't encounter, but if you've seen things that do happen to people you tend to appreciate more the things like 'reducing repeat victimisation'." (Humberside, East Riding, 31-45)

"When I was doing mine [Q sort] I was thinking about my job and the children that I work with and the impact that some of these things have on them, so I've got 'reducing the incidence and risk of domestic abuse' really high because the fall-out from that is huge." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

"I suppose how you look at this sometimes can be based on what your own situation is. So if you've got children, for example, that can become a higher priority, or if you work with people with mental health [issues] or you know people who suffer and don't get the support they need, that's going to become more of a priority for you." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

"You have your own biases; I hate the idea of men abusing women, it's one of my real hates, and it colours what you [choose to prioritise]". (Humberside, East Riding, 60+ retired)

Just as often however, respondents spoke about trying to hold these personal concerns and motivations in check, balancing them against the equally valid views of (hypothetical) others and engaging in some form of *universalisation* process.

"A lot of it is down to your own experiences... which maybe sway you...so I was trying to take myself away from the fact of what is a priority to me, and [thinking about] what is a priority – or should be a priority – to the general population." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 60+ retired)

"How can you determine what you believe?...For me, every single one [of the items] is important because it can have an impact on somebody's life. It doesn't matter how minimal I think it is, to someone else it can have a huge impact on their life ...it's now got me thinking about the funding of the police." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"[I based my prioritisation decisions on] how it affects society, I mean terrorism can be a massive effect." (Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

"I don't know if any of you here remember that terrible accident... my [relative was killed]... [road safety is] something that could be tackled, but to me it's not a priority among everything else." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

In other words, prompted by the instruction to think about what the police *should* prioritise, respondents showed a tendency to treat the Q sorting process, at least in part, as a 'moral' or value-based policy-making exercise. Rather than reflecting back the issues that had most impact on them *personally*, or that they saw around them on a daily basis, they attempted to assess what best balanced everyone's needs and perspectives and was in the general interests of 'society'. That is not to say that personal preferences and values were entirely expunged from decision making, rather that these were tempered and held in check, in acknowledgement that police priorities affect everyone. As one participant put it:

"You've got to take into account your own [views] while trying to be reasonable...and look at it is a whole really; it's not just us." (Monmouthshire, 46-65)

This suggests that, in the context of policing, even *before* engaging in group discussion or collective consideration, and prompted only by a simple, normatively framed question, people tend towards ways of thinking that are publicly minded, socially engaged and, in some sense, 'deliberative' in nature.

KEY FINDING: Asking people to engage in the process of prioritising policing issues generates an appreciation for the breadth of the police remit and the difficult decisions being faced. People tend to approach the task as a value-based policy making exercise and to universalise; locating their own experiences and preferences within a wider formulation of 'the public interest'.

4.4 WHAT WE DO WHEN WE THINK ABOUT POLICE PRIORITIES

In making (broadly) universalised, priority decisions, participants reported three main types of consideration.

First, relatively rarely, respondents suggested that they had applied some form of **strategy** to their Q sorting choices; prioritising 'key-stone' issues which they felt would have a (perhaps longer term) positive impact on a range of other symptomatic problems. Examples included: domestic abuse, child protection, drugs, organised crime, police wellbeing and community building.

"I put 'investigating organised crime' [as a high priority] because a lot of these petty crimes are feeding drug habits, so the big criminal organisations are feeding...breaking into cars, burglaries, shoplifting...so if you can get it from the top that would hopefully help some of the petty crimes." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

"I think [domestic abuse] has a much wider social impact, because if a family is affected by violence...the children suffer horribly, its inter-generational so it doesn't just affect the immediate victim, it has a knock on effect on the kids. Those kids grow up, they may be traumatised....so I think that has a massive social impact." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 46-65)

"I put 'providing a visible police presence' because I think prevention [is important]. I tried to think about how something could lead onto something else rather than, 'that's the priority because it's worse'." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 31-45)

Secondly, and more commonly, respondents reported making some form of **'harm' or 'impact' assessment** to inform their sorting choices. This tended to focus on direct and concentrated harm 'to the person' and to include a broad spectrum of psychological as well as physical impacts. It also, for some at least, produced a strong differentiation between 'personal' (high priority) harms and the (lower priority) financial losses resulting from property crime – although it is clear that burglary tends to be seen as an exception; a property crime with a high potential for personal impact.

"I put anything that's a bit violent or can cause harm to someone [as a high priority] and tried to sort it out like that. Even though some of these things [other items] are quite important, because

they don't stop people getting hurt or injured or anything like that, I put them quite low down." (Dorset, 'county', 18-30)

"I think for me it was crime that affects people rather than property, that's got more of an importance to me. Things like shoplifting, illegal parking, I don't think, to me, they are priorities; but things that have an impact on people's lives quite severely...property isn't as important as people." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

"I put a lot of stuff to do with sexual violence, abuse: things that I think are massively impactful on people for the rest of their lives, I think that's a more justifiable focus". (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 31-45)

"Well, the things that are far more important...the safety element, the sex element, the knife threats, the threats to people; that was [my] priority." (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

"I've put 'preventing residential burglary' fairly high up because if you don't feel safe in your home where are you going to be safe? So I've put the individual much higher than property." (Hertfordshire, North Herts., 46-65)

Thirdly, and perhaps most clearly, participants also reported drawing on a strong **sense of police remit**. It was clear that well-embedded, and perhaps relatively traditional, views about what is (and is not) the appropriate and ideal role for the police to play in society – relative to the responsibilities and remits of other agencies, organisations, citizens or communities – had a substantial bearing on respondents sorting choices.

[Reflecting on discussion] "We've all just gone, 'surely someone else should pick that up and police should do, like, the 'old school' police job'." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

"Rehabilitating people; that's not actually the police's job. That's for someone else to do...it's while the crime is happening they [the police] should be involved...I'm not saying it [other things] shouldn't be dealt with...but somebody else should be doing it, not the police." (Humberside, East Riding, 31-45)

"I thought that there were a few of these [items] that don't apply...so I don't think it's the police's job 'ensuring offenders face consequences for their actions', that's for the courts, that's not for the police to do...they may be serious things but for the police...I think they are lower priority; that's not their job." (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

"It was difficult sometimes to prioritise which one is more important, you have to try and relate it to the role of what you think a police officer should do as well...dealing with illegal parking...fly tipping, why should that be a police officer's job?" (Hertfordshire, North Herts., 46-65)

"It's not up to the police to make sure someone's got a drug and alcohol worker to stop them going into crime to feed a habit." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

As several of these quotations (and those below) suggest, respondents were often cautious about allocating priority to functions that, even though important, they felt fell more squarely into the remit and core competencies of other agencies.

*"Some of the [items] I thought; this is important, but I don't believe that it's the police's responsibility. Things like 'promoting road safety' isn't that the DVLA's job really? Because it's not really **crime** we are talking about, it's about people being more aware. 'Building strong communities' how on earth is that the police's responsibility when they have got all this stuff to do as well? So although they're important, I put them at the low end because it's not their job." (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)*

"Some of them [Q items] were not really policing... drugs and mental health its more sort of psychological than criminal...there are probably other agencies whose responsibility it is, like social services." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"'Dealing with online abuse and bullying', I mean that is really bad in this day and age, but would you think that that was the police? You need the schools to be working...I'd rather the police were out there protecting people from people with knives." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 46-65)

"If you clearly specified what was the police's responsibility, what was the council's responsibility, what was social services' responsibility, it would be much clearer for the police to actually focus on what our expectations is that they should do... 'Offering restorative justice', I don't think that is the police's responsibility...I think it is their responsibility to be there when we need them; it's their responsibility to keep us safe. It's not their responsibility to stop my house being burgled, that's my responsibility. It's not their responsibility to reduce shoplifting, that's the shops responsibility. It's their responsibility to

keep people who are in their custody safe; it's their responsibility to encourage people to report crime." (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

As this last comment suggests this demarcation of roles and duties extended beyond statutory agencies to take account of the perceived responsibilities of:

Individuals;

"We have to take some level of responsibility to stop things, we have to remove the opportunities because a lot of crimes are opportunist... like [when a car is broken into] "why did you leave it [your handbag] on the passenger seat?", we have to get the police in to sort out our problems... we rely on the police too much for prevention." (Humberside, East Riding, 31-45)

Communities;

"People are expecting the police to parent children and problem youths... it used to be that you had neighbourhoods... if there was somebody elderly, on their own, they were looked after not left on their own, where they are a more vulnerable target and I feel like things like that have been put on the police's shoulders." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"There are lots of issues that should be dealt with within the workplace and within the home environment that we shouldn't be taking from the police time. And I think that's where the line should be drawn; the police should be involved in cases where they know they are going to get a prosecution." (Dorset, 'county', 46-65)

Businesses;

"Well, I think the shoplifting one is not the police really, they've [shops have] got the managers, that's their responsibility, not for the police I think." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

And corporations;

"Social media organisations, should work with police a lot better." (Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

These comments convey a sense of a widely understood and strongly valued, 'core-police' remit, which respondents were keen to protect and preserve in their prioritisation choices. Although this is not easily captured or articulated, people 'know it when they see it' – and often feel uncomfortable at the suggestion that it could be stretched into less conventional areas. In these comments alone the core role is characterised

as ‘immediate’, crime (and criminal justice) related, responsive and protective. While preventing crime and dealing with its consequences are seen as relevant to the remit, respondents often seemed wary of the police moving too far up or down-stream, and crossing in to territory best served by other agents in pursuit of these aims. We will return to these themes in Section 7, when considering the public reaction to increasing ‘non-crime’ police demand.

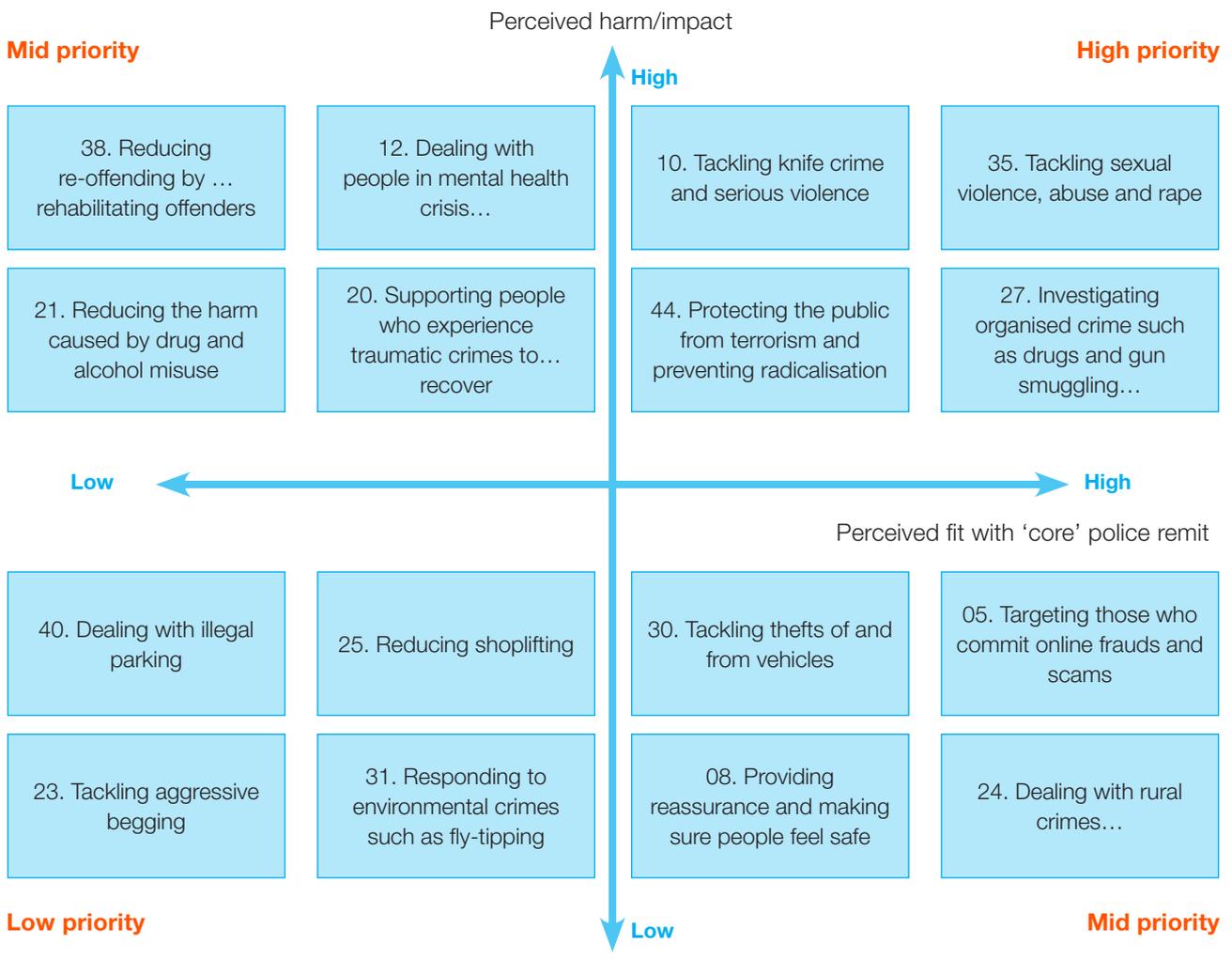
Finally, it is instructive to note the ‘work’ that these two most widely reported criteria (harm/impact and ‘remit’) do in explaining the aggregate priority choices made by study participants in their Q sorts. The highest overall priorities tend to be items viewed as *both* high harm/impact and unequivocally ‘police business’; the lowest tend to be those viewed as lower harm/impact, where responsibility is seen as sitting elsewhere or is more-contested. Those issues where the perceived potential for harm is great, but responsibility is equivocal – or vice versa – generally tend to gravitate to the centre of the Q board.

While there is undoubtedly considerable nuance, this might be considered a good rule of thumb

for understanding how and why the public – at an aggregated level – feel a particular issue should be prioritised; if it is seen as generating (in particular, direct and concentrated) personal harm, and if it is uncontroversially ‘police business’ then it seems likely that the public will see it is a high priority.

KEY FINDING: In considering police priorities, people occasionally deploy ‘strategies’ but more often base their decisions on two types of criteria. First, they assess ‘harm’ or ‘impact’, and prioritise issues where this is severe, direct and concentrated ‘on the person’. Second, they apply a ‘remit’ filter, emphasising those issues that best fit their idea of ‘police business’. This typically includes a relatively tradition focus on ‘crime’ and emergencies, and exists in relation to beliefs about the responsibilities of other agencies, communities, individuals and other actors. As a result, issues that are highly impactful and have a strong fit with preconceptions of ‘what the police do’ tend to be considered the highest priorities.

FIGURE 8: Interpretive schematic of key prioritisation criteria with example items



5. EXPLORING DIFFERENCE

5.1 IDENTIFYING ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In completing their Q sorts and reflecting on the processes they engaged in to do so, our study participants have provided a clear overall picture of their considered priorities for the police, and a strong sense of the thinking behind their choices. However, in aggregating responses together and pulling out dominant themes from discussions, there is a risk of disregarding the more subtle differences between viewpoints, or overlooking the minority who took a distinctively different approach. This is where Q comes into its own, and in this section we dig into what the nuanced variations reveal, firstly at the local level.

As detailed in the method (2.3), each set of force-area Q sorts was subjected to separate factor analyses. In six out of the seven forces, either four or five factors were identified corresponding to distinct and differentiated local 'viewpoints', each approximated by at least two local participants. In the seventh force (Humberside) a single factor solution, (approximated by almost all participants), was found to best explain the data.

A brief overview of each local factor/viewpoint is provided in the following summary boxes with full factor arrays and technical details provided in Appendix 6¹⁵. It should be noted that (as for the demographic sub-groups, see Section 4.1) there was often marked consistency between viewpoints within an area about the highest (and lowest) priorities for policing. The unique and distinctive characteristics of each factor tend to be revealed by attention to the arrays *as a whole*, with particular attention to the middle part of the ranking, when viewed in comparison to each other.

Items ranked more or less highly by one factor *compared to others within the same analysis* often provide useful insights into the shared perspective it represents. The statement numbers for each of these 'distinctive items' are provided in the summaries that follow, along with a short *interpretive* description of the viewpoint the factor appears to represent (a detailed reading of these would benefit from close attention to the array summaries provided in Appendix 6).

In the next sections we explore cross-area similarities and differences between these local shared viewpoints both qualitatively and statistically.

Derbyshire

Der. A	Vulnerability not property	Var. explained: 23%	Respondents: 16/37
Distinctive items: High: 43, 11, 18, 7, 46, 20,19, 38, 41 Low: 47, 9, 5, 30, 22, 23, 25, 45, 31			
Demographic profile: predominantly women and from (lower demand) High Peak groups			
Description: This viewpoint thinks it is particularly important that the police protect those who cannot protect themselves and uncover hidden abuse. In contrast, it sees acquisitive crimes and antisocial behaviour as comparatively less important. It supports criminal justice, but also other ways of dealing with offenders, including rehabilitation and diversion. Compared with others it appears a somewhat 'principled' or 'theoretical' position, held by those for whom the personal threat of crime is perhaps less proximate.			

Der. B	Catch criminals...and hear us!	Var. explained: 14%	Respondents: 8/37
Distinctive items: High: 27, 47, 5, 37, 26, 23 Low: 12, 39, 20, 19, 38, 3			
Demographic profile: Almost all from older two groups (i.e. 46+)			
Description: While sharing the consensus view on tackling harmful violence, this factor is also characterised by a traditional outlook on policing. It attaches greater emphasis to investigating, arresting and bringing criminals to justice. It has little time for less punitive alternatives and resists the shift towards 'complexity' and a broader 'welfare' remit. In this context, the high ranking given to <i>'engaging with and listening to communities'</i> suggest those aligned to it feel that their concerns are not being heard or taken seriously.			

15 More detailed descriptions and interpretations of each factor/viewpoint were provided in the local reports provided to each PCC.

Der. C	Millennial magpies	Var. explained: 11%	Respondents: 5/37
Distinctive items: High: 4, 1, 48, 12, 9, 22, 16 Low: 44, 32, 13, 2, 8, 14, 15, 42, 36			
Demographic profile: Exclusively from the 18-30 Erewash group			
Description: This younger group prioritised to a 'mixed bag' of contemporary issues; they share (perhaps local) concerns around property crime with their parents' generation but also embrace non-crime emergencies as an important part of the police job. They give priority to several 'newer', high-profile issues (such as historic abuse and modern slavery), perhaps reflecting a relatively recent set of (media) influences. They attach little importance to community policing.			

Der. D	Sort this place out for/with us	Var. explained: 5%	Respondents: 3/37
Distinctive items: High: 32, 13, 39, 21, 42, 24, 36, 45, 31, 40 Low: 35, 10, 4, 27, 6, 1, 48, 18, 29, 37, 26, 41, 28			
Demographic profile: Male			
Description: This factor is (almost simplistically) 'pro-police'; it is also highly local and reflects the problems likely to be encountered in the small towns where its advocates live. It values (and may feel the lack of) community strength and efficacy; (with an unusually high rank for restorative justice perhaps expressing a preference for 'sorting things out locally'), however it gives low importance to 'engagement' – possibly reflecting a preference for 'less talking more doing'.			

Dorset

Dor. A	Step in to make things right	Var. explained: 19%	Respondents: 9/34
Distinctive items: High: 11, 48, 8, 14 Low: 39, 3, 28			
Demographic profile: Mixed, predominantly Bournemouth			
Description: This viewpoint has three characteristics. First, it sees the police as having a <i>distinct</i> role in society; key priorities are unequivocally 'police-work' and partnership and collaboration are not given high status. Second, there is an emphasis on <i>reacting</i> when bad things happen. Although reassurance is valued, this is achieved by <i>stepping in</i> to put things right when this is required. Third, its advocates value decisiveness, effectiveness and strength in the police; it may be related to this that little need is seen to prioritise police welfare.			

Dor. B	With us and for us	Var. explained: 16%	Respondents: 6/34
Distinctive items: High: 34, 32, 39, 37, 28, 26, 15, 3, 28 Low: 11, 48, 7, 9, 46, 16, 24, 25			
Demographic profile: Predominantly female			
Description: This factor is about involvement. As well as response and presence its adherents value collaborative and supportive relationships between the police, communities and other agencies. In contrast to <i>Dor. A</i> They want <i>ongoing</i> presence, dialogue, interconnection and mutual support.			

Dor. C	Protect the vulnerable	Var. explained: 13%	Respondents: 4/34
Distinctive items: High: 43, 1, 46, 20, 22 Low: 34, 44, 32, 17, 30, 37, 41,			
Demographic profile: Male			
Description: These participants see the police role as being there to protect those who cannot protect themselves, including children and abuse victims. The lower priority assigned to public place policing suggests they do not have a strong perception of threat to themselves, and distinguish between those (like them) who can 'look after themselves' and those who need protection.			

Dor. D	Thief takers	Var. explained: 11%	Respondents: 3/34
Distinctive items: High: 8, 47, 9, 5, 30, 41, 16, 24, 25, 45, 31, 40 Low: 43, 13, 33, 18, 12, 2, 8, 21, 19, 42, 36			
Demographic profile: Mixed			
Description: This factor adheres to a more traditional, ‘cops and robbers’ view of the police as being there to protect property, catch criminals and maintain order in public space, as well as to deal with serious harm. This group are reluctant to embrace the complexities of modern societal problems and reject more ‘progressive’ responses to crime like youth diversion and restorative justice.			

Gwent

Gwe. A	Crime, plain and simple	Var. explained: 18%	Respondents: 11/36
Distinctive items: High: 10, 47, 12, 2, 9, 46, 30, 16, 23, 25 Low: 32, 18, 39, 41, 42, 3, 28			
Demographic profile: Predominantly Newport, particularly 60+ retired			
Description: This factor represents a distinctly ‘no-nonsense’, view of policing. It frames the police job squarely and simply in terms of dealing with crime – including violence and high-harm offending, but also (and distinctively) tackling property crime and acquisitive criminals. It is reluctant to acknowledge complexity, dismissive of more ‘progressive’ considerations and also rejects community policing (including police visibility). The higher priority given to tackling aggressive begging probably reflects concerns about visible street-homelessness in Newport.			

Gwe. B	Rural Progressives	Var. explained: 14%	Respondents: 5/36
Distinctive items: High: 27, 33, 18, 12, 17, 21, 19, 38, 24 Low: 48, 7, 46, 8, 5, 37, 16, 23			
Demographic profile: All from Monmouthshire			
Description: This factor’s policing priorities are motivated by a value-set oriented towards protecting the vulnerable and supporting and caring for those at risk, or who have come to harm. It’s also supports a broad approach to prevention and ‘progressive’ responses to offending. Ultimately it represents a call for compassionate and progressive policing. The low importance attached to reassurance and engagement reflects the perceived need to focus on vulnerable groups rather than the public in general. With a caveat around rural isolation, this group do not see themselves as in need of particular support or attention from the police.			

Gwe. C	Be professional police officers	Var. explained: 13%	Respondents: 5/36
Distinctive items: High: 13, 26, 15, 3, 28 Low: 43, 1, 12, 20, 22, 38			
Demographic profile: Mixed; from all but the oldest age group.			
Description: The message to the police from this factor is ‘do your core-business well’. It wants modern, professional, effective and efficient policing that works with communities and other agencies and makes good use of technology, but also that has a clear sense of what it is responsible for and what should be done by others.			

Gwe. D	Take care of us (and you)	Var. explained: 8%	Respondents: 2/36
Distinctive items: High: 6, 7, 39, 8, 20, 37, 42 Low: 35, 10, 4, 27, 13, 33, 47, 21, 26, 24, 25, 31			
Demographic profile: Older women			
Description: This factor values community policing emotionally. It wants reassurance and support from the police and for them to deal with problems they see around them day-to-day. It wants the police to respond quickly, support victims, and to make people feel safe but it also feels police officers need to be looked after. It might be characterised as oriented towards collective ‘care’.			

Hertfordshire

Her. A	All about the kids	Var. explained: 17%	Respondents: 7/37
Distinctive items: High: 43, 46 Low: 47, 9, 8			
Demographic profile: Predominantly female and under 45			
Description: This group are particularly concerned with the safety of children and young people, including online safety. Several indicated that they were parents and/or school teachers, who were particularly aware of the risks and challenges of growing up in today's world. Less importance is attached to the police response to acquisitive crimes, including burglary.			
Her. B	Thief takers	Var. explained: 14%	Respondents: 7/37
Distinctive items: High: 47, 9, 24, 25, 45 Low: 26, 41, 3, 28			
Demographic profile: Predominantly older men			
Description: This factor has a rather traditional view of policing and shows a resistance to its modern complexities. While the seriousness of violence and sexual crimes are acknowledged, this is a distinctly 'cops and robbers' outlook, that has little time for ethics codes and rejects the 'grey areas' implied by inter-agency collaboration. This factor evokes a certain nostalgia for the 'good old, bad old days' of policing when things were more straightforward.			
Her. C	Guardian protectors	Var. explained: 12%	Assoc. Q sorts: 4/37
Distinctive items: High: 8, 5, 17, 19, Low: 11, 12, 29, 39, 30, 21, 23			
Demographic profile: All women, generally older			
Description: The women who approximate this viewpoint value the police particularly for the feelings of safety and protection they engender. They are looking for policing that is strong and decisive but also 'good' – they value fairness and giving young people who take a wrong turn a second chance; in contrast those who specifically set out to deceive should be dealt with firmly.			
Her. D	Empowering survivors	Var. explained: 8%	Respondents: 4/37
Distinctive items: High: 4, 11, 13, 48, 33, 2, 20, Low: 44, 27, 1, 32, 4, 7, 37, 36, 45			
Demographic profile: All women			
Description: The priorities of this group of women are strongly shaped by their views on how the police should respond to victims of traumatic crimes, particularly domestic abuse. Their priorities indicate the importance of 'redress' as well as protection. Their sorting choices suggest that they reject the 'vulnerable' label and a make a clear statement about the validity of non-reporting as a choice for victims.			
Her. E	Community innovators	Var. explained: 6%	Respondents: 2/37 (+1 neg.)
Distinctive items: High: 32, 29, 7, 37, 38, 14, 42, 3, 28, 36, 31 Low: 35, 10, 43, 6, 48, 46, 5			
Demographic profile: Male (probably incidental)			
Description: This factor approaches prioritisation more strategically than others and suggests an appreciation of the need for innovation and longer-term prevention, as well as demonstrating more 'progressive' values. It is positive about community policing and the involvement of a range of agents in engineering lasting social change.			

Humberside

Hum. A	Consensus	Var. explained: 45%	Respondents: 30/34
Distinctive items: N/A			
Demographic profile: N/A			
Description: With 30 contributing Q sorts, the array for the single Humberside factor is unsurprisingly similar to the local aggregate (Appendix Table 6b (Humb)) which is also very similar to the overall aggregate picture (see Figure 6). The most notable difference being a comparatively lower ranking for community engagement and 'listening'.			

Northamptonshire

Nor. A	New problems, old solutions	Var. explained: 18%	Respondents: 11/38
Distinctive items: High: 2, 46, 30, 21, 22, 23, 31 Low: 7, 8, 20, 37, 38, 26, 41, 15, 42, 28			
Demographic profile: Mixed, generally older.			
Description: This viewpoint acknowledges the extensive and diverse set of crime and harm issues confronting modern policing, but is less modern in its views about how these should be tackled. It emphasises traditional police functions and has little time for alternatives. It is also sceptical about the value of community policing and partnership working.			

Nor. B	Safe in the streets	Var. explained: 16%	Respondents: 8/38
Distinctive items: High: 44, 32, 8, 37 Low: 35, 13, 12, 46, 21, 22, 16			
Demographic profile: Women, mostly mid-age range (30-65)			
Description: This group is particularly motivated by the need to feel safe in public places. This manifests in a particular concern about terrorism, and the strong importance placed on police presence, public reassurance and dialogue.			

Nor. C	Moral modernisers	Var. explained: 12%	Respondents: 6/38
Distinctive items: High: 13, 29, 39, 26, 3, 28, 45 Low: 43, 6, 18, 47, 9, 30, 23			
Demographic profile: Generally younger women			
Description: This might be thought of as a 'modern' viewpoint. It shows an awareness of crimes and issues that have become better understood in recent years, it is oriented towards harm, overtly 'ethical' and alert to efficiency, improvement and innovation. Overall, it wants the police to focus on doing things <i>better</i> and doing things <i>right</i> .			

Nor. D	Parental protectors	Var. explained: 11%	Respondents: 6/38
Distinctive items: High: 43, 18, 12, 14, 16 Low: 44, 32, 5, 3, 36			
Demographic profile: Mixed, not the oldest			
Description: The emphasis placed on child safety by this factor marks this as a 'keystone' issue; several of its adherents spoke about the impact of parenthood on their views. However, the orientation toward protecting the vulnerable extends to other crime and non-crime issues.			

Nottinghamshire

Not. A	Harm, but crime harm	Var. explained: 19%	Respondents: 13/37
Distinctive items: High: 1, 13, 29, 9, 21, 22 Low: 42, 3, 36, 23			
Demographic profile: Mixed			
Description: This viewpoint is strongly aligned to tackling harmful crimes, including 'hidden' crimes but gives no particular priority to high harm/risk 'non-crime' issues. This suggests a relatively tightly defined view of the police remit. With little interest in community, partnership or restorative alternatives, the viewpoint appears aligned to 'traditional' / criminal justice police functions.			
Not. B	All-purpose emergency service	Var. explained: 12%	Respondents: 6/37
Distinctive items: High: 48, 12, 14, 41 Low: 9, 30, 24, 31			
Demographic profile: Generally younger			
Description: Those aligned to this factor attach strong value to policing as an emergency service that can step in to deal with urgent risks, whether 'crime related' or otherwise. They are less concerned with deterrent or protective prevention and see property crime as relatively low priority alongside more direct risks of harm.			
Not. C	Thief takers	Var. explained: 10%	Respondents: 6/37
Distinctive items: High: 44, 47, 5, 30, 24, 45 Low: 12, 39, 20, 17, 21, 19, 22, 38, 26			
Demographic profile: Mixed			
Description: Another distinctly traditional 'cops and robbers' view of policing. While acknowledging the importance of tackling violence and sexual crime; property crime and catching criminals remains a core element of the police role from this point of view. It also shows a sceptical view on issues like youth diversion, offender rehabilitation and ethical standards.			
Not. D	Control the streets and roads	Var. explained: 9%	Respondents: 2/37
Distinctive items: High: 32, 16, 40 Low: 43, 33, 18, 46, 28			
Demographic profile: Older			
Description: This appears a relatively 'traditional' viewpoint with an emphasis on visible presence, little time for partnership working and less salience of the risks to children and young people, however, it is most distinctive in the emphasis placed on road safety and speeding and (compared to others) on illegal parking.			
Not. E	With us and our kids	Var. explained: 6%	Respondents: 2/37
Distinctive items: High: 33, 7, 39, 7, 19, 37, 15, 28, 36 Low: 35, 4, 34, 44, 1, 11, 14, 16, 25			
Demographic profile: BAME women			
Description: This factor represents a radical counterpoint. It is distinctive: first, in the priority given to forging collaborative <i>relationships</i> between the police and communities; second, in its strong rejection of criminal justice responses; third, in its attention to the risks to, and treatment of, young people, and fourth in its more strategic, longer-term outlook.			

5.2 TOWARDS A GENERAL TYPOLOGY

Reading across the seven sets of force-level factor interpretations suggests some salient similarities and dimensions of difference which might – *in purely qualitative terms* – help us sketch out a general framework for making sense of the range of viewpoints identified across the research sites.

First, several of the analyses produced relatively strong factors, (accounting for larger proportions of variance and with larger numbers of associated Q sorts), that generally approximated the overall ‘aggregate’ priority profile (see Figure 6) and exemplified the trade-off between ‘harm’ and ‘remit’ previously described. These including *Dor. A, Hum. A* and *Nor. A*; in the case of Nottinghamshire this space was occupied by two factors with subtly contrasting emphases on ‘crime’ (*Not. A*) and general ‘harm’ (*Not. B*).

Second, and perhaps most clearly, within five of the participant groups, a viewpoint was identified that appeared to suggest a more traditional ‘law and order’ based view of policing, with greater emphasis (compared to others locally) placed on catching criminals and combating acquisitive crime; these factors often also gave comparatively lower priority to partnership and collaboration, and to some more ‘progressive’ concerns such as youth diversion or safety in custody (*Der. B, Dor.*

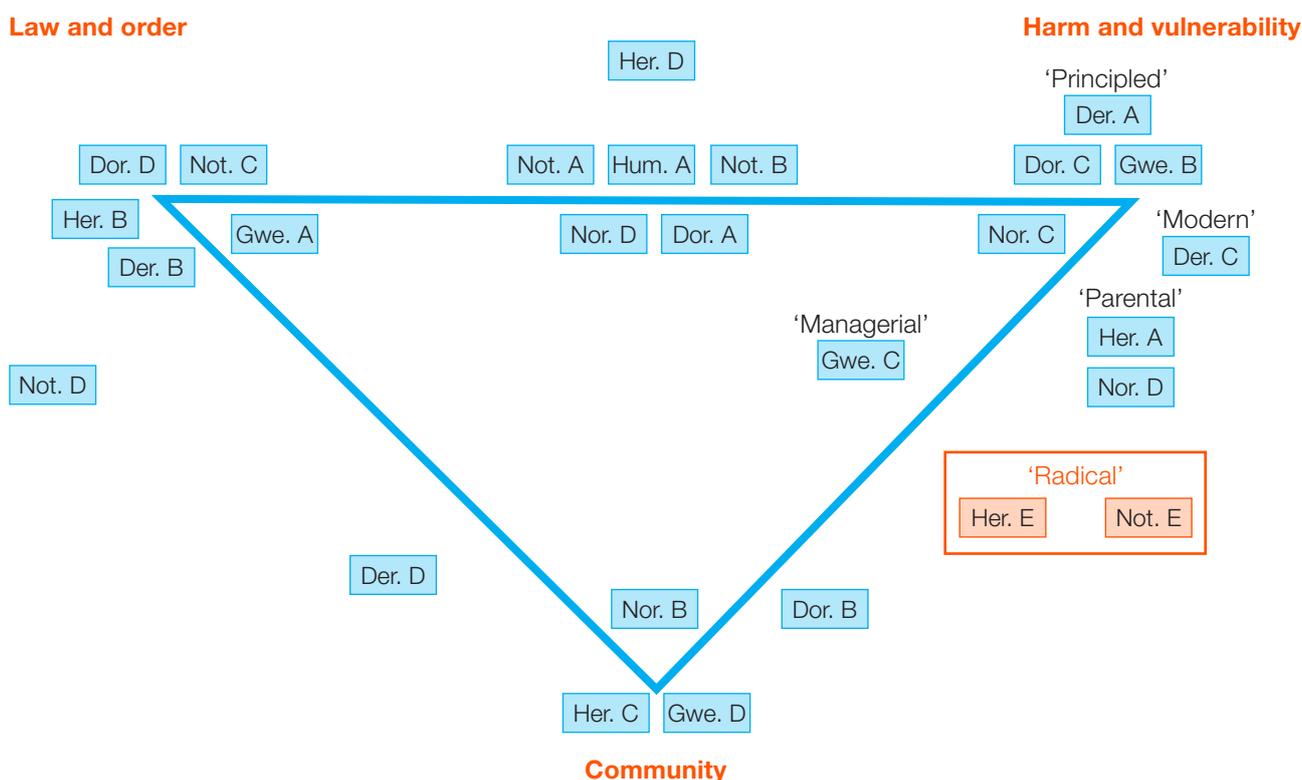
D, Gwe. A, Her. B and *Not. C*). We might hypothesise that (with reference to the harm/remit mnemonic previously suggested) these groups give more weight to (traditional) police core-remit and less to more ‘modern’ concerns about vulnerability and ‘personal’ impact.

Conversely, (at the other end of a continuum running through the aggregate consensus), a number of the local factors appear strongly oriented towards ‘harm’ and protecting those at most risk. There are differences between these however; several might be interpreted as taking a ‘principled’ even ‘selfless’ position (*Dor. C, Gwe. B, Der. A*), advocates of these tend to see themselves as more ‘fortunate’ and as having little personal need for priority service from the police. Others have a more personal/emotional ‘parental’ focus on protecting young people (*Nor. D, Her. A*).

Additionally, some viewpoints broadly tending towards to this ‘harm’-focused end of the spectrum, exhibited notably ‘modern’ characteristics, with priority given to issues of recent (media) salience (*Der. C, Nor. C*), others showed a ‘managerial’ bent towards improvement and efficiency (*Gwe. C*).

A further ‘cluster’ of viewpoints might be constructed from those broadly oriented toward aspects of ‘community policing’, although there were also subtle differences of focus here; either on community ‘involvement’ (*Dor. B*), protection and reassurance (*Gwe. D, Her. C, and Nor. B*) and local efficacy (*Der. D*).

FIGURE 9: Qualitative schematic of viewpoints on police priorities



Two local factors (*Not. E* and *Her. E*) had strong community oriented (as well as other contrasting) characteristics, however they also stand out – and together – as particularly radical arguments for a ‘new way of doing things’.

There are also several unique local viewpoints within the collection; the emphasis on empowering and supporting domestic abuse survivors displayed by *Her. D* for example, was not replicated in any other area.

Figure 9 sets out a tentative qualitative schematic for mapping the most apparent similarities and differences between the viewpoints described above.

The schematic presented above, and the emerging theories it seeks to illustrate, must be recognised for what they are: *qualitative* attempts to ‘make sense’ of the outputs from seven separate and discrete attitudinal ‘dip-samples’. In looking across locations in this way, we must first bear in mind that the characteristics of each factor have been interpreted and ascribed *relative to its local ‘peers’*. To provide an analogy, just as a viewpoint seen as ‘liberal’ or ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’ in one country may have little, (objectively), in common with one that attracts the same label in another, we should not assume a simple equivalence between viewpoints characterised in their local contexts as ‘traditional’, ‘community oriented’ or ‘principled’ (although that does not mean, in either case, that these terms and dimensions do not have some explanatory value).

Secondly, we must also recognise that such explanatory devices rely on *judgements* about which aspects of similarity and difference between viewpoints appear to be most ‘meaningful’. The five local factors at the ‘law and order’ point of our triangle, all think it is important (relative to their local peers) that the police should prioritise solving property crimes and tackling other aspects of acquisitive crime, but that does not mean they necessarily agree with each other on terrorism, or child protection or community engagement (for example). In fact (as illustrated in Table 3) while there

TABLE 3: Correlation matrix of factor arrays for five local ‘law and order’ factors

	Dor. D	Gwe. A	Her. B	Not. C
Der. B	0.67	0.66	0.69	0.74
Dor. D		0.55	0.47	0.62
Gwe. A			0.77	0.61
Her. B				0.78

16 These were not therefore used to generate either second-order factor array.

are strong correlations between the whole arrays of some of these ‘law and order’ factor, others are statistically and holistically similar less (*Her. B* and *Dor. D*. for instance have a correlation coefficient of only 0.47), and, in fact, two of these factors (*Her. B* and *Gwe. A*) have stronger correlations with other (non-‘law and order’) viewpoints.

KEY FINDING: *Digging beneath the general consistency in public views (using Q Methodology) reveals nuanced differences in people’s policing priorities, which tend to resolve into small sets of shared ‘viewpoints’ at the local level. Looking across research sites begins to suggest a general typology, loosely arranged around three broad orientations towards ‘law and order’, ‘harm and vulnerability’ and ‘community’ concerns, however this relies on qualitative judgements about the dimensions of similarity and difference that are most meaningful.*

5.3 MORE THAT UNITES US THAN DIVIDES US

To examine whether this emerging typology, or indeed any other interpretive framework, has *statistical* as well as qualitative validity, a second-order factor analysis was conducted (see method section 2.3 and Appendix 7). This, in effect, treated each of the 27 factor arrays, generated by the seven initial force-level analyses, as if it were the Q sort of an ‘archetypal’ participant, representing each local factor, in a new, combined analysis.

This resulted in a **two factor solution**; indicating, in other words, that taking account of the whole arrays, the similarities and differences between the 27 local viewpoints could be explained by the existence of just two ‘general’ factors/viewpoints.

22 local factor arrays were significantly associated with a strong second-order factor (2A), that alone explained 53 per cent of the variance in the second-order study. Two further local factor arrays were significantly associated with a second second-order factor (2B) that explained a further nine per cent of variance. Two local viewpoints were ‘confounded’ (that is, significantly associated with both second-order factors¹⁶) and just one did not align to either 2A or 2B. Figure 10 illustrates the alignment of each local factor to the two second-order viewpoints.

2A: What's worst and what's police-work?

Clustered on the right hand side of the plot (in Figure 10), the majority of the local viewpoints were found to be significantly¹⁷ (and uniquely) associated with the strongest second-order factor (2A). This shows that, statistically speaking, despite their nuanced differences, these are best understood as approximations of a single shared perspective; literally a case of *'more that unites us than divides us'*.

The arrays of the 22 local factors significantly associated with 2A, were weighted and combined to produce a second-order array, expressed as an idealised Q sort in figure 11. In total the individual Q sorts of 176 study participants have been used to generate this composite, following two rounds of weighting.

Unsurprisingly, the array shares much in common with the overall 'aggregate' priority profile (presented in figure 6). Given that items related to 'visible presence' (32: 6), engagement (37: 3) and community resilience (37: 3) have been slightly relegated in the weighting and that several more 'community-oriented' local factors have been excluded, this has become an even clearer expression of *'the what'* over *'the how'* and of the interplay of *'harm'* and *'remit'* criteria.

This indicates that fundamentally, the consensus public view is that police should prioritise what is most harmful and what only they can do; deal with violence, fight terrorism and organised crime, respond quickly when safety is threatened, and root out abuse, including where it is hidden. There are nuanced variations, that sometimes coalesce into 'segmented' 'publics' at the local level, but these dissolve back into consensus when we adjust focus to the wider geographic view.

There is however, a small but significant exception.

2B: Reform, involve, innovate

Two local factors – those previously identified as being 'radically' different in their approach to police reform (see 5.2) – are only modestly correlated with factor 2A but are significantly aligned to a second second-order factor 2B¹⁸, (and can be seen towards the centre, top of Figure 10)¹⁹.

They are:

- *Her. E*: a viewpoint badged as 'Community Innovators' and approximated by two Hertfordshire participants. This factor was interpreted as emphasising the need for innovation and longer-term strategic prevention, as well as demonstrating more 'progressive' values with a focus on community engagement and partnership working.
- *Not. E*: a minority perspective identified in Nottinghamshire and approximated by two BAME women. Labelled *'with us and our kids'*, it also advocated strategic and transformative change, based around community partnership, focusing on young people and non-criminal justice alternatives.

Although there are differences between the two perspectives, figure 12 summarises what they hold in common and demonstrates their departure from the prevailing (2A) view.

It shows that, like 2A, those who approximate this alternative point of view feel the police should prioritise serious violence (10: 9), organised crime (27: 8), and be visible on the streets (32: 8). In contrast however, they feel strongly that the police must work with and involve communities (15: 9), engage and listen (37: 8) and build local resilience (8: 42). Although orientated towards the local, this is not a nostalgic appeal back to 'bobbies on the beat'; rather, it is radical in its call for innovation and improvement through technology, collaboration and partnership (03: 7, 28: 6) and for the police to embrace alternatives to traditional criminal justice responses, including rehabilitation (38: 7), diversion (19: 7) and restorative justice (36: 6). It also realises that effective policing requires a well workforce (39: 7).

In terms of its lowest priorities, as well as 'low-level' crime and antisocial behaviour, it again demonstrates a less punitive approach (11: 3) and, perhaps, a more liberal outlook on drugs (21: 3, 6:3). It is concerned with *'the how'* as well as *'the what'* and is oriented to the long-term as well as current threats. The following quotations from the minority advocates of this alternative approach, illustrate the need that they perceived to do things differently.

17 $P < 0.001$, meaning that only one in 1,000 randomly generated Q sorts would approximate the factor this closely.

18 Although significantly associated (at $P < 0.001$) loadings to 2B of 0.503 and 0.494 are not especially strong and show that, while these two local factors have more in common with each other than with 2A, there are also notable differences between them. They correlate with each other only at 0.42 and Her. E has stronger correlations with several other local factors than with Not E.

19 In addition, two other local factors Gwe. D and Nor. C were significantly associated with to 2B but also significantly loaded to 2A. They have therefore not been used to generate either array.

“You hear about the police being stretched, and people leaving the police force and everything. Maybe there has got to be a different strategy. Communities can do more, other organisations can do more. I think we need a new way of thinking. I put ‘improving efficiency and technology and collaborating with other agencies’ quite high up. The way it’s going at the minute, it sounds like...it’s pretty much near breaking point.”
(Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

“All of my priorities are long-term, [about] resolving issues. So everything from ‘building strong resilient communities’, ‘reducing reoffending’, because you can treat the symptoms all you want, but if you don’t treat the cause, you’re never going to be able to deal with...violence, rape and things... so that some of these issues don’t exist in the future.” (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

“You realise that unless you look after the community and youths you’re not going to solve knife crime with the youths.” (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

We should not overlook the fact that this alternative position has been constructed from the Q sorts of only four participants – less than two per cent of our participant group. However, we can be confident that it represents a (statistically) distinctive and different attitudinal perspective that exists within the British public. As we shall see in Section 9, it also indicates a direction of travel in which people’s views tend to move, as they become more informed and think in greater depth about the challenges facing modern policing and society more widely.

KEY FINDING: Statistical and ‘holistic’ analysis of the variation between the local shared viewpoints indicates that this is best understood in terms of two over-arching, national-level factors. Rather than cleaving apart into ‘factions’ the majority of the local viewpoints should be viewed as variations around a central shared perspective. This exemplifies the impact/remit calculation (previously presented) and demonstrates a consensus view that the police should prioritise serious and sexual violence, fighting terrorism and organised crime, responding quickly, and rooting out ‘hidden’ abuse. The exception is a distinctive minority viewpoint which emphasises the need for radical, community-oriented reform.

FIGURE 11: Composite array representing second-order factor 2A

	High priority								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Low priority	31. Responding to environmental crimes such as fly-tipping	36. Offering 'restorative justice' (contact between victims and offenders to seek resolution and repair harm)	37. Engaging and listening to communities to build trust and understand people's concerns	17. Treating people fairly, including when using police powers like stop and search	7. Encouraging crime reporting, especially where victims lack confidence to come forward	33. Putting crime victims first	43. Keeping children and young people safe	4. Investigating crimes that cause serious physical and emotional harm like rape and serious assaults	35. Tackling sexual violence, abuse and rape
	40. Dealing with illegal parking	23. Tackling aggressive begging	42. Building strong, resilient and cohesive communities	21. Reducing the harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse	39. Looking after the welfare and wellbeing of police officers and staff	32. Providing a visible police presence on the streets	1. Identifying and tackling modern slavery and people trafficking	44. Protecting the public from terrorism and preventing radicalisation	10. Tackling knife crime and serious violence
		25. Reducing shoplifting	16. Promoting road safety by addressing speeding and dangerous driving	19. Diverting young people who commit minor crimes into support services rather than formal prosecutions	46. Dealing with online abuse and bullying	18. Protecting those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to crime, harm or abuse	6. Dealing with people who sell or use drugs in public places	34. Responding quickly to public calls for urgent assistance	
		45. Dealing with nuisance motorbikes, mopeds and off-road bikes	3. Improving efficiency by using technology and collaborating with other organisations	30. Tackling thefts of and from vehicles	20. Supporting people who experience traumatic crimes to cope and recover	47. Solving more property crimes like burglary and vehicle theft	13. Reducing the incidence, risk and impact of domestic abuse	27. Investigating organised crime such as drugs and gun smuggling and organised exploitation	
			28. Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations	38. Reducing re-offending by managing and rehabilitating offenders	14. Reducing repeat victimisation	12. Dealing with people in mental health crisis whose behaviour is causing concern	48. Finding missing people who might be at risk		
			24. Dealing with rural crimes (e.g. poaching, wildlife persecution and thefts from rural properties)	26. Ensuring ethical standards are upheld and complaints against the police are handled properly	9. Preventing residential burglary	29. Preventing and responding to hate crime	11. Ensuring offenders face consequences for their actions		
				41. Keeping people in police custody safe and recognising those with particular needs	5. Targeting those who commit online frauds and scams	2. Reducing alcohol-related crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour			
				15. Working with communities and involving the public in policing and community safety	22. Investigating reports of sexual abuse where the alleged offender has died	8. Providing reassurance and making sure people feel safe			

FIGURE 12: Composite array representing second-order factor 2B

	High priority								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
40. Dealing with illegal parking		23. Tackling aggressive begging	44. Protecting the public from terrorism and preventing radicalisation	20. Supporting people who experience traumatic crimes to cope and recover	26. Ensuring ethical standards are upheld and complaints against the police are handled properly	4. Investigating crimes that cause serious physical and emotional harm like rape and serious assaults	3. Improving efficiency by using technology and collaborating with other organisations	37. Engaging and listening to communities to build trust and understand people's concerns	15. Working with communities and involving the public in policing and community safety
25. Reducing shoplifting		22. Investigating reports of sexual abuse where the alleged offender has died	11. Ensuring offenders face consequences for their actions	17. Treating people fairly, including when using police powers like stop and search	12. Dealing with people in mental health crisis whose behaviour is causing concern	34. Responding quickly to public calls for urgent assistance	38. Reducing re-offending by managing and rehabilitating offenders	32. Providing a visible police presence on the streets	10. Tackling knife crime and serious violence
		1. Identifying and tackling modern slavery and people trafficking	21. Reducing the harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse	48. Finding missing people who might be at risk	2. Reducing alcohol-related crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour	28. Working in partnership with other agencies and organisations	39. Looking after the welfare and wellbeing of police officers and staff	42. Building strong, resilient and cohesive communities	
		45. Dealing with nuisance motorbikes, mopeds and off-road bikes	6. Dealing with people who sell or use drugs in public places	14. Reducing repeat victimisation	46. Dealing with online abuse and bullying	47. Solving more property crimes like burglary and vehicle theft	7. Encouraging crime reporting, especially where victims lack confidence to come forward	27. Investigating organised crime such as drugs and gun smuggling and organised exploitation	
			24. Dealing with rural crimes (e.g. poaching, wildlife persecution and thefts from rural properties)	16. Promoting road safety by addressing speeding and dangerous driving	13. Reducing the incidence, risk and impact of domestic abuse	18. Protecting those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable to crime, harm or abuse	33. Putting crime victims first		
			5. Targeting those who commit online frauds and scams	9. Preventing residential burglary	35. Tackling sexual violence, abuse and rape	36. Offering 'restorative justice' (contact between victims and offenders to seek resolution and repair harm)	19. Diverting young people who commit minor crimes into support services rather than formal prosecutions		
				30. Tackling thefts of and from vehicles	31. Responding to environmental crimes such as fly-tipping	29. Preventing and responding to hate crime			
				41. Keeping people in police custody safe and recognising those with particular needs	8. Providing reassurance and making sure people feel safe	43. Keeping children and young people safe			

6. OPERATIONAL PRIORITISATION: WHAT THE PUBLIC THINK OF HOW THE POLICE PRIORITISE

6.1 PRIORITY SENSITIVITY

During the second half of each session, respondents were introduced to a set of information, providing general illustrative context on the current police operating environment (in relation to resources, incoming demand, crime, investigations, 'non-crime' demand and ongoing proactive and preventative activities – see Appendix 2).

While aware, in broad terms, of the resourcing pressures facing the public sector, information on the scale and nature of the challenge currently confronting the police was met with concern, an increased appreciation of the need to prioritise and often led to a heightened respect for those making difficult decisions.

"It is quite difficult public service, because of the cuts... you know that they are [happening] but seeing this [information]...we see it on the news... but we don't know what it does to people on the ground...that's the shocking thing." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"I think they [the police] get a rough deal if I'm honest, I think policing is really, really complex and I think...the average member of the public, isn't going to understand the policing model... We see the stuff on the ground, which is important to us, which is the burglary and the assault and all that... whereas, actually, we don't really understand the sort of higher end of the scale that they're working at." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

"You can understand the difficulties of the chief of police, can't you?" (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

That said it is apparent that, a focus in the public discourse on resource pressures, efficiency savings and 'the need to prioritise' can also heighten sensitivity to apparent instances of over-resourcing or 'mis-prioritisation'. The message that the police 'cannot do

everything' clearly lowers the tolerance-threshold for what is deemed unnecessary or disproportionate.

"The village I live in, the only crime we get is burglaries and things like that, but you don't feel unsafe on the streets, you don't really see gangs or anything, but at the same time I've seen PCSOs walking around in the day time...Why? What's the point? You are not going to catch anyone; you are just out for a nice walk in a nice village. Why is the time being wasted when they could be in a different area doing something?" (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 18-30)

"I also think at times that the police go for the easy target which is the motorists. Speeding, I'm not saying it's not important, but fines...for the person who...pays the insurance, is an easy target. It's not them that they should be targeting, it's the people that don't have insurance, don't pay any tax." (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

"They need to do more actual crime fighting and less stopping people for pointless things that are not necessary." (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 31-45)

"Sometimes I see like six cars and a van chasing some little idiot in a Metro. And you think what could 12 of those people be doing?!...waste of resources. It seems like there's nobody at headquarters saying 'you deal with that one'." (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

"They can always find them when the football's on – there's hundreds of them, so where are they [the rest of the time]?" (Hertfordshire, Watford, 60+ retired)

Presenting participants with new information also provided opportunities to explore public reactions to some of the *operational* prioritisation principles and mechanisms currently employed within policing – in

particular, grading emergency responses according to ‘threat, risk, harm’ (and vulnerability) and ‘screening out’ (or providing only a basic, transactional, investigative responses to ‘routine’ property crimes, in order to focus resource on more serious, complex, ‘high harm’ cases).

In both cases, when explained and set in context, these approaches received general public support; although both generated questions, caveats, and areas of unease.

6.2 THREAT, RISK, HARM AND VULNERABILITY

In relation to grading responses to calls for service, it was broadly accepted that some form of ‘triaging’ or assessment protocol was an operational necessity, particularly in the context of stretched resources – and that the criteria for doing so summed up by the words ‘threat, risk, harm’ and ‘vulnerability’ were appropriate ones.

“They’ve got to prioritise haven’t they? They can’t just be going out if someone rings up saying there is a cat stuck in a tree. If there is ‘threat, harm and a risk’, the call [handler] has to establish basic information and then the risk is whether their judgement is right or wrong. They have to have a remit to work to or they wouldn’t be able to respond to anything.” (Dorset, ‘county’, 46-65)

“They need some scale though don’t they? They’ve got a reduced resource, they can’t just deal with every call, and they’ve got to have some scale. It just depends who’s on shift [what resources are available] what they can deal with.” (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 18-30)

“I don’t think anyone in their position and faced with that decision would disagree with what they’re doing, it’s sort of common decency to think that those sort of victims should be prioritised.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

“They have to prioritise because of the limited resources. It’s not that they don’t want to attend, it’s that...it’s better to prioritise in areas that are going to be of value.” (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

“You’d expect vulnerable people to be prioritised.” (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

On a number of occasions however, the general pragmatism conveyed by the above quotations came into tension with the *emotional* urgency some had experienced when making calls for emergency assistance – the overwhelming reaction being that in such situations they just wanted to be listened to and to trust that assistance would be dispatched without delay.

“If it’s urgent, it’s urgent. You don’t question somebody’s judgement if you can help it, if someone thinks it’s urgent to them, it is urgent...if its left for three and half, four, five hours before somebody comes out, its developed into a much worse situation.” (Hertfordshire, North Herts., 46-65)

“You hope that the individual making that call would know that they are calling 999 and it’s an emergency number. And if you are contacting 999 as an emergency then I would expect somebody to come.” (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 46-65)

“I’ve had to dial 999 quite a few times and luckily they’ve come to me, but how can they say whether somebody’s not going to be at harm, if it carries on? You don’t know. At that moment when you are making that phone call, you are wanting their help. You are putting your trust that they will come. I expect them to come.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

At the same time however, it was broadly acknowledged that police time was sometimes wasted by people making inappropriate calls, which did not warrant the unconditional deployment of a resource.

“Shocking isn’t it?...how much of a waste of time the calls that are coming in. People need to be educated more to what actually is a 999 call and what isn’t. And actually, I think there needs to be a small fine in place if people do waste time.” (Dorset, ‘conurbation’, 31-45)

Questions were also raised about the skills and judgement required for assessing risks based on partial information and in dynamic circumstances. Occasionally, those who had experienced it, were critical of the fact-finding questions they had been asked during a call.

“I suppose that depends on who’s taking the call, as to how they prioritise, their training has got to be of a sufficiently good standard to allow a consistent approach throughout, and I’m not sure that happens.” (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

"My concern with anything like this is that it depends on how articulate the individual is who has done the reporting, so you've got serious crime going on and because they're not able to paint the correct picture of what's going on, then it gets misdiagnosed and given a low priority."
(Humberside, East Riding, 60+ retired)

"I live in an apartment block and we had an intruder trying to get in...he was obviously under the influence...so I rang the police and I'm looking down on this guy from the first floor and the person on the other end of the phone went 'does he have mental health issues?' and I had to bite my lip... 'I don't know, just get somebody down here!'" (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

For some, the practice of 'grading' or 'triaging' also provoked unease about the possibility of 'rationing' or a 'retreating' threshold, that it seemed to imply.

"But who sets those levels of what is a 'threat'?"
(Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

"The bar gets lifted every time. If the crime figures are going up and the numbers to respond are going down, what is harmful and dangerous now, will be normal tomorrow and next week, and it will get worse and worse until it's only the really serious stuff." (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

Others commented on the concerning and negative messages these processes had potential to convey, both to individual crime victims/callers and the public at large, particularly if communications were not handled skilfully and sensitively.

"You can't expect the police to come out if your shed's been broken into, I wouldn't expect that. But I wouldn't expect to deal with a call centre either that's just going to say well 'tough luck mate, there's nothing we can do about it'."
(Derbyshire, Erewash, 46-65)

"I think as well, it's perception isn't it? So, I might be ringing and I might decide that it's a 999 call for me – and perhaps it genuinely isn't a 999 call but still a policing matter – but if nobody attends, then actions speak louder than words. They can do all the talk that they want, trying to reassure you that 'we're here in the community' and 'your views matter to us', but actually, if in reality, I called them about a policing matter and they never showed up, it doesn't matter what they tell me, actually my own interaction with police has been a really bad experience." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

6.3 'SCREENING OUT'

Information about operational prioritisation in relation to crime investigation was met with the same qualified pragmatism as it was for response policing. In general terms, the judgement that more 'harmful' crimes should be prioritised for investigation, over less serious (although more numerous) 'everyday' offences was accepted by respondents.

"Yes, it's a big inconvenience if you get burgled...that's why you have insurance. Don't get me wrong, I'd be extremely annoyed...is it worth tying up the police for another two three weeks when there is something else more serious they could potentially be dealing with?...I'd be upset, there's the impact on you, but then there should be a follow up via a different community aspect to deal with the emotional side of it." (Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

"It's news [to me] that they put other crimes on the back-foot to deal with more rape reports and stuff, but then also, would you expect them to do anything else? I think they're doing the right thing."
(Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"If you put [a theft] against physical violence or rape or something where someone has suffered real physical harm, you can't rate it the same, it's got to fall lower down. Ideally it would be lovely if everything could be treated the same but it can't be." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 46-65)

"Knife crime, rape, murder, it hasn't affected me personally and it's things which affect us that are bound to be the things that we bring forward, but I still think the priorities [for investigation] have got to be the knife crime and the murders."
(Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

Again however – and perhaps even more strongly in this case – public pragmatism was tempered with some discomfort. For some, this centred on the possibility of ostensibly 'less serious' crimes that none-the-less had a strong impact on their victims, remaining uninvestigated and the needs of victims being ignored.

"In that person's [the crime victim's] head, it's a big deal to them, might not be to you, might not be to the policeman, but for them it could be a life-changing thing." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

"Because whatever crime has happened, it might not be important to the police but it's important to that person." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"I can understand the police, you've got limited resources, we can't find a suspect, we just want to close those down as quickly as possible, so that we've got time to go and work on something else. But for the victim, that's not what the victim wants to hear is it?" (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

Others noted the negative impressions the practice seemed likely to convey about the attitude of the police – again stressing the importance of communication and public explanation.

"You just want to feel confident that if you're a victim of crime, rather than [the police] just saying 'we don't think there's any evidence, we can't look into it'...that gives people a really bad impression of the police, and that's not doing anything to put the police in a positive light in people's minds because they just feel like they're fobbed off." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 18-30)

Most frequently however, respondents raised concerns about the impact of the practice on local crime rates, suggesting that it would embolden 'petty' criminals, lead to an escalation of criminal careers and have wider negative societal consequences in terms of public attitudes, anxieties and morale.

"I think there is a perception that anyone can do the small stuff because you're not going to get caught...the deterrent just disappears if you know that, 'actually, it's not really serious what I've been up to, so I won't get found out, I won't get investigated and I'll hear nothing more about it' – and does that perpetuate more of the same thing?" (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

"Petty crime can also be a stepping stone to serious crime; a kid's nicked a car, then perhaps goes into a house and steals something and gradually progresses. If you get away with a small crime, what's to stop you getting away with the next one?" (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

"We're going to have to start living in a fortress, aren't we? Protecting ourselves...this is the downward spiral, that low level...it's going to be that you are going to have to look after yourself, you're going to have to have shutters on your windows and cameras on your doors." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

"It's demoralising for the nation as a whole I think if you see that people constantly get away with these petty crimes." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 60+ retired)

Overall, these findings provide reassurance that some of the basic principles that contemporary policing has come to rely on to make pressing operational judgements are broadly aligned with considered public thinking. That is not to say that when experienced directly, the public always recognise these judgements as necessitated by resourcing pressures, or that they do not feel the 'absences' and 'deficits' they create, just that put in the same circumstances, they feel they would probably make the same decisions. It is also clear that once explained they recognise a number of problematic issues these practices leave unresolved, on occasions so problematic that they prompt a rejection of the premise for 'prioritising' altogether.

"I understand the need to grade the calls, given all the cuts and stuff but they shouldn't need to, the funding should be there so that they can respond to anything and everything if needed...the government cutting things is a massively bigger picture...it is the safety of the public that they are putting at risk, with all the cuts. It shouldn't be something that should be cut." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"All I'm saying is that when someone breaks into your house there's an emotional effect... and I don't think it's good enough, I think the police would need to go back to their higher body and say, we are not happy with this." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 46-65)

KEY FINDING: [Introducing new contextual information on contemporary policing drew greater recognition of the need for the police to prioritise, but also heightened sensitivity to examples of apparent mis-prioritisation. When set in context, operational approaches to prioritising calls for service and crime investigation met with qualified public support.](#)

7. PUBLIC VIEWS ON 'NON-CRIME' DEMAND: *RESIST THE DRIFT, FIX THE SYSTEM*

As discussed in Section 4.4, respondents' views on police priorities were shaped to a large extent by firmly embedded, and relatively traditional, views on what was, and was not, within the core police remit, relative to those of other agencies and actors. While not easy to capture or summarise, there was strong consensus that this remit included providing a generalist emergency service that would respond to immediate danger, threat, or even 'concerning irregularity', regardless of whether it linked to crime or not. Reports of people who had gone missing or who were in apparent mental health crises, fitted squarely within this aspect of the remit.

"And I don't think you can ever, ever leave missing children, you've got to find them... I think that it is [core policing], getting them to a safe place, children don't run away for nothing." (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

"[In relation to a suicidal person] you can't ignore that can you? This is a life. And it's not making other people around feel safe is it? That's worrying." (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

"If there was a naked women running up and down Watford High Street who would you report it to? You'd phone the police first...that sort of thing we tend to default to the police." (Hertfordshire, Watford, 60+ retired)

"I think it goes back to, when they answer the call, if somebody's in harm, a threat, or at risk, if anybody feels that, then that's the police's remit." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

However, it was also clear that new information about the increasing levels of demand being placed on the police by 'non-crime' issues, such as Mental Health Act detentions, missing persons enquiries and safety and welfare concerns, met with a degree of 'remit discomfort'. Respondents often expressed the need to limit and qualify the extent of police involvement in these issues, either by dealing with them only so far as they were crime 'related'.

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

Respondent *"I'm with the crime...for safety and welfare there are plenty of other people. OK, it may cross over a little bit for reporting and support but ...you've got probation, health visitors, social services. Police for me, in my opinion, should be about crime." (Hertfordshire, North Herts., 46-65)*

"If someone who has got mental health issues is a danger either to themselves or others, then that should be high up the [police] priority list... if a crime effectively is being committed ... [but] I think mental health services should be dealing with most of it but obviously there is a line." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

"It depends on whether it crosses over into crime doesn't it? If it's a mental health issue that isn't crime related, in other words if this person hasn't knifed someone, then another agency could perhaps deal with it." (Hertfordshire, Watford, 60+ retired)

Or by focusing on the *immediate* emergency, leaving others to take over once a situation had stabilised – and to think about prevention.

"I think sometimes they [the police] are needed, when there's mental health issues, sometimes it is important that they're there, but I think sometimes social services should take over. But obviously sometimes [someone] needs to be restrained, or the ambulance service need [police] help." (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 18-30)

"I think police should [concentrate on the] 'act of crime', you know the actual emergencies and [other] agencies should act at preventing emergencies. That's how I think it should be cut." (Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

"I understand that [that someone in mental health crisis may become violent] but I don't think the police should have to do that, they [should] go there, deal with the violence, then hand it over to a social worker." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

Overall, while respondents recognised that these were difficult and complex social issues to resolve, they expressed a desire for forms of response that matched the problems: for the 'right' demands and functions to be dealt with by the 'right' agencies, each taking ownership of what they are trained for, best at and existed to do. For the police, this meant that responding to acute welfare concerns should, in an ideal world, remain an important but relatively minor aspect of their broader set of responsibilities.

"I think it's really annoying when you hear about the police doing a standoff for four hours for someone on a roof with [a] mental health [crisis] and those police officers could be dealing with a crime. But then on the other hand, what [else] would we do with this person?" (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 31-45)

"It's not a waste of [police] resource, but it's a resource isn't it, to go and do a welfare check." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

"It's a difficult one; OK if they are at the top of a car-park threatening to jump off, but if it is just someone having a mental breakdown and a crisis, the police aren't for that. They are not trained; they are not able to cope with the capacity." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 46-65)

"I don't know; it's the same with homeless[ness]. It just overwhelms me because I've got so many feelings [either] way. I feel so sorry for them...but that's not what the police is for." (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

More than anything, information about the rising levels of 'non-crime', safety and welfare demand on the police provoked a realisation that 'the system' in place for addressing (broadly defined) public safety and 'social need', was not well configured to the current set of challenges or profile of demand. Rather than expecting the police to take on a broader, less clearly defined workload to 'plug the gaps', respondents tended to suggest the appropriate response should be broader systemic redesign.

"Would not the increase in involvement of other agencies help with some of this [demand]? 6 out of 10 missing people are children in care, does that not highlight that something's not happening?...Something's not working as it should be, so that needs to be addressed." (Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

"It's almost like we need to take the carpet from under them [public services], shake it, get it all sorted and put it back under them. Which never happens does it?" (Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

For some, answers lay in better funding for other services:

"We've removed a lot of the funding and a lot of the specialist care for people with mental health issues and that's resulted in more [people with mental health problems] on the streets without... regular care...and the police pick that up and they shouldn't need to ...At the moment they have to because there is nobody else." (Humberside, East Riding, 60+ retired)

"It is other organisations that are under-funded, under resourced as well as the police. And the police are being expected to take up the slack." (Hertfordshire, North Herts., 46-65)

Others suggested creating new agencies, or new functions, teams or departments within existing services, to better deal with the profile of need and demand;

"I think there should be more overlap in terms of who can respond to things [in an emergency]... not just police but social workers, mental health workers people who are on standby to help rather than police having to pick people up and take them to where they can be helped...there should be more support available for the...social side of policing work." (Humberside, N.E. Lincs., 46-65)

"We almost need 'layers' of police, don't we?" (Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

"It's almost like you need a different department again to do the 'safe and well checks' as opposed to police officers." (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

"They need a mental health team; we need like police, fire, mental health." (Northamptonshire, Northampton, 18-30)

"The thing is, with these things like the mental health and missing people which are not crime, what can you say? You can't say 'oh we are not going looking for that woman because she's only been gone for two days...and she can look after herself' and then you find her hanging in the woods two days later. So there has got to be some sort of – perhaps it's a new agency?" (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

Overall, as these suggestions for change indicate, although initially working from a relatively static and traditional view of what the police and other agencies should do, respondents generally showed willingness to think differently and to accept new service arrangements, if these presented a better systemic response to the set of challenges and demands currently being faced. In particular, there were often calls for the public to be better 'educated' or to be given different 'rules' about how they should engage and interface with services, including by directing calls and referrals in a more discriminating way;

"People's knowledge of what is available out there is lacking...there's lots of prevention teams but we don't know any of them...if someone is maybe struggling with mental health, you see them and...they are maybe acting a bit crazy and yelling, and maybe you're a little bit worried, you call the police...because, who else do you call?...there are other organisations for sure, but I've never seen a sign for it... you call the police because there is no one else that we know of." (Hertfordshire, Three Rivers, 31-45)

"Maybe people need to be told like, who do you call? Like if you step into a room and your friend's cutting themselves, who do you call?" (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

"I guess though, with the NHS, now you see a lot of posters, like 'you've got this, you go to the pharmacy' I think it's a lot clearer now, where to take each kind of problem and there isn't that kind of differentiation between the police, it's just 'the police'." (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

On occasions, as we will see in Section 9, the idea that the public should have a different and more involved role to play in tackling community safety and local welfare issues was developed beyond just knowing how to better direct calls for service.

Overall, it is apparent that while there is some public openness to 'doing things differently', there is also a need for clarity about 'what the system is'; if the public are to be asked to step away from their traditional preconceptions and expectations about the roles of the police and other agencies, they need to have an alternative configuration and 'settlement' articulated to them. As expressed in the quotation below, there is little confidence that ambiguity will lead to effective outcomes.

"If they don't know what their strategy is, and they don't know what their responsibility is, and what they are accountable for, they are never ever going to achieve their goals". (Gwent, Newport, 60+ retired)

KEY FINDING: Information on the extent of 'non-crime', welfare and safety-related police demand came into tension with 'traditional' public pre-conceptions about the police remit. Although the importance of policing as a generalist emergency service was widely acknowledged, rather than accepting routine 'drift' into territory more naturally and expertly covered by others, the public tended to respond with suggestions for more fundamental, systemic service reform.

8. MAKING TRADE-OFFS

Towards the end of (almost) every session, once participants had considered their own policing priorities, discussed these with their peers, and heard and thought about new information, they were asked to take part in a group decision making exercise. As well as exploring prioritisation from a new angle, this was intended to instigate some ‘deliberative’ processes, by asking groups to reflect on what they had heard and learned, and work through differences of opinion to arrive at a consensus decision.²⁰

Groups were presented with a brief description of a ‘good service’ in each of five broad areas of police functionality (emergency response, neighbourhood policing, public protection, crime investigation and proactive operations) and told that to secure this level of provision, they would need to allocate four tokens (symbolising units of resource) to that function. A ‘good service’ in all five areas would therefore require 20 tokens, however the group were provided with only 14 in total, and asked to come to a joint decision about

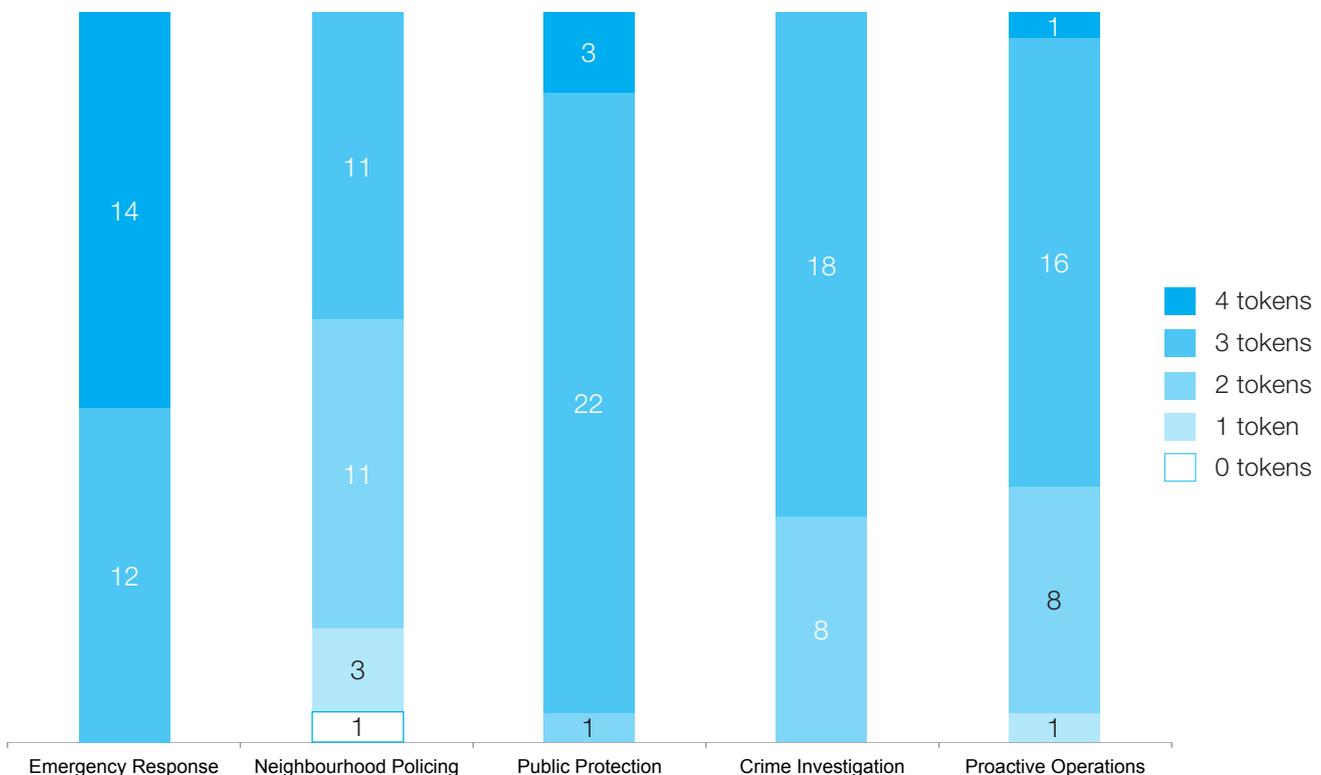
how these should be distributed between the five functions.

Participants often found the task difficult and engaged in considerable debate about which areas should be protected, with many feeling that all the functions were important. This tended to result in a relatively even spread of resources being allocated; in only five out of the 26 occasions the exercise was run²¹, did any function receive either only one or no units of resource.

Overall, groups tended to be most concerned to protect resources for emergency response; with a full complement of four tokens allocated in 14 cases (and with three units given in the other 12 instances), meaning trade-offs had to be made elsewhere.

More often than not, this resulted in least resource being provided for neighbourhood policing, with two or fewer units allocated in 15 out of 26 cases. This overall pattern was observed in all areas except Humberside and for all age groups (aggregated across forces) –

FIGURE 13: Number of occasions (out of 26) on which each function was allocated number of resource tokens



20 Although it is accepted that, as a relatively short exercise that simplified the realities and complexities of policing models, it could only ever be a ‘light’ approximation of full deliberative exercises.

21 The exercise was not conducted in two cases due to time constraints. In Hertfordshire a slight variation was applied with groups asked to allocate 16 rather than 14 units of resource.

FIGURE 14: Percentage share of all resource received (26 group exercises combined)



although for the 46-65 group ‘proactive operations’ also receive comparatively less resource.

The choice to ‘deprioritise’ neighbourhood policing in this way was often taken reluctantly, with participants acknowledging it’s contradiction with views they had previously expressed about diminished visibility and local knowledge. On several occasions it was clear that the exercise helped explain ‘real-world’ changes in provision they had observed.

Within several of the groups a number of passionate advocates were encountered who argued for the long term, strategic/preventative value of neighbourhood policing (and whose arguments sometimes swayed their colleagues);

“If you invest more in neighbourhood policing today it means that the police force aren’t necessarily going to be super stretched in the future.”
(Derbyshire, High Peak, 31-45)

“If you were looking at a 10 year plan, if you took this [neighbourhood policing] as a priority you would see everything reduce... it’s not the basis of what you want right this minute, but if you are looking at 10 years-time you want to be proactive”. (Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

However, for most, in the crucible of competing demands, neighbourhood policing was just the *least essential* area of policing.

“I love them [local neighbourhood police officers], I’d quite happily keep them, but there are bigger things going on, I’d rather they were used to stop.” (Dorset, ‘county’, 18-30)

“We aren’t saying that it [neighbourhood policing] is unimportant, we’re saying that these [other areas] are more important.” (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 60+ retired)

“But that’s what we have all been whinging about – we’ve all basically said there is not enough neighbourhood policing and community stuff!”
(Nottinghamshire, Newark & Sherwood, 46-65)

“I’d say neighbourhood policing was important too, but that [this exercise] obviously explains why we haven’t seen too many of them.” (Dorset, ‘conurbation’, 60+ retired)

KEY FINDING: When asked to make trade-offs between policing functions the most common tendency was for people to protect resources for response policing, often at the expense of neighbourhood policing. Although they do so reluctantly and acknowledge the contradictions with other views, neighbourhood policing is generally seen as the least essential aspect of policing.

9. DOES DELIBERATION CHANGE PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES?

At the end of each session, participants were asked to return to their original Q sort boards and spend a short time considering whether it *still* provided the best representation of their views; or whether, after listening to other perspectives, discussing points of difference and hearing new information, they felt they wanted to make amendments to reflect a shift in their personal perspective.

Three quarters (75.2 per cent²²) of participants made some adjustment to their board, with an average of four moved items per participant. The net impact of this on the aggregate mean scores, and overall rank order of items was relatively marginal (see Appendix 8), however there were indications within the data, of patterns of change that suggest the process tended to develop people's views in particular directions.

Figure 15 shows the percentage of participants who gave each item a higher or lower ranking position at the end of the session compared with their starting Q sort²³. It prompts a number of observations.

First, there is evidence of a strengthening of consensus around many of the issues that were felt to be the highest and lowest police priorities at the start of the sessions. This is plausibly an effect of participants listening to and being persuaded by others as they explained their choices, and a collective convergence around the 'harm' and 'remit' principles previously discussed. This manifests as (even) greater priority being given to emergency response (34: +12%²⁴), organised crime (27: +4.4%), knife crime (10: +4.4%) and investigating harmful crimes (04: +2.8%), and to lower priority being given to tackling vehicle crime (30: -7.2%) (because perceived to be low harm), mental health (12: -6.8%) and supporting recovery (47: -6.0%) (because perceived not to be 'core' policing), and

aggressive begging (23: 5.6%), fly-tipping (31: -4.8%), (because perceived to be neither), at the end of the session compared to the start.

"I took the 'mental health' one down because I thought that was important at the beginning, but after the conversation we've had, I've realised it's more of a low priority for the police and a high priority probably for social services." (Derbyshire, High Peak, 60+ retired)

"I moved the 'urgent assistance' one, because I agree with a lot of points that were made about it. It should be high priority." (Nottinghamshire, Nottingham, 31-45)

"I brought down 'reducing reoffending by managing and rehabilitating offenders' because of the discussion about that – that's not the police's role it could be charities or whatever." (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

Second, the item most often seen as more important at the end of the session compared to the start, related to partnership working (28: +15.6%), with improving efficiency through technology and collaboration also gaining a (net) higher ranking (03: +6.4%). This appears to reflect a realisation during the discussion, of the complexity and 'multi-agency' nature of many of policing's current challenges, particularly around 'non-crime' demand, and that the solutions are not ones police alone can deliver.

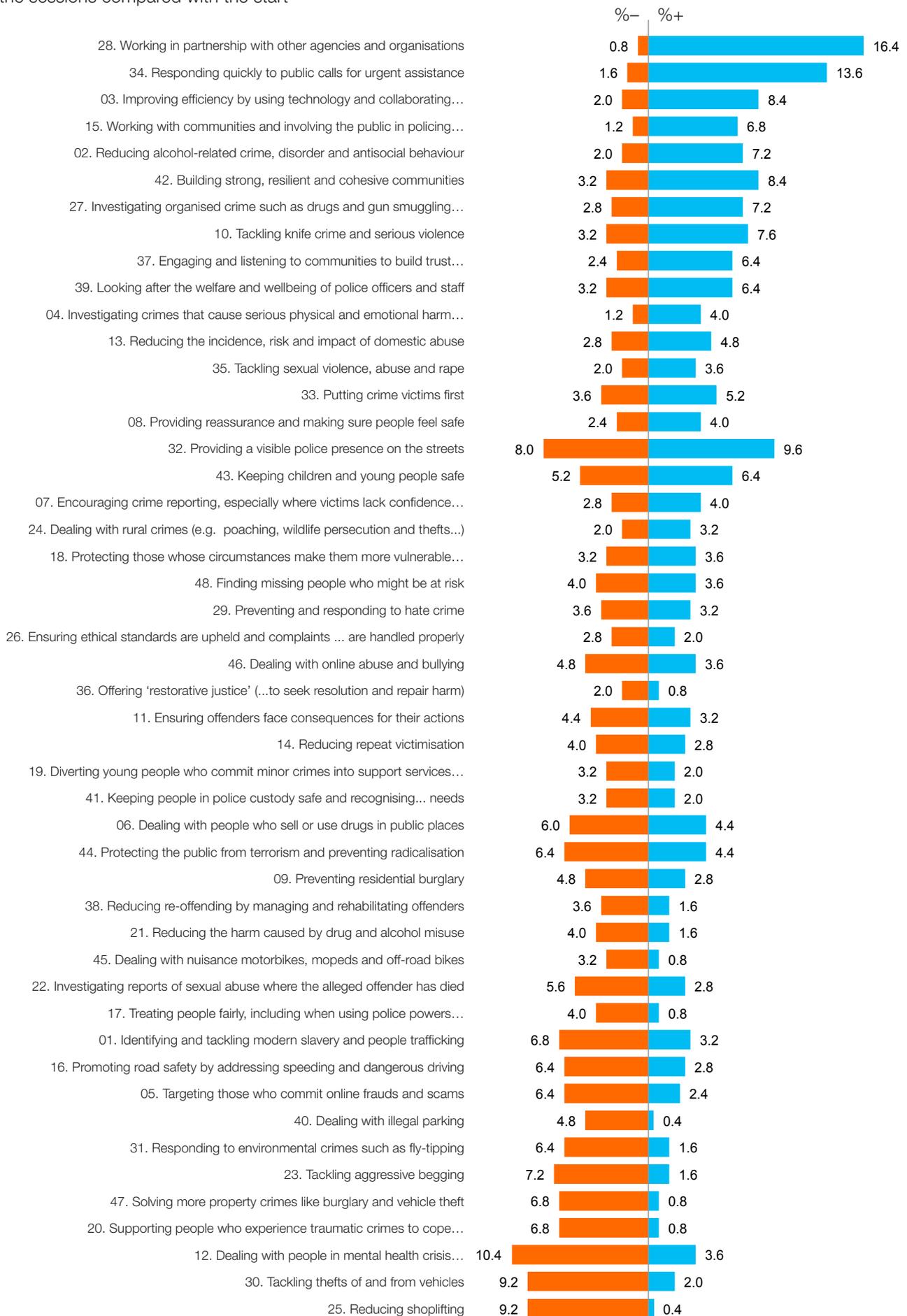
"I've just thought... 'working in partnership with other agencies and organisations', the first time I didn't really think a lot of it... now you're thinking, actually the more you [make that] a priority you're hopefully [getting] a lot less crap filtered through to

22 Of 250 participants who completed usable opening and closing Q sorts.

23 No account is taken of the extent to which any item was moved, ie a participant may have moved an item up or down by one column or several.

24 Brackets contain the item number and the net percentage of participants who ranked the item higher/lower).

FIGURE 15: Proportion of all participants (n=250) who ranked each item as a higher or lower priority at the end of the sessions compared with the start



[the police] – not ‘crap’, but stuff they can’t really influence.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

“I [moved up] working in partnership with other organisations because that could take the pressure off.” (Dorset, ‘county’, 18-30)

Thirdly, there was a modest but consistent net increase in the priority given to items relating to community policing, in particular for working with communities (15: +5.6%), building strong communities (42: +5.2%) and engagement (37: +4.0%). As illustrated by the comments below, this is reflective of a general shift towards a longer-term, more strategic perspective and recognition that communities have a positive role to play in addressing many of the issues that generate police demand.

“I pushed up quite a few of the ‘working with community’ ones [items]...Originally, they were, for me, quite low priority – I looked at knife crime and everything – but if you look at being preventative and look at a 10 year plan rather than now...it’s just then how do you convey that to Joe Public? ...most people in the country want something doing now.” (Hertfordshire, Stevenage, 18-30)

“[The session has made me think about] what we as a community can do more, to help to support the police and see if we can be a bit more positive – influence a bit more positively our communities ourselves, without draining other resources. Like supporting young people, making more youth groups available...I just think maybe there is more we can do out there to take the pressure off.” (Dorset, ‘conurbation’, 31-45)

“I think [in relation to] protecting people who are vulnerable, that can be something that the public can have quite a big influence on, because if the neighbourhood looks after the people who are slightly more vulnerable, that will take away the time that the police have to do that job, and I

think that should be quite an important thing that people consider. Looking out for your neighbour and things like that, that’s something that the public can do.” (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

“I do think that neighbourhood policing is more important now than I did in the beginning, definitely, because I can see how it can be a knock-on effect and be really positive.” (Gwent, Newport, 31-45)

Fourth, it is interesting to note that opinions on police visibility and presence shifted in both directions during the process (38: +9.6% and -8.0% = +1.6%). As described in Section 3, most sessions included some discussion about the perceived absence of a deterrent police presence, along with some doubts about its efficacy and relative value. It appears to be an area where there is some scope for public opinions to shift, but one in which the arguments are complex and consensus appears elusive.

Fifth, the greater priority given by some participants, to community-oriented items and police visibility, along with officer and staff wellbeing (39: +3.2%) and ‘core’ policing elements (including tackling knife crime and organised crime), indicate a tendency for views to shift in the direction of the minority 2B ‘reform, involve, innovate’ position (identified in the second-order factor analysis (see Section 5.2)).

While we must be cautious of over-simplifying,²⁵ Table 4 confirms that the proportion of participants whose Q sorts significantly correlated with the 2B array, increased between the start and the end of the sessions (particularly at P>0.05 and P>0.01), while the proportion that correlated with 2A changed only negligibly.

Finally, and more generally, it is worth reflecting on participants’ closing remarks from the end of the sessions which overwhelmingly suggest that time spent considering the challenges and decisions confronting contemporary policing leads to greater respect and

TABLE 4: Number and proportion of starting and ending Q sorts significantly correlating with second order arrays (2A and 2B)

	2A		2B	
	Start (n=253)	End (n=250)	Start (n=253)	End (n=250)
P>0.05	241 (95.3%)	241 (96.4%)	85 (33.6%)	97 (38.8%)
P>0.01	231 (91.3%)	231 (92.4%)	36 (14.2%)	50 (20.0%)
P>0.001	213 (84.2%)	214 (85.6%)	15 (5.9%)	16 (6.4%)

25 There was little evidence, for instance, of any shift toward the more progressive criminal justice alternatives 2B favours.

more appreciative outlook towards the institution. They also indicate that participants found the experience valuable and left with a view that they, and the public at large, should know more, engage and be engaged more, and be in a position to play a more informed and active role in keeping their communities safe.

"So, the way that people do give the police a bit of a hard time – not responding if your car's been stolen or 'they didn't really do anything' – when you start thinking about the wider picture and what they actually are dealing with, it's not just because they're sat in their office on the phone with a cup of tea. It's a bit different...the lack of resources, and they're dealing with quite a lot more serious stuff." (Derbyshire, Erewash, 18-30)

"I think again, awareness [needs to be] with the people, if we're a bit more educated and we see an issue, we can try and help." (Gwent, Monmouthshire, 18-30)

"If you know what's going on, you feel reassured; when you are given information, when you are told about these things [as in the session], that creates reassurance...We are left in the dark at the moment. The fact that things are happening [the police are active], things are going on, there are problems out there that they are trying to tackle, that are [the police's] priority and you are not just being left in the dark or the last priority call." (Dorset, 'conurbation', 31-45)

Respondent 1: *"I think by us having this knowledge [having taken part in the focus group] gives us better information to have a nicer view on the police service. So if anything, if the general public had a similar piece of information they could also have a more positive approach towards them".*

Respondent 2: *"I want to go and hug a police officer, now!"*

Respondent 3: *"How many thousands of people, if they had the same information, would then change to the same view? All of us wanted an extra policeman in our town, and now we are all like; actually, it's a bigger picture." (Northamptonshire, S. Northants., 31-45)*

KEY FINDING: Discussing police priorities, considering contextual information and making joint decisions with peers tended to shift respondents' views in the direction of consensus and towards more strategic, preventative concerns, including for partnership working and community policing. This represents a shift in the direction of the more 'radical' (second-order) minority viewpoint. Respondents reported a greater respect and appreciation for the institution of policing after taking part in the exercise and reflected on the value of deeper public engagement.

10. UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC'S PRIORITIES FOR POLICING: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The public sense a turn for the worse. In 2019 many familiar places feel different; no longer thriving, less cared for, increasingly populated by the marginal, the unpredictable, and those who seem to follow different rules. Unsettled by a national narrative of knives, lost youth, and online threat, many feel in their stomachs that malice and menace are closer to home – the homes they share with their children and loved ones. Where they once looked to the police for presence, protection, redress and reassurance, they now – too often for comfort – feel absence, equivocation, frustration and uncertainty about what they should legitimately expect. There is no doubt that the police covenant with the public – although embedded in a firm foundation of support – has recently been unsettled.

But the British public are also reasonable, socially minded and pragmatic and, with only minimal direction, readily embrace the role of citizen policy-makers rather than demanding consumers of public service policing. Asked to consider *what the police should prioritise* they engage deeply, morally and responsibly. They recognise their own subjectivities and located-ness but also the importance of holding their personal needs and preferences in check. The universalisation process that follows is notably sensitive to harm, regardless of whether it is patent or latent, physical or psychological (but less so purely financial) and particularly where it is direct and concentrated on 'the person'. However, the public also have strong and relatively traditional preconceptions about *'what the police do'*, which stands in relation to the perceived social remits and responsibilities of other agencies, organisations, individuals, communities and business, and this too shapes what they judge the police *specifically* should prioritise. We should keep in mind that the public categorically *do not* want the police to solve all society's problems – they want everyone to play their (own) part – and do so effectively.

This combined process of weighing impact and considering remit leads people, 'on aggregate' to a clear cut and remarkably consistent set of *considered* public priorities for the police. The public *do* want the police to buffer and protect them against the 'everyday' insecurities they feel and to pull closer, where they have recently felt withdrawal. They want the police to come quickly when called, deal with public place drugs activity (often seen as a particular signal that *'all is not well here'*) and provide a (primarily) deterrent presence on the streets. But above all, they want the police to address serious and sexual violence in society, along with other intensively harmful crimes like terrorism, child abuse and modern-slavery. These crimes are recognised as having severe, direct and concentrated impacts on their victims, but also as being unequivocally 'police-business' and they therefore rise to the top of the priority pile. For the same reasons there is a strong consensus that the police should focus on fighting organised crime. Perhaps reflecting the baseline of underlying trust and public 'good faith' in the police, people generally care more about *'the what'* of policing than *'the how'*, although in the absence of a convincing argument for doing things differently, they prefer to stick with familiar and conventional methods.

What the public clearly *do not* feel the police should prioritise are the 'low level' offences, antisocial behaviours and incivilities that are often (including within the opening quotation of this report) taken to be 'the public's priorities'. That is not to say that these things do not have considerable impacts on quality of life, or – as PCCs, MPs, local councillors or neighbourhood police officers will attest – that people do not feel a strong need for assistance in resolving these issues where they affect them personally. There remain strongly felt public needs and demands for local order maintenance and neighbourhood 'problem solving', but set against the intense harms of serious violence and abuse, and with opportunities identified for other actors to contribute solutions, people consistently judge that these cannot be *priority* issues for the police.

RECOMMENDATION 1: There is a need to reconsider how we conceptualise and address local 'quality of life' issues and ubiquitous neighbourhood problems. First, and most narrowly, **the language used in public engagement strategies, Police and Crime Plans, guidance documentation (and similar) should be revised.** These issues may well be valid public demands and concerns, but the public do not consider them priorities for the police. Continuing to refer them as such, will perpetuate a misunderstanding of the public's policing objectives and exaggerate the degree of difference between police and public value frameworks. Second, and more broadly, we echo HMCIC Winsor's call for an "open and honest debate about what the public should expect from the police" (HMICFRS 2019a). In addition we advocate that this **debate should focus on whether and how these local 'quality of life' problems and concerns should be addressed, and, in particular, by whom the response to them should be coordinated and delivered.** The roll-out of the Neighbourhood Policing Programme (ending in 2008) saw the police take explicit ownership for convening the community and partnership response to locally identified 'priority' issues. More than a decade on, much of the provision for this has been eroded or redirected (HMICFRS, 2017; Higgins, 2018) but the expectation remains, and no clear alternative arrangements have been put in place. With an increase in officer numbers imminent, this research indicates the need to think carefully about whether to reinstate this functionality, or focus new resource on the response to the 'higher-harm' issues that constitute the public's considered priorities. This may mean locating the ownership and coordination for local 'quality-of-life' concerns elsewhere.

We should also not dismiss the above finding as a trick of geographic perspective. Our frame for exploring police priorities has been deliberately broad and general rather than locally focused, but the relative importance attached to community policing as a process, as well as to its typical contents, was generally found to be muted. Listening to, working with and strengthening communities were rarely placed high on the police priority list and, when asked to make trade-offs, neighbourhood policing was most often compromised in order to prop-up other 'more essential' functions.

With regard to this particular finding, and more generally, this research conveys a strong sense of alignment between considered public opinion and the vein of recent police decision making. For example, the typical trajectory of the group resource allocation exercises, (undertaken towards the end of the group sessions – see Section 8), bears uncanny parallels to the journeys police forces have taken in relation to their policing models over recent years. The unfolding sequence of considerations – trimming across a range of functions (because 'everything's important'), the strong imperative to protect emergency response and (to some extent) public protection functions, the reluctant decision to erode neighbourhood policing and then some doubts and counter-voices arguing for its longer-term strategic importance – will feel familiar to those involved in designing police services over the last decade. There are parallels in other areas too – the public orientation towards harm, the general (although qualified) support for triaging calls for service according to *'threat, risk, harm and vulnerability'* and (with more qualification) for 'screening out' routine acquisitive crime investigations so that resources can be concentrated on more serious and complex cases. We began this investigation, and this report, by highlighting the need to ratify a recent turn in police value structures against the public view, and can now provide some reassurance that when the choices are set in context the police and public often tend to think alike, come to similar conclusions and hold the same reservations.

There is no room for complacency however. As we have seen, the increased prominence of *'the need to prioritise'* in public policing discourse, can have a sensitising effect. This means that examples of *apparent* police 'mis-prioritisation', disproportionality or over-resourcing, are quickly called out – not just as officiousness or over-reaction but also as *inefficiency*. Large events operations, multiple units responding to incidents, proactive traffic enforcement, stop and search operations and even visible patrols in quieter places are all (rightly or wrongly) liable to attract the

reaction: 'surely the police have better things to be doing?' and we should be concerned when they do.

Here it is worth considering again the role that police priorities – whether expressed through public communications or inferred from police actions – might play in conferring *legitimacy*, and activating pro-social behaviours (Tyler and Jackson, 2013, Bradford and Jackson, 2011, Jackson et al, 2012). If police, as potent symbols of society, demonstrate that they are 'taking the right things seriously' there is only a short and plausible theoretical step to generating the 'moral alignment' that has been linked to social identification, public cooperation and the propensity to obey the law. Conversely, if the police are felt to *have got their priorities wrong*, cooperation and compliance is more likely to be reserved. We tentatively put forward the notion of *strategic justice* to sit alongside more the familiar concept of *procedural justice* and (as we discuss later) suggest 'deliberative democracy' provides a potential means for achieving it.

We must be cautious of over-generalising. Our research coverage has been partial and contains blind-spots, particularly in relation to urban and more ethnically diverse sections of the population, (which we will seek to address through future research). However, in respect of the above mechanism, the broad public consensus around police priorities identified in this research suggests an opportunity for the police (as an institution) to embody and project a set of valued priorities that promote cooperation, cohesion and consent. Tackling violence, abuse and exploitation, fighting organised crime, responding to emergencies and being present in places where the public feel on edge (and demonstrating *procedural justice* in the way these things are done), will contribute to this, encouraging people to 'pull in' behind the police and be more inclined to follow the rules. Clearly this is not an easy ask, but it is a focused rather than expansive policing agenda, and it is singular – our findings tend towards public consensus rather than division – there is no sense of police having to 'take sides' or speak simultaneously to radically opposed factions of the public – and this is grounds for optimism.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Those responsible for setting the police priority framework at all levels should recognise the potential to demonstrate 'moral alignment' with the public, and by doing so, generate legitimacy, public cooperation and pro-social, law-abiding behaviours. In particular, the broad priority consensus we have identified suggests the value of the police doing this locally, but also as an institution, and therefore national strategic processes (such as the Strategic Policing Requirement, Policing Vision and focus of HMICFRS inspection regime) should also take these mechanisms into account. This research suggests an explicit focus on tackling serious and sexual violence, terrorism, organised crime and hidden abuse, while also being responsive to public calls for service and providing enhanced presence in the right places, would best achieve these ends at the present time.

This national accord does not mean that there is no variation or nuance in people's views and priorities, just that, for the most part, this occurs within a single and relatively discrete range. The research methods employed here are particularly attuned to locate and describe *differences* between perspectives – and we have found some. At the local level, more often than not, people tend to coalesce into a small number of attitudinal 'tribes' gathered around recognisably distinct 'totem' factor arrays. We have found some that seem to channel simpler times when the cops chased robbers and were unencumbered by ethics codes; others who feel policing should principally be there to protect the vulnerable, yet more who worry most about the risks to young people, some whose influences appear recognisably 'modern', and others still who emphasise the need for public place safety, or community involvement, or efficiency and improvement, or justice for domestic abuse survivors.

Comparing place with place, some of these local 'types' appear to share a family resemblance – most places have their 'traditionalists' for instance – but such comparisons rely on *judgements* about the characteristics that are important for defining similarity and difference. When we look objectively, holistically and statistically at the underlying 'DNA' of these groups we find a more complex and interconnected picture. In fact – with a notable caveat – these local

viewpoints hang together more naturally as variations around a single central theme, than they cleave apart into separate factions; again reinforcing the potential for consensus around an overarching, 'core' police agenda.

Within this however, there do appear to be opportunities for localism. Our findings suggest scope for tailoring police priorities, emphases and messaging, at the local level, to a more attitudinally 'segmented' set of publics – and also that these typologies do not replicate particularly cleanly from one location to the next. Q Methodology has helped us identify several sets of locally differentiated viewpoints, each with subtle differences in their policing needs and emphases, and each of which are likely to respond to particular types of messaging and 'offerings'. This must surely be positive learning for a service that aspires to be citizen-focused and democratically responsive to the policing needs and aspirations of all.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Police and Crime Commissioners and police community engagement leads should seek to develop a 'segmented' understanding of the policing needs, concerns, priorities and viewpoints that exist among the local public and develop service offerings and messaging tailored to these attitudinal groups. A range of research techniques including public surveys, qualitative interviewing and Q Methodology have potential to supplement more conventional consultation approaches. However there appears to be particular value in methods that engage people in considering and deciding between a range of potential priorities, rather than just expressing their own personal concerns.

While we can report a general alignment in values between the police and public, there is, also evidence of a gap in understanding about the contemporary police remit and profile of 'demand'. As we have seen, the public's priorities are shaped to a significant extent by preconceptions about what the police (relative to others) *do* and *should do*. But we have also seen that, although they acknowledge the range and diversity of modern crime challenges, when it comes to what should be done in response, the public have moved very little from 'standard' police tactics (Weisburd and Eck, 2004). They prioritise rapid response, deterrent presence, and (proactive as well as reactive) investigation as part of criminal justice based interventions. It is not clear what

(if any) specific policing activities are in people's minds when they assess the importance of '*tackling*', '*dealing with*', or '*protecting*' against various crime-types (it is the *issue* rather than the *activity* that tends to attract the priority judgement), but we can assume that this does not depart radically from traditional police tactics.

For most people there is (at least initially) little resonance and some scepticism about 'doing things differently'; whether through partnership, community engagement, innovation or criminal justice alternatives. While people want compassionate policing and acknowledge the logic that '*prevention is better than cure*', they are instinctively uncomfortable with the idea of the police moving too far 'upstream' into victim care, or 'downstream' into offender management, primary prevention or 'problem solving' – especially where this takes them into territory more comfortably and traditionally occupied by other agencies. Police and policy makers may increasingly accept that we cannot arrest (or deter, or respond) our way of our current set of crises, but the public are yet to take on board a convincing message about what we should do instead (and why) – and until then, it is 'core policing' that feels most absent and focusing elsewhere feels like a distraction.

This traditional, familiar and valued police role comes into particular tension, in the public assessment, when set in the context of the current increase in 'non-crime' demand. Providing a generalist emergency service is recognised as part of core policing, but when people learn about the extent to which 'welfare and safety' demand is occupying police resources, they feel the need to place limits on this to what is 'crime-related' or 'just the immediate crisis'. They sense mission drift and feel compelled to resist it. They also display the incisive clarity of outsiders when it comes to seeing the bigger picture. If the police are spending more time dealing with mental health crises or looking for children missing from care, then surely something is going wrong with 'the system'; surely, we should all be addressing the elephant in the room rather than being content for the police to sweep up after it. Once the contemporary realities of (broadly conceived) community safety and social 'need' are understood just a little more fully, initial conservatism about 'who does what' quickly begins to dissipate. If the 20th century configuration of public agencies, systems and identities is not fit for 21st century problems then obviously – people say – that needs to be addressed and suggestions for new agencies, departments, funding streams and expectations on the public readily flow. When they know a little more about the challenge, the public seem up for a more wide-ranging conversation about the solutions.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Police leaders should be advocates for a substantial redesign of existing public service provision. This will need to involve honest, and perhaps unpopular and uncomfortable, public statements of the adequacy of 'traditional' police/criminal justice methods to address contemporary crime/safety challenges, and of the existing service configuration to meet the current profile of demand. However, when people understand more about the nature of the current challenge, there is clear public appetite for doing things differently.

There are a small number of radical, perhaps 'visionary', people who know this already and are – at least within the confines of a research exercise – prepared to champion a brave new way of doing things. There is variation in their emphases, but they concur most clearly on the importance of working with communities to deliver a safer and fairer society. Like their mainstream peers they think tackling serious violence and organised crime should be key focusses for the police, but also that listening to, engaging with, and building resilience and cohesion within communities holds the key to this – and part of this is being present on the streets. But these are reformers not nostalgics; they favour technology, collaboration and alternatives/enhancements to criminal justice responses, including rehabilitation, youth diversion and restorative justice. They also recognise the importance of officer and police staff wellbeing.

This is a minority position with some internal range, but its advocates hang together and apart from others (including statistically) as a distinctive alternative viewpoint. It is also a beacon; a position that draws people in its general (although perhaps not precise) direction as they spend more time considering the challenges of modern policing, learning about police demand and the trade-offs being made and working through the implications of this with their peers. In particular these processes tend to shift people's views towards the importance of partnership working, innovation and community involvement, (but less so towards 'progressive' alternatives). It also tends to increase people's respect and appreciation for the police and the perceived importance of public engagement with police and public policy decision making in general.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The widespread sense of police 'withdrawal' identified here makes a strong case for allocating some part of the expected uplift of 20,000 police officers to community-facing functions. However, the lack of explicit 'mainstream' priority given to neighbourhood policing by the public, gives some scope for **police forces to consider the form and focus that a reinvigorated neighbourhood policing offer should take on.**

This research suggests a number of considerations:

- Efforts should be made to identify the particular local public spaces that convey a sense of unease, and for these to provide a focus for a targeted increase in police visibility.
 - Additionally however, deterrent presence and law enforcement are rarely the most effective and sustainable ways to addressing the visible symbols of 'deterioration' (street homelessness, dilapidation, substance misuse etc) that contribute to this unease. These places should also become focusses 'problem solving' involving the appropriate range of agencies and actors.
 - The form of community-oriented policing towards which people move as they consider policing challenges in more depth, emphasises community involvement, engagement, resilience, and partnership prevention as much as visibility, and these should be prominent features in any model.
- The public give greatest priority to violence, organised crime, terrorism and 'hidden' abuse, and least to 'low level' nuisance crime and antisocial behaviour; neighbourhood policing should therefore be explicitly oriented towards the former, and concentrated in the places where the threat of these is greatest (Higgins, 2018), (the need to reconsider the best arrangements for addressing the latter is addressed in recommendation 1).

Finally, it seems important to reflect on the value of the *process* we have experimented with here. Our aspiration in this research was to catalyse some ‘deliberatively inspired’ thinking; to give people the opportunity to move beyond their instinctive responses and gut-reactions, consider new information, listen to their peers and make joint decisions – and then study if and how their individual judgements and priorities changed and developed. We have seen how a surprising amount of ‘work’ in this regard was done simply by ‘changing the question’; assigning people the role of citizen policy-makers, giving them a glimpse of the breadth and range of police business (in the form of the Q set) and a little time to consider. This regularly and reliably took people beyond personal demands and local issues into more universalised and impact-based thinking. Discussing their choices with peers, reflecting on new information and making decisions as a group (and we readily accept these were light imitations of full deliberative democracy) then tended to trigger some movement in the direction of even greater consensus, as well as toward greater recognition of complexity and longer-term, more strategic considerations.

We suggest therefore that this research has demonstrated the potential benefits of a more engaged public debate – and for deliberative practices in particular – to enhance and supplement representative democracy in relation to police priority setting. These processes can do so both by sharpening the public mandate on decisions about particular emergent, controversial or under-explored issues and by communicating to the public that decisions were made and supported – or priorities set and agreed – by ‘*people like me*’ in possession of all the facts (Taylor, 2018a).

It is the responsibility of Police and Crime Commissioners to translate the *legitimate* desires and aspirations of the public into action. We make the case that policing priorities and aspirations that are more deeply considered by the public, more fully informed and arrived at following public deliberation carry powerful markers of that legitimacy.

Fully optimising that power will mean developing and championing deliberative habits; cultivating the logic of the jury trial in attitudes to policy-making; that *if I heard the same evidence and thought about it deeply, then I too would come to the same conclusions* (Taylor, 2018b). In a policing context this provides a plausible mechanism not just for achieving better democratic decisions about how scarce resources and exceptional powers should be used, but to increased legitimacy, consent, *strategic justice* and the pro-social and socially cohesive attitudes and behaviours that these can unlock.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Police and Crime Commissioners should explore and champion deliberative processes

as part of the process of setting police priorities and in relation to other locally contested, emergent and under-explored policing issues. These have potential both to supplement and strengthen representative democratic accountability and also to access a more thoroughly informed and considered – and therefore (arguably) more legitimate – set of public concerns and objectives than conventional, survey-based consultation methods are able to provide.

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