



Contemporary Challenges Faced by Police Officers in Scotland - A Focus on Body Worn Video



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Executive Summary

This pilot study, funded by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR), explores frontline police officers' perceptions of Body Worn Video (BWV) technology as it is integrated into Police Scotland's operational practice. Using qualitative group interviews with officers at various stages of BWV adoption, the research provides insights into the cultural, psychological, and operational implications of this technology.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Positive Reception:** Officers with BWV experience report overwhelmingly positive attitudes, citing benefits such as evidentiary clarity, reduced complaints, and enhanced professionalism.
- **Change Management:** Initial use of BWV can feel intrusive or robotic, but officers adapt over time. In person training is preferred over online modules.
- **Trust and Surveillance:** While BWV enhances transparency, concerns persist about internal surveillance, distrust, and the potential misuse of footage.
- **Public Interaction:** BWV is seen as a de-escalation tool that fosters mutual accountability and improves public cooperation.
- **Technical Challenges:** Issues include system incompatibility, and device malfunctions which can hinder operational efficiency.
- **Outlook:** Officers support ethical innovation but express frustration with slow adoption and bureaucratic delays.

EXPLORATORY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Leverage positive officer experiences:** As BWV is well received, future research can explore how testimonials can be collected and shared to support adoption. Collaboration with training teams can help embed insights into reflective practice.
2. **Support change management:** This can be done through clearer communication of policies on activation, sampling, and oversight. Further work is recommended to assess training preferences to tailor change strategies effectively.
3. **Maximise evidentiary value:** Leveraging the strong objective evidence of BWV, in

complaint resolution, court outcomes as well as in promoting transparency through internal messaging.

4. **Strengthen police-public relationships:** Using BWV to de-escalate tensions and build trust. It is recommended to research BWV's impact on public behaviour and train officers to use BWV to support respectful engagement.
5. **Address psychological impacts:** Concerns around morale, trust, and surveillance require attention. Explore the psychological effects, review practices, and options for private conversations when appropriate.
6. **Improve technical infrastructure:** Ensuring scalable data storage and indexing and explore integration between devices and systems and aim for prompt resolution of device issues.
7. **Lead in ethical adoption of new technologies:** Modernise policing by taking a proactive, stance on new technologies and use operational efficiency methodologies to reduce workload.

This report presents preliminary insights to serve as a foundation for continued dialogue. It is not a conclusive assessment, but rather an invitation to deepen understanding through collaborative enquiry. Emphasis is placed on the critical importance of trust building and preparing for future challenges in the ethical deployment of technology.

ABBREVIATIONS

SIPR – Scottish Institute for Policing Research

BWV – Body Worn Video

GCU – Glasgow Caledonian University

1. Introduction to the project

Aim: A primary pilot project to identify common or prevalent perceptions of the ongoing or anticipated integration of BWV and associated technologies into policing practice. This aim was agreed with Police Scotland on 28th February 2025, approved by SIPR on 10th March 2025 and granted ethical approval by GCU on 14th March 2025.

Method: Descriptive qualitative group interviews with officers who have experience using BWV, those who are scheduled to start using BWV and those who are not planned to be using BWV. Questions, as highlighted in Appendix 1 were intended to explore the principles of procedural justice (voice, neutrality, respect, and trust) in integrating BWV and other technologies into policing practice.

Output: Small-scale report which detects the active ingredients from participants' qualitative accounts (capabilities, motivations, and opportunities) related to the integration of BWV.

Rationale: This is intended to be impactful for Police Scotland as the service begins to introduce BWV into everyday policing practice. This study, through the lens of procedural justice and institutional theory, leads on an evidence-based approach to understanding behavioural change in policing pro-actively with the introduction of BWV. This whilst also keeping in mind future opportunities for the use of technology in policing.

This research aligns with SIPR and Police Scotland priorities. In line with SIPR's Strategic Research Priorities ('Strategic Research Priorities - SIPR', 2022), it contributes to Theme 1 - Policing and Health, Safety and Wellbeing particularly in relation to public confidence and legitimacy, to Theme 2 - Technology and Digital Policing and Theme 3 - Policing Systems Capability and Resilience, including support for operational policing, change management, staff well-being and leadership. It also aligns with Police Scotland's 2030 vision for "safer communities, less crime, supported victims and a thriving workforce" (Police Scotland, 2024a). The roll out of BWV is an integral part of the initial three-year business plan covering 2024-2027 (Police Scotland, 2024b). The commencement and completion of phase 2 of the rollout of BWV to frontline staff were earmarked as first-year milestones (number 1.24 and 1.47). As a second phase to the project, the sharing of best practice and learning outcomes was earmarked as part of year two milestones (number 2.16). Completion of national rollout is targeted for year three (number 3.21).

2. Theoretical and empirical research overview

BWV are compact devices typically worn on the chest by police officers. They record audio and video and are turned on by police officers when necessary. The function of BWV in Police Scotland is guided by the Body Worn Video Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which emphasises "proportionate, legal, accountable, necessary, and ethical (PLANE)" deployment (Police Scotland, 2025, p. 6). Officers are also guided by the principles of integrity, fairness, respect and human rights as outlined in the Code of Ethics for Policing in Scotland (Police Scotland | Poileas Alba, no date).

2.1 KEY THEORETICAL PILLAR 1 - PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Public trust in the police has been recognised as a vital factor in upholding strong police authority and institutional legitimacy (Hough et al., 2010). Procedural justice posits that "individuals are more likely to perceive authorities as legitimate and trustworthy when they feel they are treated in a fair and respectful manner by those authorities" (Chan, Bradford and Stott, 2023, p. 2). Procedural justice is important at an external level, referring to how fairly police treat the public, and internally to how police organisations implement concepts of internal procedural justice (Yesberg et al., 2024). Support from the public is vital for effective police operations. Such support is dependent upon people's judgement about the legitimacy of the policing function and such judgement is based on how members of the public perceive the exercise of authority by police (Tyler, 2004). Procedural justice rests on four key elements: voice, neutrality, respect and trust (Goodman-Delahunty, 2010; Tansill, 2024). Within the framework of procedural justice, trust is understood as the public's perception that authority figures act with sincerity, transparency and in the best interests of the community. Respect, often equated with professional conduct, encompasses the way officers uphold citizens' rights, acknowledge their contributions, engage with them genuinely, and treat them with dignity. Neutrality refers to the importance of lack of bias and the practice of ethical conduct in decision-making, in a consistent and just manner. Voice refers to the value which the public's voice is given in police decision-

making (Goodman-Delahunty, 2010). BWV demonstrates efforts aimed towards improving accountability, transparency and trust in policing (Greater London Authority, 2020).

2.2 KEY THEORETICAL PILLAR 2 – INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Institutional theory focuses on how institutions work and interact with their surroundings (Scott, 2013). Legitimation or rather how institutions are regarded as holding legitimate power is key for institutional stability (Giddens, 1984). Explicit rules and related sanctions which are directly linked to the process of legitimation shape individual behaviours (Tenbrunsel, Smith-Crowe and Umphress, 2003). Yet the formal aspect of rules and regulations, often referred to as the regulative element in institutional theory, is also supplemented by the normative and cultural-cognitive elements of organisations. Normative elements are related to how institutions hold power over individuals and objects, whilst cultural-cognitive elements refer to shared conceptions of individuals interacting in institutions (Scott, 2013). Institutions have the ability to both constrain and enable individual actions (Giddens, 1984). Whereas some literature is inclined to view the individual as either a mechanical agent with limited scope for individual agency or an independent agent exercising free will, it is widely acknowledged that individual decisions are shaped by and shape institutions (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009). Individual actions are oriented by institutional direction, yet the individual also holds decision-making power (Giddens, 1984).

Based on this, the view adopted in this research is that trust by the public as well as internally by police, is vital for ensuring Police Scotland is regarded as a legitimate authority. Key to trust is procedural justice, which is dependent on ensuring voices are heard, people are treated with dignity and respect, open and honest communication as well as lack of impartiality. Also, that laws and regulations are vital in policing, yet individual officers hold a degree of discretion in their decision-making. From an institutional perspective, this discretion is shaped primarily by rules and regulations, but also by the norms and the culture prevalent in Police Scotland. However, decision-making is also shaped by individual factors and characteristics belonging to individual police officers.

2.3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN BWV

The integration of BWV in policing has been the subject of growing academic interest, with a range of studies exploring its implications for officer behaviour, public trust, and institutional dynamics. Lum et al. (2019) conducted a comprehensive review of 70 empirical studies up to mid-2018, concluding that both officers and citizens generally support BWV. However, they caution against overestimating its impact. Whilst BWV appears to reduce complaints against officers and is valued for evidentiary purposes, there is limited evidence that it significantly improves public trust or transforms police behaviour. Importantly, Lum et al. (2019) identify a research gap in understanding how BWV affects internal police culture and police-public relationships. O'Neill et al. (2024) provide observational insights from the UK, including Scotland, highlighting that officers often view BWV primarily as a protective tool rather than a mechanism for enhancing public accountability. Their findings suggest that BWV subtly shifts the power dynamic in favour of officers, particularly when the camera is activated. While most interactions proceed without issue, the emphasis on officer protection may limit BWV's potential to foster procedural justice.

Public perception studies, such as Police Scotland (2022), report overwhelming support for BWV, with nine in ten respondents favouring frequent use. The public believes BWV enhances safety and increases trust in officers. However, Webster, Miranda and Leleux (2022) caution that much of this support comes from individuals without direct experience of BWV. Their review of international rollouts identifies common benefits, such as improved complaint resolution, evidentiary clarity, and victim support, but also notes limitations. These include the narrow field of view, officer discretion in activation, and concerns about re-victimisation in court. The potential for public distrust, particularly around perceived manipulation of footage, is also highlighted by Webster, Miranda and Leleux (2022). L'Hoiry, Santorso and Harrison (2024) offer a more critical perspective from Northern England. They report that BWV can lead to more formal, robotic interactions and may inadvertently increase workload due to redaction demands. Some officers expressed concerns about being constantly monitored, leading to apprehension and reduced confidence. Notably the expectation that all interactions be recorded has created new pressures, including delays in decision-making and prosecution.

Exploring officers' attitudes in the U.S., Paoline, Elligson and Gau (2025), reveal that support for BWV is shaped by organisational trust and role orientation. Officers critical of management or suspicious of oversight were less supportive, whilst those aligned with the crime-fighting ethos of policing, valued BWV's evidentiary function. Interestingly, acceptance was not linked to age or experience, challenging assumptions about generational openness to technology. Their finding that internal treatment influences external behaviour, reinforces the relevance of procedural justice within police organisations. Poirier, Charbonneau and Boivin (2024) report from Canada that officers were largely supportive of BWV particularly for its evidentiary value in cases like Driving Under the Influence (DUI) and domestic abuse. However, concerns about risks and unintended consequences tend to emerge post-rollout, suggesting that initial optimism may evolve with experience.

3. Methodology

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative research approach was adopted to explore the lived experiences of police officers. This methodology is particularly suited to capturing individual and collective experiences, identifying variations in those experiences, and developing theoretical insights that enhance understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Flick, 2018). As this was a preliminary, exploratory study, the research aimed to map the current landscape and inform the design of more extensive future investigations.

Participants were invited to take part in a focus group or a group interview. Due to the nature of the group dynamics, the format more closely resembled a semi-structured, one-to-many group interview rather than a focus group, as defined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023). The researcher facilitated the discussion, encouraged interaction amongst participants, and posed follow-up questions in accordance with a pre-prepared guide (see Appendix 1). This guide was shared with participants in advance of the online meeting, which was conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Two group interviews were conducted in June 2025. The first session included four participants, and the second included six. To preserve anonymity, demographic identifiers are not reported. However, participants were categorised into three groups:

- Officers who are experienced in using BWV – Coded as E1, E2, E3 and E4
- Officers who are planned to start using BWV – Coded as I1, I2 and I3
- Officers who are not planned to use BWV – Codes as O1, O2, O3 and O4

The same interview guide was used for both sessions. However, in line with Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), the second session incorporated adaptations to probe more deeply into themes that emerged during the first session.

Following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) methodology, first-order analysis focused on participants' own terms, resulting in the identification of fifty-eight first-order codes, each with a positive, neutral or negative valence assigned. These were subsequently analysed to generate seven second-order themes. Each of these themes is discussed in the findings section of this report. A strategy of semi-ignorance of the existing literature was employed, as recommended by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013), to allow findings to emerge more inductively. The research design and questions were informed by consultations with Police Scotland between March and May 2025, as well as a detailed review of the Standard Operating Procedure for BWV (Police Scotland, 2025) and the Police Scotland Code of Ethics (Police Scotland | Poileas Alba, no date). Notably, the academic literature review conducted prior to data collection did not include empirical studies on BWV, to minimise potential bias.

3.2 LIMITATIONS

This study reflects the views and experiences of eleven officers and is not intended to be representative of the wider Police Scotland workforce, which comprised 16,553 officers across thirteen local policing divisions as of 31st March 2025 ('Police Scotland Officer's & Staff - Quarterly Fact Sheets', 2025). Recruiting participants proved challenging, likely due to the operational demands of police work. Three officers who had consented to participate in the first session were excluded to protect their anonymity. Several officers who had initially agreed to participate were unable to attend on the day, possibly due to re-deployment. Additional participants who were not intended to be part of the research cohort, were invited to ensure sufficient attendance.

As this research was supported by seed funding, the time and resources available were necessarily limited. The scope and depth of the study were therefore shaped by these parameters.

4. Findings

In keeping with the open and exploratory process of research as advocated by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013), these findings are structured in line with the second-order themes identified as part of the coding process. Starting off with the attitudes displayed by experienced officers, linked to the voice element of procedural justice, these attitudes provide a glimpse into the lived realities of the officers who are already using BWV. Next, basing on the element of trust in procedural justice, the changes that come about before and just when starting to use BWV are explored. This then leads to a discussion about the evidentiary value of BWV, in line with the neutrality aspect of procedural justice, followed by the police-public relationship tying into the concept of legitimacy. Next, delving into the element of trust of procedural justice, the focus shifts to the motivational and psychological factors encountered by officers as well as the relevance and importance of circumstances and lived experiences. This section then closes off discussing the technical challenges and future outlooks.

4.1 EXPERIENCES OF BWV

Experienced officers expressed overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards BWV technology, citing minimal ethical concerns and significant practical benefits in daily policing. Whilst the ethical frameworks like PLANE (Police Scotland, 2025) underpin operational guidance, officers reflected little direct engagement with ethical dilemmas posed by BWV use. For example E3 said *“Certainly I’ve not encountered any problems to date. Yeah, in terms of using it ethically. Most people are just receptive to the camera being on, so I haven’t had any issues”*, suggesting ethical clarity and public acceptance and having limited contentious encounters. Although here it must be emphasised that ethical dilemmas are not always dealt with rationally, but often unconsciously (Palazzo, Krings and Hoffrage, 2012).

Officers emphasised that informing the public of recording practices often led to cooperative interactions. The sentiment that *“most folk are happy”* (E1) and *“they’re not put up nor down about it”* (E2) was commonly shared. Routine activation of BWV *“pretty much switching on every house you go to”* as E1 explained, was also a shared experience. It becomes embedded practice described as intuitive and non-disruptive: *“You just forget it’s there, to be honest, which I think should be a good thing”* (E4).

Beyond frontline utility, higher-ranking officers noted administrative efficiencies. BWV footage reduces the need for lengthy internal investigations and statement gathering, allowing for swift case resolution, and in some instances, early guilty pleas. BWV serves not only evidential purposes but contributes to reflective professionalism wherein officers reported heightened awareness that their actions could be scrutinised, be this through BWV, public mobile recordings, or ambient surveillance. This seems to instil consistent ethical mindset even in high-stakes events such as sieges or negotiations.

4.2 DEALING WITH CHANGE

Participants described the process of adapting to the change which BWV brings with it. This experience seems to be marked by personal habit-building, procedural learning and emotional adjustment. Officers noted that initial use of BWV requires conscious effort by remembering to switch on the device at spontaneous incidents and off again when appropriate. The challenge was not technological complexity but integrating new routines into high-pressure environments where quick decision-making is key. As E2 explained *“You’re sometimes thinking about different things and you’ve got questions to ask control and you’re looking to speak to colleagues who are closer, that sort of thing, you sometimes forget to turn it on.”*

Initial experiences also revealed a degree of self-consciousness, with officers describing early interactions as *“robotic”* (E4 and I1). The presence of a camera triggered heightened internal questioning like whether actions were appropriate and legal. This was described as a temporary disruption of natural communication. However, as officers became accustomed to the technology, they reported returning to more humanised interactions, engaging with the public in a personable manner and often forgetting the camera was present.

Training emerged as a significant factor in this transition. A number of officers expressed frustration with online modules, citing their ineffectiveness compared to in-person training. For example I1 explained *“I was quite lucky... I got some in-person training whereas the vast majority of folk have only had this online training”*.

Concerns about surveillance, such as fears that the BWV could be remotely activated were dispelled in group discussions, however this may be something which needs to be addressed on a larger scale within Police Scotland. Whilst some initial apprehension persisted, especially regarding increased scrutiny, most framed BWV as a positive shift, one that enhanced transparency, accountability and even training opportunities.

4.3 EVIDENTIARY VALUE OF BWV

A recurring theme among officers was the protective role of BWV in addressing malicious and unfounded complaints. Officers expressed a strong belief that BWV serves as a critical evidentiary tool, shifting interaction from subjective account to objective documentation. As officer I1 noted *“Right now, anyone can say anything against us and it’s just your word against theirs”*, highlighting the vulnerability officers feel in the absence of corroborating evidence. BWV was seen as a means to swiftly dismiss baseless allegations, with another officer recounting how footage from a domestic incident directly contradicted a complaint, preventing unnecessary escalation.

The emotional toll of complaints, regardless of their validity, was also emphasised. Officers described the stress of prolonged investigations, and the relief BWV can bring by expediting resolution. *“It’s horrible to have this thing hanging over you”* as I3 explained when describing the psychological burden of such complaints. BWV was credited with improving peace of mind and job satisfaction, particularly when officers knew their actions were recorded and could be reviewed impartially. BWV was also seen as a deterrent against false allegations, with officers reporting a noticeable reduction in complaints since its introduction. The ability for supervisors to quickly access footage was viewed as a practical benefit, enabling prompt and fair assessments.

Officers consistently highlighted the evidentiary strength of BWV in capturing undeniable proof of events, behaviours, and demeanour during police interactions. Unlike written reports, which are inherently interpretative, BWV provides a visual and auditory record that can substantiate or refute claims with clarity. For example, I1 explained *"before we would just report that they refused to take a breath test. Whereas now we can show the way that they have refused."* This helps to transform subjective assertions into more objective evidence.

The visual documentation is particularly valuable in cases involving volatile or emotionally charged incidents. Officers noted that demeanour, such as aggression, distress, or non-compliance, is often difficult to convey in writing but becomes immediately apparent on video. This is especially relevant in domestic abuse cases, where early emotional responses captured on BWV may now serve as corroborative evidence, even if the victim later finds it challenging to continue with the proceedings.

BWV also enhances transparency and mutual accountability. Officers reported that members of the public often respond positively to the presence of cameras, appreciating the openness it brings to interactions as E2 explained *"the camera holds them [the public] accountable, also holds us accountable."* Such accountability fosters trust and reinforces professional standards. BWV also supports the judicial process by providing courts with a clearer understanding of incidents, beyond what can be conveyed in statements. In this way BWV not only protects officers and victims but also strengthens the integrity of the criminal justice system.

4.4 POLICE-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIP

Officers explained that the relationship between the police and the public is often shaped by previous experiences, community norms and perceptions of authority. Officers acknowledged that many individuals, particularly in areas with longstanding distrust of law enforcement, view them not as individuals but as symbols of institutional power. For example E1 explained *"they don't see you as a person, they see you as a uniform"* noting that negative experiences of individuals from the public, could be personal or inherited from their upbringing and these create barriers to trust.

In this context, BWV was seen as a tool that can promote transparency and

accountability. Officers reported that informing individuals that they were being recorded often led to more cooperative interactions. Even among those being accused, reactions to BWV were generally neutral or positive. As E1 explained *"I've never had anybody go up in arms about it."* This suggests that the presence of BWV may help de-escalate tensions and promote civil conduct.

BWV is also viewed as a mechanism for mutual accountability. Whilst as explained earlier, it protects officers from false allegations, it also reassures the public that their treatment is being documented. This dual function aligns with the principle of policing by consent, which as also described by participants, relies on public trust and legitimacy.

Regional differences were acknowledged, with urban populations more accustomed to surveillance and less likely to object to BWV. In rural areas, where policing is often more personal and less visible, initial concerns may arise, but officers believed these could be addressed through clear communication. Although BWV is not regarded as an all-encompassing solution to strained police-public relationships, it is a valuable tool that supports fairness, professionalism, and public confidence in policing practices.

4.5 MOTIVATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Observations related to motivational and psychological factors are being divided by their valence: positive, neutral and negative. On the positive side, officers expressed a strong sense of reassurance and professional confidence associated with the use of BWV, particularly when their conduct aligns with expected standards. Most described BWV as a tool that reinforces professionalism rather than restricts it. Officers explained that as long as they are professional in their jobs and how they treat people, there should be nothing to be afraid of, with officers viewing BWV as a natural extension of their role rather than a source of anxiety.

The benefits of knowing that their actions are transparently recorded was linked to increased job satisfaction, especially in situations when footage helps clarify disputed events. Officers described a sense of validation when BWV footage supports their account in court or during complaint investigations. For example, O1 explained that seeing the conduct of an accused clearly on video, and having false claims dismissed is *"a big positive"* and a source of professional satisfaction.

BWV can also be seen as enhancing the meaningfulness of public protection work. Officers spoke of the emotional reward in knowing that footage can help secure protective measures for vulnerable individuals, such as non-harassment orders in domestic abuse or stalking cases. This tangible impact on victim safety was described as a key source of motivation. BWV also has the potential to foster trust in supervisory relationships. E4 explained *"I don't think I've ever lost trust in my line managers in relation to viewing it [BWV footage]."*

Displaying a more neutral valence towards BWV, officers demonstrated a pragmatic acceptance of its role in modern policing. Whilst BWV introduces an additional layer of scrutiny, some officers indicated that this was not inherently problematic. *"We're under scrutiny, but... we're kind of used to it."* (I1). This suggests that the presence of cameras is simply another aspect of accountability in a profession already subject to public and internal oversight.

The motivational impact of BWV appears to be shaped more by how footage is interpreted than by its existence. Officers noted that individual responses to incidents vary widely, and the footage must be reviewed with contextual understanding. Concerns were raised about whether reviewers, particularly those removed from frontline duties, might assess behaviour too rigidly, without appreciating the situational pressures officers face. BWV also intersects with the fluid nature of police work, where officers adapt their demeanour and approach depending on the scenario. For example, O4 explained that having just come onto a shift they could have already met with *"10 personalities within the shift"*, and this reflects the emotional and behavioural flexibility required in responding to diverse calls. While BWV captures these interactions, it may not fully convey the nuance behind them.

Uniform and role expectations were also noted as influencing behaviour. Officers acknowledged that while they strive to retain their individuality, the uniform inevitably shapes how they present themselves. When discussing subjects as sensitive as BWV it is important to acknowledge the interplay between personal identity, professional role and situational demands.

Whilst as described earlier, BWV is widely recognised for its operational and evidentiary benefits, several officers expressed concerns about its unintended psychological and cultural consequences. These are not necessarily created by, but are exasperated by using BWV. A prominent theme was a sense of mistrust both from management towards frontline officers and reciprocally. Officers described a perception that BWV footage could be used punitively rather than constructively. Despite initial assurances that footage would only be reviewed for legitimate policing

purposes, some officers reported receiving emails about dip-sampled footage, leading to confusion and scepticism. For example, I1 said: *"You told us you're not going to watch it, but then clearly you've been watching it."* Such contradictions can undermine trust and transparency.

Mistrust seems to be quite a common perception. For example, O2 explained *"as we all know, there is that kind of culture, that we have amongst ourselves, that maybe on the surface we don't trust each other"*. This can contribute to a broader culture of apprehension, where officers feel that they are under constant surveillance with a fear of being *"critically analysed for every wee thing."* (I1). This is also accompanied by concerns that footage might be interpreted out of context by supervisors who may be detached from frontline realities. This has led to what can be termed as *"hindsight policing"* (O3) where decisions made under pressure are retrospectively scrutinised without adequate appreciation of situational complexity or human variability in response.

BWV was also seen to impact interpersonal dynamics and officer wellbeing. Officers reported feeling more self-conscious during routine interactions, particularly during long custody transfers or informal conversations with colleagues. The constant recording was said to inhibit natural communication, leading to silence or guarded exchanges. In emotionally sensitive situations, such as crisis negotiations, officers expressed concerns that if BWV were to be introduced, it could compromise trust with vulnerable individuals.

Broader organisational issues, such as low staffing levels and sudden shift changes, were cited as compounding dissatisfaction. In this context, BWV was sometimes viewed not as a supportive tool, but as another layer of oversight in an already strained system. Officers emphasised the need for careful implementation, clear communication, and a culture of trust to ensure BWV enhances rather than undermines morale.

4.6 TECHNICAL AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Officers also highlighted several technical and logistical challenges associated with the rollout of BWV. A key concern was the volume of footage generated, raising questions about the sustainability of managing such large data. This has its upside that it might decrease the chances of micromanagement as explained by O3 *"the scale of it will be so large... people just don't have the time to do that [micromanage]"*.

Compatibility issues between hardware and software systems were also flagged. For instance, officers described difficulties uploading footage from Motorola cameras into the Axon-based Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) system which was not designed for seamless integration. This mismatch has caused operational inefficiencies and frustration.

Additionally, concerns were raised about devices malfunctioning or activating unintentionally, including instances where covert mode prevented officers from realising, they were being recorded. While the upload process itself was described as straightforward, it was also noted to be time-consuming, especially for new officers still learning the system. This adds to the administrative burden of frontline policing.

4.7 FUTURE OUTLOOK

Officers expressed a mix of cautious optimism and scepticism regarding the future of technology in Police Scotland. While there was a general agreement that advancements such as BWV were long overdue, most felt that Police Scotland has historically lagged behind other sectors. As O3 explained *"I have been in the police for over 15 years and I think they've probably been talking about it for the last 12-13 years. So, it was always as if it was just coming. So, you know it's great that we're now here in 2025"*. This delay has shaped expectations, with several officers anticipating that future innovations will continue to be slow, hindered by bureaucracy, funding constraints and overcomplicated procurement processes.

There was also concern about the longevity and maintenance of the current BWV equipment. Officers doubted whether devices would be replaced or upgraded in the near future, despite daily use. Others highlighted the need for better integration of systems and more efficient digital workflows to reduce administrative burdens, especially through the use of AI driven tools which could streamline paperwork and reporting. While some officers were open to more ambitious technologies, such as facial recognition, or AI assisted case management, they stressed the importance of careful implementation, legal safeguards, and public trust. There was also resistance to ideas perceived as too far removed from community policing, such as automated police stations, which would probably face significant public pushback.

Despite reservations, most officers recognised the potential of technology to improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and free up officers for frontline duties. However, they emphasised that any future developments must be grounded in practical needs, adequately resourced, and introduced with transparency and consultation.



5. Bridging findings and theory

The findings of this preliminary study reveal a complex interplay between individual attitudes, organisational culture, and broader institutional expectations, which can be meaningfully interpreted through the dual lenses of procedural justice and institutional theory.

5.1 PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND THE ROLE OF BWV

The findings strongly support the theoretical proposition that voice, neutrality, respect and trust, are central to both public and internal perceptions of police legitimacy (Tyler, 2004; Tansill, 2024). Officers consistently reported that BWV enhanced transparency and accountability, which in turn fostered more cooperative interactions with the public. This aligns with the notion that when individuals perceive fair treatment, they are more likely to view authority as legitimate (Chan, Bradford and Stott, 2023). BWV was seen not only as a tool for external procedural justice but also as a mechanism for internal accountability. Officers described how the presence of BWV encouraged reflective professionalism and ethical consistency, even in high-pressure situations. However, concerns about surveillance and mistrust, particularly when footage was reviewed without clear justification, highlight the fragility of internal procedural justice. These concerns echo Yesberg et al. (2024), who argue that internal legitimacy is equally dependent on fair treatment within the organisation.

5.2 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY: RULES, NORMS AND AGENCY

Institutional theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how BWV is embedded within the broader organisational and cultural context of Police Scotland. Officers' experiences reflect the tension between formal rules (example SOPs and ethical codes) and informal norms and cognitive schemas that shape daily practice (Scott, 2013). Whilst BWV is formally regulated, its implementation is mediated by individual discretion, cultural expectations, and operational realities. The findings

suggest that while institutional structures guide behaviour, they do not fully determine it. Officers exercised agency in how they adapted to BWV, negotiated its presence in sensitive situations, and interpreted its role in their professional identity. This supports Giddens' (1984) view of the duality of structure, where institutions both constrain and enable individual action. Moreover, the emotional and psychological responses to BWV, ranging from reassurance and validation to apprehension and mistrust, underscore the importance of the normative and cultural-cognitive dimensions of institutional life. Officers' concerns of 'hindsight policing' and the potential misuse of footage reflect a broader institutional culture that may, at times prioritise oversight over support.

5.3 SYNTHESISING FINDINGS WITH EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The findings of this study align with and extend the existing empirical literature on BWV, offering a nuanced understanding of how this technology is perceived and experienced by frontline officers in Police Scotland. Participants also echoed the relevance and importance of ethical and cautiously optimistic approach to technology in Police Scotland, which was also advocated by the Independent Advisory Group for Emerging Technologies (ETIAG, 2023). Consistent with Lum et al. (2019), officers in this study expressed general support for BWV, particularly for its evidentiary value and its role in protecting against malicious complaints. The emphasis on BWV as a protective tool was echoed in O'Neill et al. (2024), who observed that officers often prioritise self-protection over public-facing benefits, a stance that is important to steer away from when rolling-out BWV.

While public opinion surveys including Police Scotland (2022) suggest that BWV enhances trust and safety, the officers interviewed were more cautious. They acknowledged that BWV may improve transparency and accountability, but also raised concerns about surveillance, mistrust, and the potential for footage to be misinterpreted or used punitively. These concerns mirror those raised by L'Hoiry, Santorso and Harrison (2024), who found that BWV can lead to more formal, robotic interactions and increased workload due to redaction and administrative demands. The findings also support Webster, Miranda and Leleux's (2022) observation that while BWV is widely supported in principle, its practical limitations, such as narrow field of view and officer discretion in activation, can undermine effectiveness. Officers in this study highlighted similar issues, particularly the psychological burden of constant recording and the risk of 'hindsight policing', where decisions made under pressure are and retrospectively scrutinised without adequate context.

This study highlights the emotional and motivational dimensions of BWV use. Officers reported that BWV could enhance job satisfaction and professionalism when used constructively but also noted that it could erode trust if perceived as a surveillance tool. This finding aligns with Paoline, Elligson and Gau (2025), who argue that organisational culture and internal trust significantly shape officers' acceptance of BWV. The Canadian study by Poirier, Charbonneau and Boivin (2024) resonates with this research in showing that officers' perceptions of BWV evolve post-rollout. This study reinforces the view that while BWV offers clear operational benefits, its success depends on careful implementation, organisational trust and ongoing dialogue between officers, leadership and the public.



6. Exploratory recommendations

This research aimed to explore prevailing perceptions regarding the integration of BWV and related technologies into contemporary policing practices. The key findings are presented in Section 4 - Findings. Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Leverage positive officer experiences:** The overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards BWV, both in this study and in alignment with existing literature including Lum et al. (2019), O'Neill et al. (2024), Police Scotland (2022), Webster, Miranda and Leleux (2022), Paoline, Ellingson, and Gau (2025) and Poirier, Charbonneau and Boivin (2024), underscore its value to both officers and the public. As such, further research into general perceptions of BWV is not recommended. However, other areas warrant deeper investigation.
- 2. Support change management:** Change, while necessary, often presents challenges. The College of Policing (2024) emphasises the importance of adaptability, flexibility, and openness to change. These are qualities that appear present within Police Scotland.
 - a. Clarity and communication:** Officers should receive clear information regarding remote activation capabilities, dip-sampling procedures, and oversight mechanisms. This should be supported by a consistent internal communication campaign aligned to operational practices.
 - b. Training preferences:** While there is a preference for in-person training, this study does not provide sufficient data to recommend a specific format. It is advised that Police Scotland assess officers' preferred training modalities and conduct a cost-benefit analysis before determining the optimal approach, which may be blended.
- 3. Maximise evidentiary value:** This research, along with prior studies including Lum et al. (2019), O'Neill et al. (2024), and Webster, Miranda and Leleux (2022), highlights BWV's role in providing compelling, often indisputable, evidence. This feature should be leveraged through officer testimonials, internal communications, and multimedia content to reduce apprehension among those yet to adopt the technology.
- 4. Strengthen police-public relations:** While public hostility toward police officers is beyond the scope of this study, BWV has shown potential as a de-escalation tool. Further research is recommended to better understand this dynamic and to develop training materials that empower officers to use BWV to foster respectful and civil interactions, whilst not abusing of the power which this technology brings.
- 5. Address psychological impacts:** Although BWV has demonstrated motivational benefits, broader psychological and cultural factors must be addressed:
 - a. Contextual interpretation:** Footage should be reviewed with an understanding of the operational context, particularly by individuals not engaged in frontline duties.
 - b. Trust and role identity:** Research, including that by Filstad (2022), underscores the emotional significance of the policing role. Lack of trust can undermine this identity. BWV may exacerbate existing trust issues, which can be addressed through targeted interventions. This study identifies concerns regarding the relationship between officers and management. A deeper exploration of trust dynamics within Police Scotland is essential, but this also needs to be followed by actionable steps to address the identified issues.

- c. Operational practicalities:** Officers have expressed concerns about the inability to have private conversations (for example during prisoner transport). It is recommended that Police Scotland explore technical solutions that balance evidentiary requirements with the need for collegial interaction.
- 6. Improve technical infrastructure:** The successful deployment of BWV requires robust technical infrastructure:

 - a. Data management:** Police Scotland should ensure systems are capable of handling large-scale data storage and indexing.
 - b. System integration:** An internal review should be conducted to identify barriers to seamless integration between BWV devices and data management systems, along with a cost analysis of resolving these issues.
 - c. Device reliability:** Mechanisms should be in place to promptly identify and address device malfunctions, particularly those affecting activation timing.
- 7. Lead ethically in technology adoption:**

 - a. Ethical leadership in technology:** Aligning with and supporting the work of ETIAG (2023), Police Scotland is encouraged to position itself as a leader in ethical technology adoption. Delays in BWV implementation risk undermining the organisation's modern image, as perceived by both officers and the public.
 - b. BWV and related technologies offer opportunities to streamline administrative tasks.** A comprehensive review of manual processes, using methodologies such as Lean Six Sigma, is recommended to enhance operational efficiency and allow officers to spend more time in the field.



7. Next steps

As this is a pilot project, the recommendations presented are preliminary and not intended to be comprehensive. It is acknowledged that Police Scotland may already be aware of some of the issues identified or may have taken remedial action, which an external researcher, may not be aware of.

This report is being circulated with SIPR and Police Scotland in the first instance. As a way forward it is recommended that together with Police Scotland all the above recommendations are assessed based on their impact and feasibility (Stickdorn et al., 2018). Issues that are high impact and high feasibility would be the low-hanging fruits which produce results with minimal effort. Recommendations that are classified as high impact and low feasibility or low impact and high feasibility can be assessed according to their cost-benefit analysis. Recommendations classified as low impact and low feasibility are not pursued further.

It is strongly recommend that areas 5b – 'Trust and role identity' and 7 – 'Lead ethically in technology adoption', following the recommendations by ETIAG (2023), are looked into as a matter of priority.



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Appendix 1

RUNNING ORDER OF THE GROUP INTERVIEW

This is the text of a preparatory email sent to group interview participants prior to the meeting.

Dear [Participant Name].

In preparation for our focus group this Tuesday this is the guidance running order I will be using. You may want to have a look and prepare a few points, but that is optional.

This focus group will be semi structured and aware that there is a lot to cover we may not cover this all or we may discuss other topics you deem important.

Aim: Identify common/prevalent perceptions of the (ongoing or anticipated) integration of Body Worn Video (BWV) and other associated technologies into policing practice.

Guidance Running order

1. Introduction by researcher and participants.
2. What is your experience (or lack of it) of BWV?
3. What is your overall perception of this technology?
4. The SOP ([Police Scotland has published its BWV Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\)](#)) speaks a lot about the impact and use of BWV, but what effects can/does this have on you (your privacy, your wellbeing, your job satisfaction)?
5. How do you consider that BWV affects citizen's privacy?
6. The SOP speaks of PLANE principles. Do you have examples of experiences (yours or others') which were ethically challenging (as relevant to BWV or Stop and Search)?
7. How does BWV impact the dynamic of police-public interaction, if at all?
8. Can BWV lead to more complaints (especially negative malicious complaints) against the police? Why?
9. Where do you see the future going in terms of technology used in policing? What should Police Scotland be aware of when implementing new technologies?
10. Are there any other concerns that you deem should be heard?

Thank you

Corinne

Author biography



Dr Corinne Fenech, a Lecturer in Marketing with Glasgow Caledonian University, is an academic and practitioner with expertise in strategic and operational management. Corinne has graduated with a PhD in Management (University of Glasgow), MA Business Ethics (University of Malta) and MBA (University of Malta) and is also a Fellow of Higher Education Academy (FHEA). She brings a multidisciplinary perspective to organisational development. Her

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