

"You never see them in the schemes; they're all in the town where they're not needed as most people have their own security. It's the outskirts and the schemes."

"Police officers are not visible in rural communities."

"A lot of them are just social workers now"

"In my small town, I don't see the police, never."

Lights Under a Bushel?

Visibility Research for Police Scotland



Authors

Professor Karen McArdle - University of Aberdeen

Kirsty Forrester - Dundee City Council

Dr Alan Mackie - University of Dundee

27th February 2026

Contents

Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
The Context	8
This Visibility project	10
Methodology	13
Discussion	14
Conclusion	29
Overlaps and gaps	31
Guidelines for Practice	31
Training Implications of the report	32
References	33



Introduction

For generations, the archetypal figure of the "Bobby on the beat" has been central to public understandings of police visibility in the UK. This figure often revolves around an idealised notion of an officer embedded in the everyday pattern of local life and has long symbolised a form of policing grounded in presence, familiarity, and relational engagement within communities (Loader, 1997). Contemporary debates around visibility continue to return to this image, drawing on the idea that effective policing is not merely about enforcement and response but also about the proactive cultivation of trust, recognition, and local legitimacy (Skogan, 2019). Visibility is therefore more than just being seen but encompasses a broad range of factors that are crucial to the way in which the police are seen and how the public view the police.

Literature Review

In Scotland, these longstanding expectations of visibility are now intersecting with significant organisational reform. Police Scotland's emerging strategy (Police Scotland, 2024) outlines a renewed commitment to frontline presence and community engagement as a core component of its 2030 vision, which emphasises safer communities, reduced crime, supported victims, and a strengthened, thriving workforce. Pilot initiatives such as the new Community Policing model, trialled in Forth Valley and centred on problem-solving teams, enhanced local engagement, and returning officers to community-based work, signal a shift towards a more place-based, prevention-focused approach to visibility. As this new model is scaled up and incorporated into the national strategy, questions of what police visibility should mean, and how it is best achieved, become increasingly salient for both policy and practice.

WHAT IS VISIBILITY?

Police visibility in the modern era extends beyond the traditional image of officers on foot patrol. It encompasses a spectrum of physical and symbolic presences, including foot and vehicle patrols, marked police cars, and the everyday visibility of stations and other police infrastructure. Increasingly, visibility also includes digital forms: online engagement, social-media communication, and virtual contact points that can all shape how communities see, view and experience policing. Together, these forms of presence contribute to public perceptions of accessibility, responsiveness, and reassurance, making visibility a multidimensional concept that reflects both physical encounters and the broader representational footprint of policing today.

REASSURANCE, TRUST AND COMMUNITY

However, these more ephemeral and symbolic forms of police visibility are frequently understood to carry less weight in the public imaginary than direct, physical encounters. Weston (2020, p8) makes this point when writing that:

The 'reassurance function' a visible police presence can provide, that is the feelings of safety and security citizens can experience when they see and are aware of a police officer or police vehicle close by, is substantiated in evaluations of foot patrol (our emphasis).

It is this 'reassurance' factor that plays a central role in estimations of police visibility, whereby the public's subjective sense of community safety is said to be influenced by the presence of regular foot patrols (Innes, 2007). Indeed, as Sindall and Sturgis (2013) note, these formed a central plank of the UK Policing 'reassurance policing' model of the 1990s and 2000s. This came in response to criticism that the police 'had lost touch with local communities and become overly focused on targets, crime reduction and reactive response' (p148). Yesberg et al (2023), in their research, add to this idea of public reassurance by noting that police visibility is a significant predictor of trust and perceived police fairness and effectiveness. The point being that visibility itself can engender feelings of trust and efficacy.

The challenge for the police, however, is that in a context where debates about adequate resourcing dominate, questions arise about how to balance the value of visible policing against the need for considered and responsible expenditure (Robinson et al., 2025). Sindall and Sturgis (2013, p139) highlight a range of evidence that suggests that 'confidence in the police rose as a result of an increased police presence on the streets..the more frequently residents believed that the local police patrolled their neighbourhood, the more effective they thought the police were at controlling crime'. Dau et al. (2023, p. 212), in their systematic review of police presence, argue that 'police presence is most effective when focused on specific places and specific types of crime', a finding echoed in other studies (Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Braga et al, 2019).

Ariel et al (2019) caution however, that this depends on the baseline number of police operating in an area prior to any significant increase. Dau et al (2023) also, however, highlight an intriguing paradox: in some circumstances, increased visibility can actually heighten the public's perception of disorder. This underscores the potential difficulty police services face in striking an effective balance between being sufficiently visible to reassure communities and avoiding visibility that unintentionally amplifies concerns about safety and disorder.

Evidence also points to the notion that visibility alone is not enough – what also matters is how police conduct themselves in communities. As Bradford et al (2009, p21) note, accessibility is also crucial in terms of engendering feelings of trust and legitimacy in the police:

...our findings open up a more optimistic view: treating individuals with fairness and respect - and providing a more visible and accessible police force - may well help improve public confidence in policing.

They also point to what they term an 'insatiable' desire from the public for more 'bobbies on the beat'. This again highlights a tension for the police between available resourcing and an almost unlimited demand for more foot patrol. The new policing model currently being implemented across Scotland reflects a recognition that improvements are needed in both visibility and community engagement:

A consistent approach to community policing will ensure identifiable local officers are available across the whole of Scotland, improving visibility, communication and engagement for the public and our partners (Police Scotland, 2024, p19).

Mackie et al. (2026), in recent SIPR-funded research, point to relationship breakdowns between marginalised young people and the police as being partly driven by the absence of known, familiar officers within their communities. Issues such as this are said to erode the legitimacy of the police. This is crucial as legitimacy is central to the way in which the police operate in Scotland (SPA, 2022; Moir, 2024). As Yesberg et al (2023, p715) note:

Legitimacy refers to the extent to which people believe the police behave in an appropriate manner and feel a normatively grounded obligation to obey the police... [..]..when residents do not see the police as legitimate...[they]... are less willing to cooperate with police, less willing to grant police discretion, and even less likely to obey the law.

Kochel and Weisburd (2019) argue that increased police visibility within a community-policing framework can enhance both the perceived effectiveness of policing and residents' sense of safety. In turn, this heightened sense of security may encourage community members to engage more confidently in informal social-control activities. Skogan (2019) builds on this by suggesting that such a model and increased visibility helps to strengthen relationships with the police and increase trust and legitimacy.

VISIBILITY IN THE DIGITAL DOMAIN

The expansion of the digital sphere has created new opportunities for police visibility, offering additional channels through which the public can encounter and engage with policing. Social media, in particular, provides platforms for communication, real-time updates and the projection of organisational openness and transparency, with the potential to enhance public trust and confidence (Horgan et al., 2024). However, Jones et al. (2025) highlight the issue that there remains a reticence to engage in a more dialogic approach with the public on digital platforms:

...a professional anxiety has been observed towards social media across police organisations – from senior officers concerned with protecting the police reputation due to its assumed centrality to maintaining police legitimacy; to the rank-and-file officers who fear saying or doing something on social media that will cause them professional harm.

As Robinson et al. (2025) caution, adopting a more genuinely dialogical or interactive social-media approach would require substantial time and resourcing. As such, such an approach is unlikely to be met in a period of fiscal constraint. In this context, digital

visibility may risk remaining primarily one-way rather than relational. However, this does not mean that visibility is necessarily harmed as others have noted that the digital sphere can still be a useful space for the police to share local activity, amplify messaging, promote awareness raising campaigns aimed at public safety as well as seeking assistance from the public when required and appropriate (Fielding, 2023; Horgan et al. 2024; Jones et al. 2025).

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON LITERATURE

In short, what the literature appears to point towards is a complex set of issues both influenced by, and influencing, police visibility. This raises the fundamental question: what is the purpose of visibility? Is its primary function to reassure the public through a sense of safety and presence? Is it to create opportunities for meaningful community engagement? Is it intended as a targeted strategy to prevent or disrupt criminal activity? Or, as some scholars suggest, does visibility serve different purposes in different contexts, making it a far more nuanced concept than traditional policing discourse often assumes? Rather than treating visibility as an uncomplicated good, existing research encourages us to question its intended outcomes, its unintended consequences, and the expectations that communities place upon it. Seen this way, the question is not simply how much visibility is needed, but what kind and ultimately, to what end?

The Context

A January 2026 Audit Report for Police Scotland highlighted a number of significant challenges, including the need to realign strategic priorities, improve performance management and reporting, and accelerate progress on organisational reform to ensure that policing resources, governance structures, and workforce planning are better equipped to meet future demands.

These include:

- **Need for Reform:** Policing in Scotland is under pressure to deliver the next stage of its reform to ensure future sustainability.
- **Workforce Uncertainty:** There is "no evidence" that the current 16,550 officers and 5,900 staff are the correct numbers needed for future service delivery.
- **Performance Metrics:** Current reporting does not clearly show whether Police Scotland is achieving its long-term strategic goals.
- **Public Confidence:** While the service has a clear vision and strong financial management, confidence in local policing has declined.
- **Missed Opportunities:** The service has been slow to implement necessary changes to modernise operations.

The Scottish Police Authority point to the following positive findings:

The [Best Value report](#) found that policing in Scotland benefits from effective leadership and governance. It also says that:

- senior leaders work well together and have a clear vision
- lots of improvement activity is taking place
- financial management is strong
- and partnership working is a continuing strength. (p.1)

A quotation below from Borovec (2019) puts this report into an even broader context.

Changes that have been taking place in policing over the past thirty years and that have led to new policing concepts, such as community policing or problem oriented policing, are the results of efforts to find more effective ways of policing, which will promote public safety and enhance citizens' quality of life, i.e. increase the feeling of safety and reduce the fear of crime. The scope and nature of crime, as well as changes in the type of crime have led the police to find more effective solutions and to expand crime control tactics with crime prevention strategies, increasing the feeling of safety and the quality of life in communities. (Borovec et al, 2019 : 135)

Whilst Borovec was discussing Croatia, the lack of feeling of safety, or fear of crime has become the focus of public interest in Scotland. The Audit Report (2026) mentioned above focused on community trust and a decline in confidence on local policing. It is considered that police presence and visibility can reduce such fear in local communities, by improving citizens' overall sense of safety. O'Reilly (2024) explains how neoliberalism and globalisation have led to a gradual disconnection of the police from communities. At the time of writing Police Scotland was in the process of exploring new methods of organising engagement with communities in Tayside and Fife and this will be rolled out to other communities in April 2026. The findings in this report research will contribute to this process.

British policing has had to cope with the Covid pandemic; Black Lives Matter protests and crimes that have affected confidence in the police (e.g. Sarah Everard case) (O'Reilly, 2024). These have arguably affected forces not associated with these crimes (Forrester et al. 2024), but who were also struggling with the disadvantage of similar austerity measures. Often attitudes may reflect what is seen on the television or social media rather than individual's own experience of Police Scotland (Forrester et al. 2024). O'Reilly (2024) argues that, contrary to our data, all contact with the police is much more likely to damage rather than improve confidence. We found this to be largely the opposite. Contact with the police was more often seen to be a positive excepting three short anecdotes where expectation was not met.



This Visibility project

The project funded by Scottish Institute for Police Research (SIPR) was a partnership between Professor (Emeritus) Karen McArdle, of the University of Aberdeen and Honorary Professor at the University of Dundee; Kirsty Forrester of Dundee City Council (Community Learning and Development Manager – Adult Learning and Improvement); Alan Mackie of the University of Dundee (Youth and Community Work Lecturer at the University of Dundee). These three colleagues conceptualised, proposed and implemented the project, which sought to research, through collaboration with people from a range of different backgrounds, the visibility of policing in the community.

This project concerned assisting police officers to engage, as co-inquirers, with people who are seldom heard in a research context. The project used a participatory action research process (PAR). Ortiz Aragon and Brydon-Miller (2021) suggest a starting point for participatory researcher is the desire to leverage knowledge in participatory ways to support meaningful change. Stringer and Ortiz Aragon (2021) frame PAR in a way we share as consisting of 3 core elements (1) Learning through and for action; (2) action informed by learning; and (3) participation by those who know. Our use of PAR combined these three approaches. PAR focuses quite specifically on development and change, as well as research knowledge, through mainly qualitative inquiry methods.

The project brought together extensive knowledge and experience of PAR and how to work with marginalised communities and engage with them in ways which ensured the project met its outcomes. Namely, we, through our networks, had access to the identified community populations and existing relationships founded on trust. Thanks are due to staff at Dundee City Council, Dundee and Angus College, Fife Council and Angus Council for their assistance in engaging with participants and forming focus groups.

CO-INQUIRERS

Six police officers who participated as co-inquirers in this project were predominantly, but not exclusively, early- to mid-career practitioners working on the frontline of community policing. Our point of departure was an awareness, informed by previous collaborative projects, that both community workers and police officers often expressed uncertainty about how best to engage with particular population groups. Many reported feeling unsure about what constituted appropriate or culturally sensitive practice and were concerned about the risk of miscommunication or causing offence.

This uncertainty was mirrored within communities themselves. For many community members, particularly those with limited prior experience of interacting with the police, or of engaging with individuals from outside their own cultural contexts - such unfamiliarity acted as a significant barrier to building mutual understanding and trust. We were mindful that strengthening relationships between the police and these communities was essential for promoting collective well-being and enhancing public confidence.

At the same time, our earlier work had demonstrated that effective community policing and meaningful engagement could have a positive impact. We had observed examples where constructive, culturally responsive approaches led to increased confidence among migrant participants taking part in workshops and focus groups. Drawing on these positive precedents, our intention in this project was to develop a set of principles that could build on such good practice and support sustained, long-term improvements in police/community relationships.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We used the expertise of police officers to gain insight into police visibility and wider connectedness.

- What is meant by 'visibility' and how is it understood?
- What kind of visibility 'counts', in what context, and for different sections of the community?

- How might visibility vary according to context?
- What do officers do when they are being visible, and does the quality of what officers do make a difference to their perception by the community?
- What impact does 'visibility' actually have on the community?
- What are the perceived impacts of low levels of police visibility?
- Connecting to communities is linked, we suggest, to being highly visible but what are any overlaps and gaps?

OUTPUTS

- A comprehensive research report based on stakeholder feedback;
- Recommendations and evidence-based Guidelines for police practice associated with in-depth understanding of visibility and connectedness in the community;
- Guidelines for police training purposes;
- A model of inquiry for use in other areas/communities by Police Scotland;
- A launch of the guidelines, linked to visibility, in Dundee or other suitable location.

OUTCOMES

- Police officers trained in inquiry and connectedness with communities, including improved in-depth understanding of what works in visibility and connectedness;
- Improved relationships and understanding between community members, community workers and the police;
- Research findings about barriers and means of overcoming barriers to visibility with these populations;
- Improved well-being in the community through greater sense of safety and trust;
- Training of potential community ambassadors and police ambassadors for improved communication more widely in the Dundee, Angus, Fife areas;

THE SAMPLE

The assistance of community workers from Fife, Tayside, and Angus Councils, as well as teaching staff at Dundee and Angus College, was instrumental in identifying and recruiting suitable participant groups. Their established relationships within local communities and educational settings enabled access to diverse focus group samples that would have been difficult for the research team to source independently. We targeted populations that included individuals who may sit at the margins of mainstream society, recognising that such groups are often less likely to have their voices heard and may have limited awareness of police roles, practices, and responsibilities. For many within these communities, the police may also be considerably less visible, further constraining opportunities for engagement and mutual understanding. At the same time, we deliberately sought to include participants from more mainstream population groups to ensure that the research reflected a balanced cross-section of community perspectives. Not all community perspectives were achieved. We did not, for instance, seek the views quite specifically of disabled people. Our intention was, however, to engage as wide a range of community stakeholders as possible, thereby capturing diverse experiences, expectations, and perceptions of police visibility and community safety.

We generated data with:

- Young men and young women attending college (Dundee and Angus College X 2);
- Ethnic minority community (Arbroath);
- LGBTQ+ communities; (Cupar);
- Parents/carers (Whitfield);
- Elderly people (Lumphinnans);
- Rural community (Birkhill)

- People living in a small town (Brechin);
- People in recovery (Douglas);
- Young people not in employment (Glenrothes).

The police officers themselves generated data as part of the ongoing process. Their experience was learning for the project. In total, we conducted ten focus groups, involving 95 participants across the different sessions. In addition, we carried out one individual interview with an elderly community member who wished to participate but was unable to access the focus group venue in Birkhill. At Dundee and Angus College, we elected to run separate focus groups with young women and young men to ensure that gendered experiences, particularly in relation to interactions with the police and perceptions of police visibility, could be explored without constraint.

Whilst we sought a diverse population, it is important not to stereotype people as being simply forming opinions from one standpoint. Each individual had a different history and different experiences and opinions of the police. There was some flux between focus groups and areas of commonality. We seek in this report to communicate these similarities, differences, and patterns.

We also interviewed the Community Safety Lead Officer and the Chief Inspector with responsibility for partnerships, both based in Dundee, to assist with data analysis and interpretation.

Methodology

In qualitative research, the researchers may be considered to be the instruments of research data analysis, or the lens through which the data may be interpreted. Here, we have chosen to include extensive quotations to illustrate the findings, to enable the reader to understand the complex picture, which the research data formed. The data were substantial and these quotations have been selected to represent commonly reported views or key findings. As far as possible we have stayed with the original text but have occasionally edited quotations to protect anonymity.

By recruiting police officers to undertake and facilitate the focus groups, our approach aligned with that participatory methodological approach, whilst the researcher team remained in a mainly observational role. This decision was informed by the substantive focus of the project, police visibility, and reflected a commitment to generating data within an interactional environment that more closely mirrors real-world encounters between police and community members. Our approach also reduced researcher influence on the interactional process, thereby minimising performance effects and allowing participants to respond directly to police personnel rather than to academic facilitators. Additionally, involving officers as co-inquirers supported a co-productive model of knowledge generation, strengthening practitioner ownership of the research process and creating opportunities for, we hope, reflexive learning. Our approach therefore aligned both with the theoretical aims of the study and with ethical commitments to practitioner involvement and authentic community engagement.

Additionally, and importantly, the police officers involved were uniquely positioned to elicit actionable and contextually grounded insights during the focus groups. Their professional experience enabled them to respond directly and authoritatively to issues raised by participants, thereby deepening the level of discussion around community concerns, policing practices, and the legal frameworks that shape these interactions. This form of real-time, practice-informed engagement enriched the quality of dialogue in ways that would not have been possible, certainly not with the same depth or immediacy, had the research team facilitated the groups. Overall, the experience for the research team was highly positive. The police officers who participated as co-inquirers demonstrated strong and adaptable communication skills, which played a significant role in fostering an environment where community members

felt comfortable speaking openly and honestly. This was reflected in the openness, depth, and authenticity of the data generated during the sessions. As the findings will illustrate, participants were not only willing but also confident in offering constructive critiques of what they perceived as shortcomings in current policing practices within their communities.

The police officers and Council community workers participated in research training; and an induction into research and ethical practice. Each participated in a cycle of inquiry, with a focus group, to hear the experiences of these people; and assisted with analysis of the data, developing an emergent set of guidelines for practice.

Focus groups were conducted in a structured workshop format, and all discussions were digitally recorded to ensure accurate capture of participants' contributions and to support rigorous subsequent analysis. The themes in the workshops were primarily about visibility and connectedness, including a) engagement with the police; b) raising issues from life stories, which may involve previous experiences of crime and policing; and c) were about seeking ideas to develop guidelines for good police practice to promote positive visibility with these communities. The workshops were facilitated by the police officers, supported by investigators; and community workers were present and are included as respondents because of their in-depth local knowledge.

Recordings were partially transcribed and analysed using thematic and discourse analysis over 3 iterations, including by the police co-inquirers; a community worker; and the principal investigators.

Ethical approval was sought and received from the University of Dundee's Ethical Approvals process. Co-inquirers and community workers were trained in ethics by the team prior to implementation of the focus groups.

Discussion

We were able to delineate themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants. In line with the recommendation of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), the findings and analysis are combined. The inductive nature of this research lends itself to an integrated elucidation of the interview responses.

FEELING SAFE.

A common theme identified in analysis was safety. Our respondents were, with notable exceptions, generally quite positive about the police. This was particularly pronounced in the ethnic minority focus group. This contrary to much popular media discourses on relations between the police and those from minority ethnic backgrounds (Bremner, 2022; Hammond et al, 2025), though is in line with other recent findings where 'minority ethnic groups are more likely to hold positive views of the police than the national average' (Scottish Government, 2023). For many in the group, these positive perceptions were shaped in part by comparison with policing practices in their countries of origin, where experiences of police authority were described as markedly more punitive, inconsistent, or unpredictable. As such, the Scottish policing context was viewed as comparatively respectful and reliable, factors that seemingly contributed significantly to participants' overall sense of safety:

Police are wonderful. Protect, safety. Deal with anti-social behaviour. Deal with crime (Arbroath)

I can phone and ask about anything, living conditions and housing. Police work with Housing. (Arbroath)

The purpose of the Police and what they do is guidance, protection and support, follow up and prevention (Birkhill).

More negative experiences frequently centred on a perceived lack of police visibility. However, what was particularly noteworthy was participants' apparent awareness of wider structural constraints: many tempered their critique by acknowledging that police resources are limited rather than infinite, and that reduced visibility was

therefore understood as a consequence of broader resourcing pressures on the service. Those respondents who did report seeing the police in their community often noted that this presence was primarily in vehicles rather than on foot, and this was generally interpreted in negative terms. The use of cars was seen as creating a sense of distance and reducing opportunities for meaningful, informal engagement with officers, again a finding in line with previous study (O'Reilly, 2024).

*I forget, who the f*ck are the police? I never see them anymore. I'm being a wee bit cheeky, but eh, there is no police presence anymore. (Douglas)*

Feeling safe is so important especially at night. Need more police officers. (Arbroath)

I know what they are meant to do, look after the community; make the community feel safer. But honestly, I have not seen any police, they sometimes go up and down in their cars up that [busy local road]. They're always in cars. (Douglas)

Police officers are not visible in rural communities. I had an incident at the side of the road and had to wait 3 or 4 hours (Birkhill)

I don't see you. I don't see police where I live, where I live is quite small but there are a lot of pubs, but don't see them (Dundee College, young men).

More of that community building, we used to see more of them. Like I get you are overstretched and that, now. You do a lot of different jobs now; I get you are more like social workers half the time. Less ability to do those sorts of things, to stop things happening. (Brechin)

Yeah, we used to have a lot of the community officers would come to all of our events, they used to show face. There was a lot more of that connection. But that has gone downhill, not that it is anyone's fault, it is just provision. That ability is not there. We'll see them here and there but more now we will see them because there has been an issue. It is not just that they are invited. The relationships are more with people where there has been an issue (Cupar)

A strong local theme that emerged concerned fears relating to what participants described as the anti-social behaviour of young people. Respondents expressed uncertainty about where responsibility for addressing such behaviour lay, with some unsure whether it fell to the police, the local council, or another agency. Several focus group members also located responsibility with parents, teachers, the media, and society more broadly, highlighting the extent to which perceptions of youth behaviour are shaped by multiple social forces.

'Teenager faces buried in this thing (hoodie). Something is wrong something is missing something is lost.' (Birkhill)

'There's an awful lot of buck-passing. I spend time in Camperdown. Now, just a wilderness. The golf course is just being vandalised, with kids on motorbikes and quad bikes. A weekend ago, I was there and 3 or 4 motorbikes came. If I hadn't been quick, quick and fled, my dog too as they went streaming past. One woman came in with her dog and another and a third one, a third one. Anyway, in fear and danger for themselves and dogs, I sent an, an email to council 'Nothing to do with us,' they said, 'it is up to the police' But the council don't care.' (Birkhill)

Kids in the park are bad. Teenagers, have no respect. Early school – needs to have rules, growing up. (Arbroath)

E-scooters in rural areas. Deterrent for young people not there. It's frustrating for police who can't get there soon enough. Difficult to catch. (Birkhill)

No accountability for young people in schools. Violence in schools, home. A primary school teacher I know came home and was black and blue. Lack of discipline. Nurses too, in hospitals. There are no consequences. Society has gone too far in one direction. (Birkhill)

Problems of boy racers on bikes and e-scooters. Also grown men in cars racing. Young people have no respect for police or even parents at home. No boundaries. No repercussions for children. TV and media contribute to young people crime. (Brechin)

Studies on moral panic about young people have long shown how this multiplicity of actors, narratives, and expectations can work to position young people as beyond the boundaries of 'acceptable' or 'normal' behaviour, casting them instead as a social problem requiring heightened scrutiny and intervention (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995; Pitts, 2005). What the police role in this is less clear and less easy to square. On the one hand, visibility could offer a form of reassurance, as outlined at the beginning of this report. On the other hand, increased visibility could signal that something is wrong as well as becoming a proxy for the monitoring of young people who are doing little more than 'hanging around'. As a consequence, getting this balance right seems challenging.

Few people had helpful suggestions about what could be done about this. But police and youthwork involvement were seen to be important. The fact that youth work has been cut (Youth Scotland, 2025) in austerity measures was seen as an important contributor to this situation.

Need to patrol main street. People on bikes are doing wheelies in front of cars (Lumphinnans).

They (police) need to confiscate bikes. And need to prevent crime. They're (police again) drastically understaffed. Mob rule of young people - lads, at Aldi in Cowdenbeath. They (police) need to spray perpetrators with ink. The lassies are worse. (Lumphinnans)

Youth workers needed. Cowdenbeath youth group caters for 140 – 260 young people. We have here no village hall and the Hub costs £35 an hour, which is too expensive. The Bowling Club is not suitable for young people (Lumphinnans).

I'm frightened to go out in the dark. Elderly lady mugged. (Brechin)

A recent study (Mackie et al, 2026) by one of the authors presents an illuminating picture of relationships between police and young people and young people and the community.

The findings reveal that while young people are navigating challenging economic circumstances, marked by limited opportunities and material constraints, they nonetheless express a strong sense of connection to their local area. This connection is rooted not in formal institutions or services, but in the everyday relationships they maintain with friends, family, and peers. These social ties provide a sense of belonging and stability, even in the face of broader structural difficulties. This finding is in line with previous literature. While outsiders may view these communities as dangerous or places to be avoided, it is important to recognise that they hold deep significance for many of the young people who grow up there. This attachment, though sometimes marked by ambivalence, is grounded in the familiarity of place and the strength of social ties that shape their everyday lives.

Modern approaches to policing, such as community policing in its comprehensive sense, are multi-dimensional and multi-layered, embracing numerous aspects, such as having as one of their primary goals being the need generate a feeling of safety. This makes sense, if we take into consideration the fact that citizens' satisfaction with the police and their activities depends, in large part, on whether citizens feel safe or not. Fear of crime, Borovec et al (2019) argue, results in a growing number of residents feeling unsafe and results in physical and psychological withdrawal from society, weakens informal social control, and diminishes the capacities of individuals and the community to jointly solve problems they face.

Fear of crime is an emotional reaction characterised by a sense of danger and anxiety, produced by the perceived threat of harm. This may be elicited by perceived clues in the environment that relate to some aspect of crime. It can also be defined as a person's or a group's sense, which represents a belief, perception or emotion related to crime or public order, and which has a negative impact on their feelings, thoughts or behaviour and the quality of life (Borovec *ibid*). This fear can be a reaction to direct danger when a person comes face to face with some form of violence. As people have the ability to anticipate future events by means of factors, such as streets littered with garbage, devastated public property, graffiti, abandoned buildings, fear of crime can appear due to an anticipated possible threat or as a reaction to an event, i.e. some characteristics of the surroundings.

O'Reilly (2024) points out the fear of crime is subjective and may not be related directly to actual risk of harm. Farrell (2007, p23) distinguishes between:

...everyday worry about crime (which is relatively rare and typically affects those who live in high crime areas and who have direct and indirect experience of crime) and anxiety about crime (which is more widespread and typically affects those who lead more protected lives).

This distinction appeared to resonate with the older members of our cohort, particularly in the ways they described the young people in their communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that we do not observe their neighbourhoods first-hand and therefore cannot fully access the specific experiences shaping their perceptions.

Also, low-level disorder such as graffiti may not be remarkable in a community that suffers from high crime and disorder but can be of real concern in a more orderly community as it is unusual. The perception of crime, however, significantly influences citizens' feeling of safety and their perception of the police (Singer & Cooper, 2009).

This point is particularly relevant in the context of our study, especially for some of the older participants. For them, feelings of fear and anxiety were associated not with an over-police presence, but with its absence, reflecting a nostalgia for the traditional 'bobby on the beat' and an awareness of the impact of ongoing budget constraints:

'It needs some police presence, as some time to make contact with the people. They need not to be driving...[...]but out (of the car). Don't have 'manpower' at present. They should be making some contact.' (Birkhill)

It's at least 5 years since I spoke to a policeman. Very disappointed. The old bobby was an institution. Respect for police has disappeared with that.' (Birkhill interview)

Some people knock on doors and do drugs. Not our door. People do drugs from parked cars. People afraid of reprisals to report it. (Arbroath)

You used to see them a lot more, the safety wardens too, you never see them anymore, cutbacks I suppose. I used to see them around Fintry and Whitfield, since Covid I never see them anymore. We have this new park and the kids they don't look after it. For the little ones, the youths are ruining it for the little ones. I think if we had more wardens that would help. When it first got built, they built new grass and they were throwing it around. (Whitfield)

As Loader and Mulcahy (2003) pointed out over twenty years ago, the bobby on the beat continues to exert a powerful imaginary. They make the point that the bobby has not only come to represent an absence of police presence in the contemporary period but that:

...the demise of this figure and his (sic) social magic is consequently taken not merely to explain the subsequent erosion of this safer, more secure world, but also to exemplify it, as if the eclipse of the local bobby is itself a sign of social disarray. The absent guardian thus becomes a key motif to express social decline. (Loader and Mulcahy, 2003, p95)

Yet it is important to acknowledge the potency this absent figure continues to extend beyond cultural nostalgia. The sense that something essential has been lost plays directly into contemporary debates about trust in the police, shaping how communities judge the police today. A good example of this was articulated in one of the groups:

It's the way of the world now, you don't have your own personal doctor now, you don't have your own police officer. That officer who would say, 'I'm going to tell your mother'. (Recovery Group)

Paradoxically, however, these narratives of absence and decline do not always align with empirical patterns of trust. To explore this tension, we now shift to examine how trust in the police is currently understood and experienced.

TRUST

In our research, a police presence was valued highly, and 'law and order' was perceived to be a barrier to effective policing, and police staffing levels. People harked back to a former time which may or may not have actually existed (Forrester, 2024). The role of schools was alluded to, but respondents also saw a need for improvements in the justice system. We return to this later in the report.

Law and order does not exist anymore. Respect has gone because I speak to the folk in shops. Police will not touch shoplifters these days. It's not the bobbies; it's higher up the tree, law and order.' (Birkhill)

Bus passes misused by young people to get to rural areas to commit crimes. (Birkhill)

There are twenty-two Community Councils in Angus. Police cannot go to all. (Brechin)

Park police cars more often and open windows for a chat. Use local networks on social media (Brechin)

I feel sorry for police in this area. They're not paid enough. Hard job, risk of assault (Lumphinnans).

I'd like government to give police more power to deal with young people. (Police) Need to be in schools. Definitely primary (school) but also age 14. Attitude to any authority, teachers, police. They're (young people) disruptive, badly behaved. (Arbroath)

For me very important to be safe in Arbroath. I'd like police to be more around. Kids in park make me feel unsafe, asking for money. Carlogie. (Arbroath)

Community centre, leisure centres. 12 – 16 not enough groups. No activities. It's important for children. All youth clubs are shut now. All gone, which is a shame. (Arbroath)

Children also mollycoddled. Do not know risky play. Parents pay fines not the children. Youth clubs only suit one group. But it's hard to get a job. (Brechin)

Justice system and courts should make it not so easy for young people. Community payback needed. (Brechin)

Youth justice need to help. Home is the problem. Free bus pass is a problem, as it makes the offenders mobile. (Lumphinnans)

Fires have been started in school basement in farm buildings and an empty house. (Lumphinnans)

The Researcher asked the young women about the young people with hoodies on e-bikes, scooters.

The people are trying to be frightening, but are not really frightening. It's just a pose. (Dundee College)

It is important to acknowledge that the criticism of young people came from the older members of our sample; from those in Lumphinnans in particular and did not represent a wider full view of young people.

Research shows that public trust in the police does not always increase with a decrease in crime frequency (Owen-Evans and Low, 2024; Scottish Government, 2025). The perception of crime frequency varies depending on demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Accordingly, a British study (Thorpe & Hall, 2009, cited in Borovec, 2019) showed that age (35 and over) is strongly related to the perception of rise in crime frequency at the national UK level. This of course suggests that UK wide levels of crime will impact on Police Scotland. However, the perception of significant rise in crime at the local level is unsurprisingly related to variables, such as prior victimisation and type of area where respondents live. There is a statistically significant relationship between concern over crime and dissatisfaction with local police (Jackson & Bradford, 2009). Concern over crime is particularly high among citizens with small children (Paskell, 2007).

Tura et al (2025) found that those who are non-white, from lower social classes, and who reside in a city context (London in this case) show lower predicted trust levels than other people. While older people show higher predicted trust levels, younger people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, have the lowest predicted

levels of trust in the police. They also found intersectional effects. While middle-aged white males from lower social classes and living outside of London have lower than expected trust in the police, older White females from lower social classes and living outside of London have higher than expected trust in the police. They argue that ground-level, community engagement, coupled with extensive officer training on engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds, are key to developing higher levels of trust in the police.

The challenge for understanding the dynamics of trust in the police is that there is strong variation across intersectional groups in their levels of trust. The connection between the public and the police is complex when considering minority communities or indeed any community. Their research suggests that low predicted trust in the police is most common among those who are younger, non-White and socioeconomically disadvantaged and racial and ethnic minorities consistently report lower levels of trust in the police (Tura et al *ibid*). This latter statement concerning ethnic minorities was not true for our small sample, who were able to compare Police Scotland to other police forces in country of origin.

Specific trust in the police is a fundamental element in the functioning of a democratic society (Pickering et al, 2024). Our data suggest trust in the police is often built on direct and indirect experiences with the law enforcement system. Positive experiences include police responding promptly to calls for help, treating individuals fairly, and demonstrating competency in crime-solving, were shown to foster trust. In contrast, negative experiences, such as perceived misconduct, discriminatory practices, or ineffectiveness in ensuring safety, erode trust (Pickering et al, *ibid*).

Building trust with young people is an important dimension of our findings as it was in other recent SIPR findings (Mackie, 2026). Again, the finding here is one of ambivalence towards the police, with some negative framings, some positive and some more balanced:

I feel like they see the worst of young people and think we're all like that. Because that is what is more visible. I have been out and about, and people look at me like I am going to cause trouble (16+)

I've just had mixed experiences, sometimes I feel oh my god, other times it makes me feel safer. (LGBTQ+)

[They're] reassuring, when you see the odd one patrolling in the car, it is reassuring that they do sometimes go around the small towns. (Young College Males)

I think some people forget that police are just human beings, they just see the uniform. And some officers are amazing and go above and beyond. There are some great officers. (LGBTQ+)

They shouldn't be abusing their authority. A lot of social media, you see police acting as if they're better, than the public. I haven't had it personally, but something I see and they shouldn't be doing. (16+)

Our findings point to a degree of contradiction among young people, who value the reassurance that greater police visibility can bring but remain cautious about how officers conduct themselves. Many of the young people in our study pointed to incidents with officers where they felt poorly treated, or even a sense of fear. For example:

When I was younger, even if there was something I wanted to report I would just not be interested in talking to them, just because I was that kind of intimidated. (Young College Males)

It would be pretty good to see them (the police), I wouldn't feel as scared basically. I was at the bus station this time right, and I got hit, and the police just took me home, they didn't do anything to the person. Now I just don't know if the police would do anything. (16+)

I feel better when you see them in pairs. Like if you see one of them, there's always that lingering...[pause]...whereas if you have two if anything happens then there is two then you're covered. If it's just one, then it's just your word against theirs. (LGBTQ+ Group)

Other recent research suggests that just over half of young people believe the police do a good job locally, far fewer feel the police treat people fairly or are reliably available when needed (YEF, 2024). This suggests that while increased presence may help build trust, it must be accompanied by consistently fair, respectful, and procedurally just policing. Sindall et al (2017, p358) argue that:

The ages of 10-15 are a crucial time where attitudes are formed and begin to stabilize...[...]this is also the time when young people are most likely to experience the 'sharp end' of police-public interactions, with higher levels of involvement in crime, and a disproportionate propensity to be stop and searched...[...]this arguably makes young people's views of the police particularly susceptible to change, influenced either by direct experiences or indirectly via the vicarious experiences of others.

Young people will become the adults of the future and as such, if trust is to be built with communities, then it is important that interactions with young people are cultivated with care to enhance trust as well as legitimacy. Young people are a powerful, if often untapped, resource in promoting community change that benefits children, young people, and families. While public opinion may view young people either as problems to be solved or as passive clients of community youth programmes, an alternative view posits youth as civic assets whose insights and contributions are essential to build healthy communities (Campbell & Erbstein, 2012). A number of questions are posed by Campbell and Erbstein (ibid): What choices do community developers face in pursuing this agenda? What principles should they consider as they pursue youth civic engagement? What strategies, organizational structures, and leadership skills are critical to success?

Research identifies multiple rationales for engaging young people in community change, including informing local planning and policy with unique youth knowledge and insight, accomplishing community projects with youth energy and labour; building strategic constituencies for community change; and holding decision makers accountable through youth advocacy. For young people themselves, civic engagement can deepen civic commitment, extend social capital, create meaningful relationships with adults, foster self-esteem and identity development, and build a sense of self and collective efficacy (Campbell & Erbstein, 2012).

The evidence on how to do this, suggest Campbell and Erstein (ibid), supports the important role played by three implementation principles:

1. asking (and answering) the right strategic questions in the right order;
2. creating structures that integrate youth and adults into joint decision making; and
3. marshalling boundary-spanning community leaders with diverse skills and extensive networks.

Together these principles focus attention not on specific youth engagement methods, but on the degree to which communities have the leadership and institutional capacity to hold, nurture, and sustain this challenging work. The task is not simply giving young people a voice; it is making sure that voice will be heard by focusing the goals and then building the necessary bridges to local organizations and policy makers.

Where residents know and trust one another, they are more willing to intervene to solve community problems and tend to experience less crime. Trust, we define as the promise of a good future relationship, all things being equal (McArdle et al, 2024). Trust refers to a willingness to be vulnerable to another under conditions of risk, where such willingness is based on positive evaluations and expectations of the other's competence, benevolence and good intentions. Confidence, by contrast, refers to a 'conscious evaluation of whether an entity is trustworthy (i.e. whether it is in fact competent, benevolent and well-intentioned).

Policing is thought to be one antecedent to 'collective efficacy', or communities working together effectively. Police presence in neighbourhoods, assert Yesberg et al (2023), is associated with more positive views about officer behaviour, which in turn is associated with collective efficacy (Yesberg et al, 2023). Efficacy may be understood, in this context, as the ability to take charge effectively at the local level

Decades of research across different contexts has confirmed (Yesberg, 2023): when communities are higher in collective efficacy or working together – a construct that relates to social ties among neighbours, combined with a willingness to intervene to solve local problems – crime tends to be lower.

HOW CAN POSITIVE REGARD BE SUSTAINED?

Little research has examined how collective efficacy is generated and sustained over time. We propose a need to turn to the literature on community development. Community development has many definitions, but here we see it as a process through which people seek collectively to influence their shared life experience. Community development is a historically situated, ideologically contested and contextually specific practice (derived from Shaw 2008). Communities are complex and multi-layer and power dynamics need to be addressed between residents and external players (Taylor, 2019), such as the police. Just as the state cannot solve complex problems, so too the community cannot do this alone. Partnerships have already been apparent in our research and need to be developed further.

People often hark back to a time that debatably never existed of the good old days of the Bobby on the Beat

A long way back we would be chapping on someone's window and running away. A kick up the backside. We respected the bobby. He knew everybody. All that is missing these days because of legislation you can't do this and you can't do that. Legislation. (Birkhill)

They should be able to be more old-school, give you a kick up the arse, we used to get the option that they could take you home to your father or give you a kick up the arse right then and there. (Douglas)

Policing is thought to be one factor contributing to shaping community, but how and why police activity and officer behaviour are expected to facilitate and encourage collective efficacy is not well understood. Three mutually compatible mechanisms have been proposed in the literature:

- (1) that trust in police fosters collective efficacy;
- (2) that police legitimacy encourages collective efficacy ;
- (3) that certain types of policing strategies help build collective efficacy.

(Yesberg, 2023)

Yesberg describes these mechanisms further. Firstly, When residents view the police as a capable and effective resource, and believe officers exercise their authority in a fair and just manner, they may be more inclined to take collective action to address community problems and may feel more empowered to intervene when confronted with local problems. (Silver and Miller, 2004). On the other hand, when residents do not feel the police are visible, they may feel too vulnerable to intervene in neighbourhood issues, because they may see their own actions as both less effective and more at risk from reprisals.

Secondly, researchers have suggested that the police may facilitate collective efficacy through their legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to the extent to which people believe the police behave in an appropriate manner and feel a normatively grounded obligation to obey the police (Jackson et al., 2013). If residents do not see the police as legitimate, the validity and force of mutually shared values diminish, and residents are less willing to cooperate with police, less willing to grant police discretion, and even less likely to obey the law.

The third proposed mechanism of Yesberg et al (ibid) is that certain types of policing strategies will increase collective efficacy within communities. Community or neighbourhood policing is a law enforcement approach that emphasises community involvement in crime prevention and seeks to increase contact between police and local residents (Gill et al., 2014). Community policing is expected to increase collective efficacy by providing more opportunities for residents to interact with one another, by increasing access to police resources, and by stimulating 'self-help' within communities. Another aspect of community policing – police presence or visibility – is also thought to contribute to collective efficacy through reassuring residents of safety and reducing fear of crime, allowing them to engage confidently in their own informal social control behaviours (Yesberg et al. 2023)

A recent rapid evidence assessment (REA) (Yesberg & Bradford, 2021) reviewed the literature on policing and collective or communities working well together. Overall, trust in police was the aspect of policing most consistently associated with collective efficacy. There was also some evidence that community policing activities, such as visibility and community engagement, predicted collective efficacy. By contrast, police legitimacy was largely unrelated to collective efficacy. Community context and concerns about social order, they conclude, play an important role in shaping attitudes toward the police.

Our respondents alluded to the frisson of fear they experience when seeing the police but welcomed their presence and the importance of crime prevention. It is interesting to note that the role of the community in policing, tackling crime or prevention was not very strongly identified. Policing was seen more as a service than a partnership

People feel safer seeing police but also worry what they themselves have done. (laughter). Elderly folk need reassurance. Police can't be everywhere. Need to park car and go for a walk to gain intelligence and spend five minutes. (Birkhill)

Cost of crime versus cost of prevention is interesting. Cheaper to prevent. Only see police if something is 'going down'. (Brechin)

I don't trust the system, but I do trust the police. But I don't think they need to wander aimlessly around the street, it's like an ad, if you know who you want the ad to be targeted at, you structure a plan. I'm sure you must have a plan of who you need to target in the community, where are these people? If it is schools, parents, youths (Whitfield)

SYSTEMS

Maguire (2019) refers to the 'iron cage of rationality' the big, highly elaborate organisational structures of policing (p. 68). Maguire states that the police are getting larger in terms of the communities they serve. Secondly, the structures are more mechanistic and inflexible. Thirdly, technology is having an impact; and fourthly they are becoming more militarised. He is referring to police agencies in general and, as we hear, this may be not the case to the same extent for Police Scotland.

People were aware of the link between safety and a police presence, and, in Lumphinnans, they felt they had been left behind, 'just a spot on the map'

They'd (the community) would feel safer if a police car came one day a week and stopped and spoke to people. Lumphinnans is just a spot on the map the green bit before you get to Lochgelly. (Lumphinnans)

Likewise, those living in more rural areas of our cohort felt that they were not a priority for the police. Others recognised that due to less crime occurring in their locality, this was perhaps unsurprising:

I don't see you; I don't see police where I live, where I live is quite small but there are a lot of pubs, but don't see them. (College, Young men)

In my small town, I don't see the police, never. (LGBTQ+ Group)

This was also the case for those living outside of the city centre, in surrounding towns and housing estates:

You never see them in the schemes; they're all the town where they're not needed as most people have their own security. It's the outskirts and the schemes. (Recovery Group)

Around the city centre, that is the only police where I see them. Two police cars outside the station, never anyone in them. Driving round, always in cars, sometimes in vans. (16+)

While recent Scottish budgets have increased allocations to policing (c. £1.55bn in 2024/25 and £1.6bn in 2025/26), the SPA and Police Scotland note ongoing real-terms pressures (pay awards, national insurance, estates and technology). Against this backdrop, the question of whether numbers and structure drive crime reduction and public trust have resurfaced (Scottish Police Authority, 2026; Audit Scotland, 2026). Whereas some claim that a reduction in numbers is likely to have a detrimental effect, others argue that raw numbers are less important than how the police are organised and deployed. By cutting red tape and focusing staffing reductions on 'back-office' functions, the argument goes, it should be possible to maintain a consistent 'frontline' presence, which is a key aspect of policing for maintaining citizen confidence in the service.

Using administrative data linked to the British Crime Survey in order to assess the relative importance of police numbers and police visibility in determining public confidence in the police, Sindall and Sturgis (2013), found, as expected, that visibility has a significant and positive effect on confidence. However, they also found a significant and positive effect of police numbers over and above the effect of visibility. Moreover, because the extent to which police are visible in local areas is itself a function of the number of police employed, we find that the number of police has an additional indirect influence on public confidence through its direct effect on visibility. We found frequent mentions of lack of policing numbers and an awareness of its impact on the presence of police. By implication, reducing police numbers is likely to erode public confidence in the police, even if frontline visibility is maintained through organizational efficiency.

Research on police legitimacy and public confidence underlines the importance of the police demonstrating moral alignment with the communities they serve. However, less attention is given to conflict between values, either within communities or between communities and the police. The work by Mackie et al (2026) alludes to the disengagement between police and young people in particular.

Cuts to police budgets since 2010 have contributed to the fragmentation of neighbourhood or community policing in the UK (O'Reilly, 2023). Officers have found themselves abstracted from neighbourhood work, or engaged in a wider range of activities, crowding out the original 'mechanisms' of supporting confidence: visibility, community engagement, and problem-solving. Looking at these cuts positively, they have also encouraged a re-evaluation of the core priorities of the police. Forces have looked increasingly to vulnerability, risk and measurable harm as metrics for decisions on these priorities.

Confidence and legitimacy are separate constructs. Confidence rests on trust, while legitimacy refers to the right of the police to claim authority and obedience (ibid). However, they are intimately linked; if confidence in a police force collapses, its legitimacy is inevitably eroded (O'Reilly ibid). Given the complex relationship between the two constructs, they may be seen as mutually reinforcing ideas.

The first tension, between individual and collective experiences of safety and security, is common in the context of 'problem-solving' in neighbourhood policing. Residents' views may conflict, and community officers must resolve this in a way that expresses the will of the community (O'Reilly *ibid*). This is articulated in models of police problem-solving such as SARA; problems are categorised as 'substantive community concerns' If the problem is not a community one, it is not a 'problem', though it might still be a crime.

Community policing was spoken of by residents in terms of relationships, according to O'Reilly. (*ibid*) Visibility was associated with reduced crime, but this was only part of the emotive attachment to a regular police presence. Local police officers were spoken of in affective terms, as belonging to the community and as part of the warp and weft that held a community together:

A consequence of inadequate community police presence may be formation of opinions based on blue light responses and media portrayals (Bradford et al. 2025). Bradford et al describe how recent high-profile cases involving corruption, malpractice and mistreatment seem likely to have contributed to declines in public confidence, and indeed legitimacy.

It starts from the ground up – if you have an officer in the community enjoying their role...(but) if you have a grumpy cop who isn't able to do all the things he needs to do that it isn't going to help. Social media is great, but what you need is hard facts – officers out there able to do their jobs, complainers are getting results and can see they are getting results. You need to sell yourself and the job you do...What about your vulnerable that don't have access to smart phones or laptops. Allow our communities officers give them the space to go into communities – not everything can be solved on a computer...You're going to have to try and bring it back from the point it has reached... You have officers out risking their lives and they are being met with "where are you going for your donuts?" it is really hard. There is very little elsewhere that is being appreciated. Police Officer

Expectations of what the police can and can't do. A real misunderstanding of the law – fuelled by watching English documentaries and America TV shows. (we are) operating within the confines of Scottish law. Only way we can counter that is to be more explanatory...telling people why we can or can't do things.

Chief Inspector – Police Scotland

Positive police-public interactions rooted in everyday engagement offer opportunities to address this. They found a strong correlation between encounters with officers and attitudes towards police, reinforcing the idea that investment in a community police presence might enhance public attitudes, by demonstrating that police are available, representative, and ready to interact, listen, and respond to community concerns. Visibility and 'presence' seem more important for overall confidence, while fairness and proportionality are more important for legitimacy. Our findings both offer support to the idea police-public relations are under significant strain and provide insight into why this is so. Once again people referred to young people and their upbringing.

'It doesn't matter what you do these days. You (young offender) just get a slap on the hand. A lot of paperwork. Law and order.' (Brechin)

Young people know their rights and are not bothered. Their parents are bad. Young people on e-bikes in park are a danger to dog-walkers, especially older women. (Lumphinnans)

Young people have no respect for parents, teachers. Teachers in tears. Headteacher gets kicked and punched. Vigilantes will start to take law into their own hands. (Lumphinnans)

Borstals missed massively. Nae visibility unless police are looking for someone. (Lumphinnans)

There are important questions to be asked from our data about the role of the police and the systems that support police officer to do their jobs.

Like I heard an officer saying this job can make you feel schizophrenic, and you don't know, you might be around people who have mental health issues. Makes you feel a bit uncomfortable and less likely to want to talk to someone. (Cupar)

There is less physically police and civilian staff, so the police are doing some civilian jobs.

Yes, we miss these guys being able to connect with them. They just don't get the chance. (Cupar)

Youth Justice need to help. Home is the problem. Free bus pass is a problem as it makes young people mobile. (Lumphinnans)

A lot of them are just social workers now, a lot of mental health, you need much more help from the social. A lot of police officers should do social services at university! (Douglas)

Discussions with police officers highlighted that they feel pulled in many directions – they would like to be involved in community engagement but often have to cancel appointments last minute because they are required to respond to an incident or have to take someone to hospital. All the officers we spoke to were very optimistic about the new strategy – Policing for our communities.

Key Aspects of Community Policing (PFO - Police & Community Focus)

- Identifiable Officers: A "2030 vision" aims for visible, locally based officers who are known to their communities.
- Preventative Approach: Focus on early intervention to address issues like anti-social behaviour, mental health crises, and local criminality.
- Local Engagement: Local policing teams conduct patrols (including foot and cycle), attend community events, and work with local schools and businesses.

Community Policing has often been described as more of a philosophy than a programme. It is often presented as a model that stands in counterpoint to reactive, response policing; a reconnection with more traditional modes of policing (O'Reilly, 2024). Issues associated with community policing include its lack of an exact definition; it can also be dismissed as not 'real' policing by officers. Partnership with other agencies was recognised as important

Particular local issues were raised, such as speeding in Birkhill and the waiting time in rural areas for a response:

Speeding is an issue. Pop-up Jim was stolen from Newbigging! Needs moving round to be effective and this is the role of community. (Birkhill)

Where I live people can go over the speed limit and nobody does anything. People go to drive out there because they know nobody is going to be patrolling out there. (Young college males)

People recognised there was a lack of numbers for policing but felt the numbers were there when needed by the 'richer' people, such as a Trump visit, the Royal Family and football matches. This was mentioned by 2 groups, Arbroath and Lumphinnans.

Police officers, we never see them. Pulled away to other areas e.g. Tump. They're pulled away to other areas. Not seen. They could just chap on the door. (Lumphinnans)

There used to be a strip of photos of local police. Cowdenbeath Police station is not accessible (Lumphinnans)

Remembrance service had no police presence and other areas did. (Lumphinnans)

'Hot spots' are where policing targets effort at locations where crime and disorder are located, for deterrence and reduction of opportunity to commit crimes. Targeted foot patrols do work (O'Reilly, 2024) to reduce crime and there appears to be 'spillover' into associated nearby communities.

Problem-solving is something police officers do all the time but problem solving with social issue is an important part of the current role of police officers. The focus is on problems rather than crimes and it acknowledges that agencies other than the police might be better placed to deal with problems (O'Reilly, 2014). The problems may be a cluster of similar incidents rather than a single crime. Community policing brings the community in from the beginning to identify problems. SARA is a common problem-solving model that can be used: Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment. Impact

evaluation is significant for problem solving as individual crimes may not be targeted and the process can be iterative rather than linear like the SARA model.

Problem solving does not work without partnership. Our research showed that knowledge of what is the Councils' responsibility was confused by participants with what is the police's responsibility. Passing on public concerns on other services can be an important dimension of local police work. This maybe what O'Reilly (ibid) calls a 'mixed economy' of those delivering community safety (p.92). Partners can improve and support visibility and accessibility to populations, where trust is created. Visible policing is more than a presence in the community. It is about being accessible and familiar to participants as well.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There is a clear need for interaction to be not one size fits all but to be particular for the groups and population identified in a community setting. This was particularly the case for young people but not exclusively.

There's just no trust. You hardly see them walking about anyway, and when you do see them, they send in massed troops for little things. And everything is very forceful, you know it's all loud and brash. Well, that is how I feel anyway. (Douglas)

*F**k off. I was brought up not to grass. Vigilantism is on the up, because people know the police don't do anything, so people are taking the law into their own hands. The wider legal system, the whole shebang. (Douglas)*

They (older people) see us (young people) as risky and dangerous. They say we've done something bad, but they've probably done exactly the same, gone out and got drunk with friends. Everyone has done that and we all learn from our mistakes.

They probably think we're all backwards, see us as absolute idiots. And we'll probably like that too. (Glenrothes)

I feel like they see the worst of young people and think we're all like that. Because that is what is more visible. I have been out and about and people look at me like I am going to cause trouble. (Glenrothes)

...and they don't take us seriously or listen to our opinions. Like if we question being asked to do something sometimes, I'm just asking but it's like I am being rude just for asking a question. And they expect respect when they don't give the younger generation any. Some do but a lot don't because they see us as risky and dangerous. (Glenrothes)

Community Policing is really a metaphor or figure of speech. It is a 'semantic sponge' (Manning, 1997), that is loaded with ideological, political, philosophical, cultural and occupational baggage. (Cordner, 2019; p. 148). Foot patrols have been shown to make the public feel safer and to improve attitudes to the police (Police Foundation, 1981). Our research showed that 'bobbies on the beat' was desirable to respondents, but some respondents said being in a patrol car is significant as long as they stopped and talked to you out of the window. Community policing emphasises the personal service towards the public, not a bureaucratic one that is aloof (Cordner, 2019). It implies less reliance on the patrol car and more reliance on face-to-face interactions, where prevention of crime is part of everyone's job. Police organisational structures, says Cordner (ibid) are more suited to routine bureaucratic work than creative approaches required for community policing.

The alignment of police visibility with community engagement, particularly in terms of increasing police responsiveness to local needs, reinforces a broader symbolism and cultural significance invoked by policing. For some sections of the population the figure of the 'bobby on the beat' produces and communicates meaning which suggests cohesive order, legal authority and shared morality to the extent that it is interpreted as a measure of the state of policing and wider society (Weston, 2020).

In this way, patrolling police officers come to represent, what Weston (ibid) refers to as 'symbolic 'guardians' of social stability and order, held responsible for community values and informal social controls,' with any perceived absence of their presence

conversely signalling perhaps a loss of discipline, societal decline and a failure of the policing institution to connect.

Community Engagement is characterised according to the objectives of the College of Policing (2018a) Engaging Communities' Guidelines and refers to police officers and staff providing an ongoing two-way dialogue between the police and the public and developing a better understanding of communities, their needs, risks and threats. The policy portrayal of police visibility in community engagement work is structured around a number of implicit assumptions that suggests citizens will engage with police officers and staff on patrol; that a police presence will provide an engagement function; and that communities will be identifiable to police officers and staff on patrol. (Weston 2020)

In alignment with our study, and we suggest common sense suggest. in comparison to vehicle patrol, Weston's research (Weston, 2020) showed that foot patrol is more noticeable, perceived more favourably, makes police officers appear more approachable and increases opportunities for interaction. Moreover, Weston describes how when patrolling involves the public seeing the police and/or having informal exchanges with them, it can develop familiarity, build police-public relationships and lead to positive assessments of policing and community engagement, especially when the police are perceived as being helpful, understanding and/or communicating information about policing (Weston, 2020)

It is more of an internal piece – making sure the Police Officer is explaining fully, being transparent, explaining these are the steps we take..Having honest conversations.. We are getting emails set up so we can email complainers and they can respond back in as well..My expectations are that if cops have got 25 crimes those 25 people are getting feedback. Chief Inspector (Police Scotland)

Yesberg & Bradford (2021) found that police visibility was a significant predictor of both trust in police fairness and effectiveness at the neighbourhood level. Trust in the police tended to be higher in places, where police visibility was also higher. This finding fits with previous research showing the significant effect police visibility can have on perceptions that the police are 'doing something' to control crime.

The findings of Yesberg & Bradford (ibid) suggest that visibility is one important aspect of this equation. The second main finding was that trust in police fairness significantly predicted collective community effective working together. When residents believed the police exercised their authority in a fair and just manner, perceptions of collective ability to make change were higher.

Finally, Yesberg & Bradford (ibid) found a small indirect effect of police visibility on collective working together, through trust in police fairness. When the police are more present in neighbourhoods, perceptions of fairness are higher, which, in turn, enhances perceptions of collective efficacy. It seems it is not enough for the police to be a visible presence; people also need to feel they can trust the police to exercise their authority in a fair and just manner. The implications of these findings seem to be that police can maximize their influence on collective efficacy through not only making themselves more visible to residents, but by treating them fairly and respectfully, and by giving them voice in their interactions with them.

PARTNERSHIP AND SOCIAL ISSUES: MENTAL HEALTH

Community policing programmes inherently encapsulate a range of different philosophical perspectives and organisational strategies, but one of the main approaches adopted is police officers being assigned to localities on a long-term basis with regular patrol responsibilities to deliver inter alia community engagement. It is seen as creating a style of policing where the police are close to the public, know their concerns from regular contacts, and act on them in accord with the community's wishes (Weston, 2020)

Given gaps in available services to vulnerable populations, police officers have become de facto service providers, often acting as 'street corner psychiatrists' (Schaeffer Morabito, 2019: 1990). This can be onerous and so consume large amounts of time. Schaefer Morabito goes on to explain that effectively policing vulnerable populations involves the use of three techniques. These are getting to know the terrain; the use of alternatives to arrest; and making decisions that will benefit the community as a whole (derived from Shaefer Morabito, 2019: 203). These techniques all call for police discretion.

A large number of comments were made about the presence and working of the police, particularly in relation to mental health issues. There was an awareness that police are required to ensure the safety and safe handover of those deemed at risk to hospital staff, though this can take, in some cases, several hours. This has been described as 'mission creep' whereby officers are charged under the Mental Health (care and treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 as responsible for that person until a formal, documented handover to a medical practitioner or designated health staff takes place. Our respondents felt that this was not the role of the police and the time spent undertaking this work led to more pressure on them:

A lot of police work is mental health. (Birkhill)

They do a lot of work around mental health issues. They are trained but not enough, for mental health. (Dundee College, young women)

These people that have got the mental health, they should be able to call another service, it's no crime so a police officer shouldn't have to deal with that. (Recovery Group)

Police do too much social work and mental health. Police don't walk away from problems. The bottom line is lack of resources for police and also social work and mental health. (Birkhill)

I think there is a missing emergency service that blurs the lines between police and NHS... instead so many of these calls sit with us. We are not overly trained in mental health but we do it and we probably do it more than ambulance but we do it because it comes across our desks. Police Officer

Section 32 of the Mental Health Act stated that Police Scotland are responsible for the safety of the public in Scotland. People will phone 101 because they know they will be attended to promptly, whereas if you phone 111 you could be waiting... We are duty bound to preserve life. Chief Inspector – Police Scotland

Social issues such as poverty and mental health issues affect policing directly and indirectly of course, but serious questions need to be asked about the role of the police and what they are doing. Alternatives can be explored to minimise police time spent on issues which may be tackled and approached in different ways. Hope Point of Penumbra in Dundee is a case in point where people can self-refer for support with mental health issues. A Police officer cannot refer people but can explain the service and take people to it if they wish to attend. This may make a better use of police time than waiting in A and E for mental health patients to be seen.

And while these services were welcomed by the police officers we spoke to, they pointed out that some of these services are only open at certain times of the day but that "someone's breakdown isn't limited to times." (Police Officer)

I have worked in this sector for 20 odd years, and I am wondering why we are not making an impact in terms of drugs. I do agree with going into schools and speaking to young children. But when you speak to people who have been through it. There is not enough rehabilitation in our communities. How can you move on in your recovery if you are still living in the same community, with a dealer living next door?

Community Safety Manager (or Council Officer)

Braga (2019: 106-107) proposes a list of alternative processes that police may find helpful in developing responses to local crime problems. It illustrates the wide range of activities open to the police and the complexity and varied nature of the job.

- Concentrating attention on those who account for a disproportionate share of the problem.
- Connecting with other services through referral; co-ordinating police responses with other agencies; pushing for new services.
- Using mediation and negotiation techniques to resolve disputes.
- Conveying information to reduce fear and anxiety to enable residents to solve their own problems; to elicit conformity to known laws and regulations; to develop support for addressing problems; and acquaint
- the community with police limitations and what can be reasonably expected.
- Mobilising the community and using exiting forms of social control.
- Altering and organising the physical environment to reduce opportunities for problems to recur.
- Contribute to increased regulation for factors that increase problems.
- Use law to control public nuisances, offensive behaviour and conditions that contribute to crime. (derived from Braga, 2019: 106 – 107)

Braga describes the 3 core and densely interrelated elements of community policing:

- Citizen involvement in identifying and addressing public safety concerns;
- Decentralisation of decision making down to the local officer;
- Problem solving to respond to community crime and disorder concerns. (Derived from Braga, 2019: 108)

Others in our research discussed community outreach-type activity that had occurred in the past, but had been lost, for reasons unknown:

The relationship we have with our offices is fab but they get pulled away a lot and the get deployed to deal with emergencies and the opportunities that we create for them to come in, it is understandable but we miss them just coming to certain things, just to be there. (LGBTQ+ Group)

They used to go into schools and that. (Young College Men)

And they used to do the street football, 'cos we did a (this was 2016) we ran a, we went through all the northeast Fife towns, there were officers came and there was a community feel and that was great. The officers would have chats and those small chats, that can lead to that trust to open up about other things. When you are more human you can have those more normal conversations. (LGBTQ+ Group)

Mickelsson et al. (2025) demonstrate that community sports initiatives can play a significant role in fostering positive relationships between police and young people, helping to build trust and enhance perceptions of police legitimacy. Similarly, regular police presence in schools, combined with sustained, relationship-focused engagement, can further strengthen young people's confidence in policing and support the development of long-term trust. The police do already engage with schools in varying capacities, though the levels of engagement appear inconsistent (Mackie et al. 2026).

The visibility of the police presence was felt to be important for reasons other than reported crime. We should perhaps also note that fear of reprisals was given as a reason for not contacting the police:

It depends on the situation, me individually I wouldn't. if it was a public incident then I would probably, but not if I was recognisable then it might make me a target. Aye like if someone saw you they would like 'he's phoning the fucking polis'. (Recovery Group)

Need to be more approachable. E.g. coffee with a cop in Lochee. People feel scared of the police. Fear of reprisals, repercussions and law and order. Police rely on partner agencies a lot. (Dundee College)

Feel scared to approach police as they feel they may have done something wrong. Nosy at what police are doing! (Dundee College, young women)

Justice system and court can be a turnoff for reporting to the police. Can be frightening to witnesses – bail conditions. (Dundee College, young women)

DIGITAL VISIBILITY

Across the diverse demographic groups involved in our research, we found very limited engagement with any official police digital content, whether through social media channels, websites, or other online platforms. Participants rarely reported encountering material produced directly by Police Scotland or local policing teams. Instead, the digital content they did come across tended to be general social media posts created by other users, often shared within wider online networks. These posts were frequently critical or negative in tone, meaning that participants' perceptions of policing in digital spaces were shaped far more by second-hand commentary than by any direct communication from the police themselves:

There needs to be more promotion of the good stuff on social media, show me the success stories. (LGBTQ+ Group)

I don't really follow Police Scotland, it is more other people talking about Police Scotland and it is never really anything good, most of them are just slandering them. (Young College Males)

You should be going into schools and telling people you're not like the way that you're presented on social media. (16+ Group)

Across the entire cohort, only one participant reported actively following police-related social media content, and they felt this contributed positively to their sense of police visibility:

Yeah, I follow Tayside on Facebook on twitter, you see who they've arrested and it is quite interesting, it's not entertainment but you know they are there. You see them doing their work. (Young College Males)

As a consequence, the police had minimal influence over the online narratives circulating about them across the different groups we spoke to, leaving digital visibility largely defined by user-generated discourse rather than institutional messaging.

Conclusion

Visibility is a key component of sustaining public confidence. Visibility of the police remains closely correlated with levels of confidence with the Police (Police Foundation, 2022)

Visibility is a part of a range of police activities that support confidence that the community is safe and secure. 'It is part of a kind of policing that reassures people that they matter and belong.' (O'Reilly, 2024:39) O'Reilly (2024) describes foot patrols as a symbolic expression of the 'guardianship' of the state and how it persuades people that their community is cared for. It is a visible tangible presence, assuring people that local order is secure and so are they. Citizen reassurance is not simply a matter of increasing police patrols, equally important is what police officers do when they are on patrol. This draws attention to the need for the police to be aware of and consider their 'symbolic communication and impression management' in their patrol practice. It is less about quantity of patrols and more about the quality of the police-community interaction.

Visibility is complex and different for different populations and cultures. One size does not fit all but most areas agreed that it is desirable. Place, space and knowing the culture of a community are important to deciding how to be visible. Visibility was different for each focus group population. The Cupar group wanted 'soft touch,' not 'loud and brash' policing, as described in Douglas. and the rural communities wanted more help with speeding vehicles. Familiarity with the police is a separate matter from visibility. Trust develops over time and can be person-specific, but it is also shaped by the quality of interactions, the consistency of officers' behaviour, and the perceived fairness of their actions. When people encounter officers who demonstrate empathy, procedural fairness, and respect, trust can deepen, even if overall police visibility has not changed. Conversely, high visibility without meaningful engagement may do little to build confidence, and in some cases can erode it if the presence feels intrusive, enforcement-oriented, or disconnected from community needs. Police redeployment and being called elsewhere limit the ability to be familiar with a particular police officer. Familiarity can enhance local knowledge and enhance problem solving with the community.

Young people featured quite largely in our study as a perceived source of trouble by adults. Looking forward, the existing evidence suggests a need to:

- Strengthen strategic partnerships across police, youth work, schools, and other services to support preventative work.
- Develop neighbourhood-specific plans alongside relevant organisations, and alongside the community, focused on local issues.
- Involve young people directly in designing initiatives, supported by youth and community workers. (Mackie et al, 2026).

A contrasting population is made up of rural adults. In our focus group in Birkhill, 5 semi-rural or rural community councils were represented. In contrast to the young people, respondents were more confident with the police and valued input and the communication they had at local community council meetings. Data reports were typically given on crime in the area, for example. Whether this reporting is good use of police time, in a context of austerity for many people in both rural and urban communities, was explored in the Birkhill focus group. Birkhill focus group recognised the need for reciprocal partnership between police and community, suggesting a willingness to participate in local community policing measures.

- Police should have involvement with local democratic structures, such as community councils, and work with local community planning partners to address local issues

Another example is the ethnic minority community in Arbroath who were pleased to meet the police co-inquirer and ended their session with invitations to local cafes so that the police could find out more about the community. There was a positive groundswell of support for the police and encounters with the police were presented

positively. One man had driven to the local shops without insurance and a driving licence. He thought this was fine as it was local and a short distance. He was stopped by the police and was accepting of their need to act. 'They were fine to me.' There is a need for greater communication with ethnic minority communities about the law. A woman in the same group said that she had had an argument with her little brother in the park about going home. The little boy finally said he was going home by a different route from his sister. He was brought to the house by a police officer. This was seen as good that the young boy was protected, but a source of embarrassment to the family to have a police presence and others agreed this would be troubling.

- Explore means of reaching ethnic minority communities to communicate details of common laws to new arrivals;
- Explore the culture of local ethnic minority communities to find ways to communicate effectively
- Target appropriate communication for the population.

It is clear from the three examples that communication with the community depends on knowledge of the culture and sub-cultures of populations. This implies the need for close links between police officers and the community where possible and close contact with community activists and community workers who can assist with knowledge of what is happening in the community.

How do people want to be engaged with? I see that as being absolutely valid...we are always cognizant of how we engage with different groups...come the 24th Feb (when the new strategy for policing is launched locally) there will be another post around social cohesion and EDI - that will be a post that can pick that up.

Chief Inspector – Police Scotland

What officers do when they are being visible is to create confidence in the safety of a community. The quality of the interaction does affect people's views of the police, but people may have unrealistic expectations, expecting the police to do something in particular and being disappointed when this does not happen. The visibility of the police does have an impact on the community, resulting in a view that the community is safer.

The perceived impact of low levels of police visibility affected some communities, contributing to local residents thinking they were being ignored, they did not matter to the police and this affected well-being, as evidenced by the residents of Lumphinnans thinking they were overlooked in favour of Lochgelly.

Overlaps and gaps

'Lights Under a Bushel' was the title of this research project and implied that the virtues of the police may remain hidden. This is indeed the case for some populations but not for all. We found that our inquirers had highly complex jobs which focused well on some communities but not all. Prioritisation is important and the ability to target populations, so that knowledge of culture and sub-cultures can be considered in community engagement. The knowledge of the public of the community role police may play requires further promotion through the media we propose.

We have drafted Guidelines for Practice for police working with communities. Their job is very demanding and complex and these guidelines have been developed with this in mind. Engaging with the community is not always an end in itself, it is a means of doing a particular job. Partnerships with those who engage with the community are important to making the job more manageable as well as setting priorities for a limited resource.

Guidelines for Practice

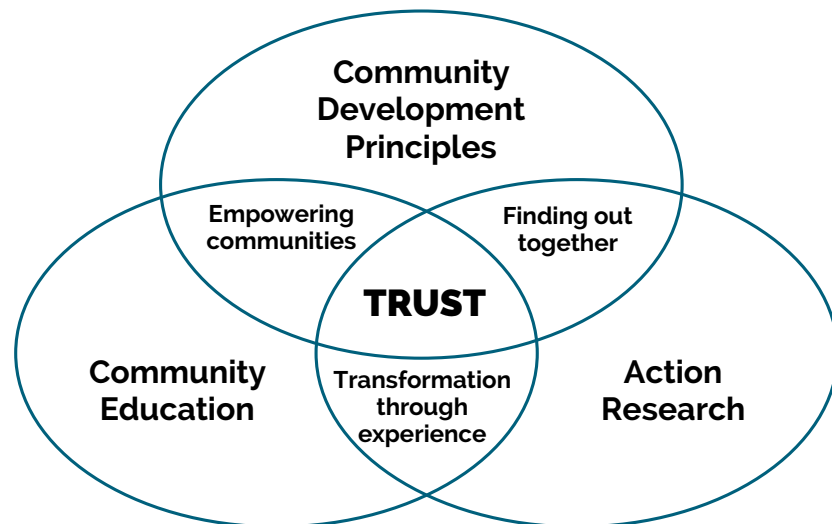
1. Prioritise cultural and sub-cultural awareness in Police community engagement.
2. Engage with community professionals to target policing times and places and to access their resources.
3. Recognise visibility is not possible in every community all off the time. Need to prioritise.
4. Recognise systems that can inhibit flexibility and work with these to be responsive.
5. Explore roles of those who are engaged with social issues to identify collaborative best practice for policing.
6. Seek means of problems solving and tackling the complexities of social issues such as for example poverty and drugs. Engaging with the community to find appropriate ways of managing the impact of these issues at local level.
7. Raise awareness of the role of police officers in the community through marketing and public relations.

Training Implications of the report

We have identified the following exemplars of how police education and training can respond to this report:

- Means of understanding adults and young people in different locales and cultures.
- How to engage in partnership and collaboration with community workers.
- How to target and prioritise community effort.
- How to manage a complex role to work flexibly within systems.
- Exploring professional roles and responsibilities to tackle local social issues with partners.
- Problem solving to develop approaches with the community for responding to social issues at a local level.

A model of community engagement to build trust is presented below.



This model of community engagement to build trust is derived from previous work with ethnic minority communities (Forrester et al, 2024). The diagram shows the interrelationship between the process of action research which seeks change, the principles of community adult education; and principles of community development.

These combine to facilitate trust, which we define as the promise of a good future relationship, all things being equal. They combine through transformation through experience, through empowerment and through finding out together. We consider its relevance here.

The research process was educational for all those involved in this project, researchers, police officers, community workers and community participants. Participants were made more aware of the broad community safety role of Police Scotland; they valued engaging with individual police officers and enjoyed the process of this learning.

The underpinning process of this model was on adult community learning to develop trust. There are many similar models of adult learning in a finding out, community development context that will have an equal impact. These are usually known to community development professionals who can frequently assist with engagement and learning for communities with partnership working.

Finding out through participatory research provided a balance to power differentials, both police and communities had a shared opportunity to develop knowledge of each other. Adult learning principles highlight learning as transformation with changes of identity as part of this process; a process which is both safe and challenging. Community development principles focus on engagement with communities to empower participants, in order to provide relevant opportunities, services and experiences.

These principles, in our opinion, facilitate the development of trust. The model we used included the following elements, which may be viewed as guidelines for the Police in engaging in this way or with a similar model.

1. Careful selection of appropriate groups to participate (being inclusive);
2. Engagement with groups in the community through community professionals;
3. Location of meeting in community space with hospitality
4. Benchmarking current understandings of Police Scotland;
5. Facilitation of dialogue between a police officer/s and the community, focusing on questions to answered by both groups for problem solving ;
6. Facilitating an approach which highlights adult learning;
7. More than one meeting to develop relationships;
8. Follow up on issues raised in each meeting.

References

- Audit Scotland (2026). and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) (2026) "Best Value" audit report. Audit Scotland. UK
- Borovec, K., Balgač, I. and Mraović, I.C., 2019. Police visibility as an influencing factor on citizens' perception of safety. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Security*, (2), pp.135-160.
- Bradford, B., Weirich, C., Rowlands, D., & Crawford, A. (2025). Public confidence in the police: using opinion survey data to explore the current 'moment' in British policing. *Policing and Society*, 35(7), 883–900.
- Bradford, B., Jackson, J., & Stanko, E. A. (2009). 'Contact and confidence: Revisiting the impact of public encounters with the police'. *Policing and Society*, 19(1), 20–46
- Braga, A. A., Turchan, B., Papachristos, A. V., & Hureau, D. M. (2019). 'Hot spots policing of small geographic areas: Effects on crime'. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 15(3), e1046
- Bremner, F. (2022). Reacting to Black Lives Matter: *The discursive construction of racism in UK newspapers*. *Politics*, 43(3), 298–314
- Braga, A. (2019) Problem-Oriented Policing: Principles, Practice and Crime In In M. Reisic & R. Kane (2019) *The Oxford handbook of Police and Policing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- Borovec P. M., Vandeviver, C., Dewinter, M., Witlox, F., & Vander Beken, T. (2023). 'Policing directions: A systematic review on the effectiveness of police presence'. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 29, 191–225.
- Campbell, D., & Erbsstein, N. (2012). Engaging youth in community change: three key implementation principles. *Community Development*, 43(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2011.645042>
- College of Policing (2018) *Modernising Neighbourhood Policing Guidelines*. College of Policing, Coventry UK.
- Cordner, G. (2019) *Community Policing*. In M. Reisic & R. Kane (2019) *The Oxford handbook of Police and Policing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- Cordner, G. and White, S., 2010. The evolving relationship between police research and police practice. *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*, 11(2), pp.90–94.
- Farrall, S. (2007). *Experience and expression in the fear of crime: Full research report* (ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-1108). Swindon, UK: Economic and Social Research Council
- Forrester, K., Mendel, J., McArdle, K. (2022) *Inquiring Together: Collaborative research with the diagram show sthe communities and serving officers*. SIPR, Edinburgh UK
- Gill, C., Weisburd, D., Telep, C.W., Vitter, Z. and Bennett, T., 2014. Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: A systematic review. *Journal of experimental criminology*, 10(4), pp.399-428.
- Jonathan Jackson J. Ben Bradford, B. (2009) Crime, policing and social order: on the expressive nature of public confidence in policing. *British Journal of Sociology*, 24 August 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01253.x>
- Jackson, L.A., 2003. Care or control? The metropolitan women police and child welfare, 1919–1969. *The historical journal*, 46(3), pp.623-648.
- Horgan, S., Collier, B., Stewart, J., & Thomas, D. R. (2024). 'Influence policing: Domestic digital influence campaigns and algorithmic strategic communications in UK law enforcement and homeland security'. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 65(3), 480–503.
- Hammond, C., Ncube, M., & Fido, D. (2025). *A Foucauldian discourse analysis of the construction of people of colour (POC) as criminals in UK and US print media following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests*. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice*, 25(1), 344–363
- Innes, M. (2007). 'The reassurance function'. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 1(2), 132–141.
- Kochel, T. R., & Weisburd, D. (2019). 'The impact of hot spots policing on collective efficacy: Findings from a randomized field trial'. *Justice Quarterly*, 36(5), 900–928
- Loader, I., & Mulcahy, A. (2003). *Policing and the condition of England: Memory, politics and culture*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Mackie, A., Troncoso, P., Fyfe, I., & McCluskey, G. (2026). 'Policing after lockdown: Re-building relationships

- with the COVID generation'. *Scottish Institute for Policing Research*. <https://sipr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Policing-after-Lockdown-report-Alan-Mackie-1.pdf>
- Maguire, E. (2019) Police Organizations and the Iron Cage of Rationality In M. Reisic & R. Kane (2019) *The Oxford handbook of Police and Policing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK
- Manning, P. (1988) Community Policing as a Drama of Control in J. Greene & S. Mastorfski (1988) *Community Policing: Rhetoric or Reality*. Prager, NY USA 27 – 45
- McArdle, K., Briggs, S., Forrester, K., Garrett, E. (2024) *Community work: Theory into Practice*. Policy Press, Bristol, UK
- O'Reilly, C. (2023). Doing the right thing? value conflicts and community policing. *Policing and Society*, 33(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2022.2071423>
- Paskell, C., 2007. Plastic police 'or' community support? The role of Police Community Support Officers within low-income neighbourhoods. *European urban and regional studies*, 14(4), pp.349– 361.
- Pickering, S., Dorussen, H., Hansen, M. E., Reifler, J., Scotto, T., Sunahara, Y., & Yen, D. (2024). London, you have a problem with women: trust towards the police in England. *Policing and Society*, 34(8), 747–762. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.2334009>
- Pitts J (2005), "No boundaries the antisocial behaviour industry and young people". *Community Safety Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 4 pp. 23–33
- Police Foundation (1981) *The Newark foot patrol Experiment*. Police Foundation Washington, DC, USA
- Police Foundation (2022) *A new model of protection: Final report of the strategic review of policing in England and Wales*. Police foundation, London.
- McRobbie, A., & Thornton, S. L. (1995). Rethinking "moral panic" for multi-mediated social worlds. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 46(4), 559–57
- Moir, J. (2024). 'Police legitimacy in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion: An analysis of a strategic plan'. *Academic Journal of International Economics and Management Research*, 5(1), 1–14
- Owen-Evans, R., & Low, N. (2024). *Public trust and confidence in the police*. UK Parliament, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST). <https://post.parliament.uk/public-trust-and-confidence-in-the-police/>
- Police Scotland. (2024). Three-year business plan (2024–2027). <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/juzn1sfo/3-year-business-plan-2024-27-v1-00.docx>
- Robinson, P., Ralph, L., & Aitken, A. (2025). Police use of X (Twitter) during the 2024 UK riots. *Police Practice and Research*, 27(1), 67–86.
- Scottish Government. (2025). *Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2023/24: Main findings – Public perceptions of policing*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-and-justice-survey-2023-24-main-findings/pages/public-perceptions-of-policing/>
- Scottish Police Authority. (2026, January 13). *Budget proposed for policing 2026–27*. Scottish Police Authority. <https://www.spa.police.uk/news-insights/news/budget-proposed-for-policing-2026-27/>
- Schaefer Morabito, M. (2019) Policing Vulnerable Populations. In M. Reisic & R. Kane (2019) *The Oxford handbook of Police and Policing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Scottish Police Authority (2026) *Policing in Scotland benefits from effective leadership and Governance* <https://www.spa.police.uk/news-insights/news/best-value-in-policing-report-2026-published/#:~:text=A%20joint%20best%20value%20audit,on%20the%20journey%20of%20reform.> (Accessed 25/1/2026)
- Shaw, M (2008) *Community Development and the politics of community*. Community Development Journal (43) 1: 24–36
- Sindall, K. and Sturgis, P., 2013. Austerity policing: Is visibility more important than absolute numbers in determining public confidence in the police? *European journal of criminology*, 10(2), pp.137-153
- Sindall, K., McCarthy, D. J., & Brunton-Smith, I. (2017). Young people and the formation of attitudes towards the police. *European Journal of Criminology*, 14(3), 344–364
- Sindall, K., & Sturgis, P. (2013). 'Austerity policing: Is visibility more important than absolute numbers in determining public confidence in the police?', *European Journal of Criminology*, 10(2), 137–153.
- Singer, L. and Cooper, S., 2009. Improving public confidence in the criminal justice system: An evaluation of a communication activity. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 48(5), pp.485–500.
- Silver, E. and Miller, L.L., 2004. Sources of informal social control in Chicago neighbourhoods. *Criminology*, 42(3), pp.551–584.
- Skogan, W. G. (2019). 'Advocate: Community policing'. In D. Weisburd & A. A. Braga (Eds.), *Police innovation: Contrasting perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

SPA (2022). *Scottish Police Authority*. 'Public confidence survey factsheet'. <https://www.spa.police.uk/publication-library/public-confidence-in-policing-public-briefing-july-2022/>

Taylor, M. (2019) Governance in a neo-liberal age In S. Kenny, B. McGrath & R. Phillips, (2019) *The Routledge Handbook of Community Development: Perspectives from around the globe*. Routledge, London, UK

Tura, F., Pickering, S., Hansen, M. E., & Hunter, J. (2025). Intersectional inequalities in trust in the police in England. *Policing and Society*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2025.2529300>

Weston, L. A. (2020). 'Making the 'visible' visible: An interactional understanding of police visibility in community engagement' (Doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool). University of Liverpool Repository.

Weisburd, D. & Eck, J. E. (2004). 'What can police do to reduce crime, disorder, and fear?' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593, 42–65.

Yesberg, J., Brunton-Smith, I., & Bradford, B. (2023). 'Police visibility, trust in police fairness, and collective efficacy: A multilevel Structural Equation Model'. *European Journal of Criminology*, 20(2), 712–737.

Yesberg, J.A. and Bradford, B., 2021. Policing and collective efficacy: A rapid evidence assessment. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 23(4), pp.417-430.

Youth Scotland. (2025). *Acting on funding: How Youth Scotland and its Area Associations support community-based youth work in the current funding climate*. Youth Scotland. <https://www.youthscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Acting-on-Funding-WEB.pdf>

"You never see them in the schemes; they're all in the town where they're not needed as most people have their own security. It's the outskirts and the schemes."

"Police officers are not visible in rural communities."

"A lot of them are just social workers now"

"In my small town, I don't see the police, never."