

Police Firearms Survey

Final Report

Prepared for: Scottish Police Authority
Prepared by: TNS
JN:127475



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1. Background and objectives

Since 1 April 2013, Police Scotland has decided to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) police officers to deploy to routine incidents with visible sidearms. This has generated a considerable amount of public debate and in response to this, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) have announced a complementary programme of review and inquiry.

This SPA inquiry aims to assess:

- What the level and nature of public concerns are over the current Police Scotland policy in relation to the deployment of a limited number of firearms officers on routine patrol;
- How effectively Police Scotland are engaging with the public and considering the impact on communities in implementing their approach;
- How Police Scotland can best address any public concerns and provide necessary reassurance to communities; and
- What, if any, lessons might be learned around how operational decisions with wider strategic or community impact are communicated to national and local oversight bodies and other key interests.

As part of the inquiry, the SPA is running a consultation process for stakeholders and interested parties and members of the public will also be able to respond to the consultation. The SPA inquiry will then draw together both its own evidence and that of the HMICS assurance review and report with overall findings and recommendations.

In addition to the other elements of the inquiry, the SPA commissioned TNS to conduct a public opinion survey among the adult population of Scotland to determine their attitudes towards the use of trained Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) police officers in Scotland, with the results of this survey also feeding into the wider inquiry.

2. Methodology

This research was conducted amongst the adult population of Scotland, using the Scottish Opinion Survey as the means of data collection. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in-home, using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) technology in which the questionnaire is administered from a lap-top computer. Interviewers work with a list of addresses supplied within each sampling point and only one interview per household is permitted. The SOS uses a quota sampling methodology based on gender, presence of children in the household and working status.

For this study, a sample of 1,050 adults was interviewed in 58 constituencies throughout Scotland over the period 17th October – 23rd November 2014. The quota sampling ensured that the sample was representative of the adult population in terms of sex, age, employment status and socio-economic group (SEG)¹.

To further ensure that the sample was representative of the adult population in terms of age, sex and class, it was weighted² to match population estimates from the BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) Establishment Report 2011, Mid-year population estimates 2011 and the 2001 Census.

The final questionnaire used in the survey follows as an appendix.

¹ The standard six socio-economic (SEG) or social grades, commonly used in research, are based on the current or previous occupation of the chief income earner in the household. AB includes higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations, C1 includes supervisory or clerical, and junior managerial, administrative or professional occupations, C2 includes skilled manual workers whilst DE includes semi and unskilled occupations, state pensioners and the long-term unemployed.

² Weighting is the process by which data are adjusted to reflect the known population profile. This is to counter any effects of differential refusal rates, interviewers falling short on particular quotas, or to correct for any over-sampling.

3. Main findings

3.1. Awareness of the decision

At the start of the survey, respondents were read a short introduction about the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms. This was done to ensure that all respondents were made aware of the broader context and reason why the survey was being conducted.

Respondents were told:

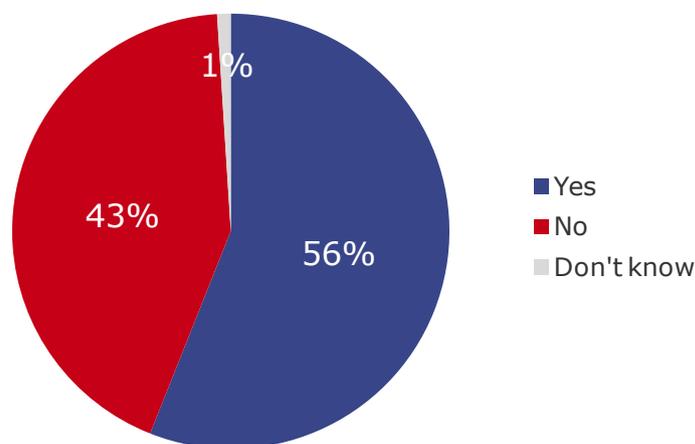
“Police Scotland recently took the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response Police Officers to attend routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms.

The Scottish Police Authority is seeking views from members of the public about this decision. The following questions are being asked to understand your views and opinions.”

Having ensured that all respondents had been provided with an introduction to the change to enable them to answer the rest of the survey, they were firstly asked: “Were you aware of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms?”

Despite the media coverage of the change, just over half (56%) of adults in Scotland said they were aware of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms, with 43% unaware prior to the interview (See Figure 3.1).

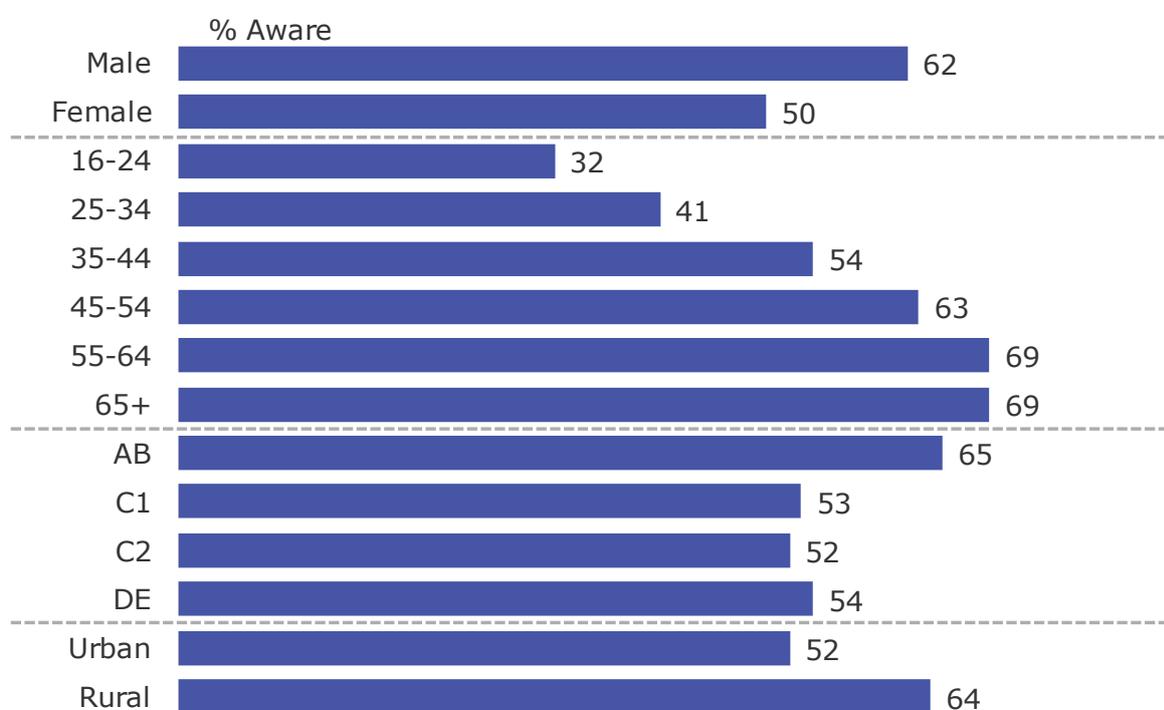
Figure 3.1: Awareness of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms



There were some statistically significant differences in awareness of the decision by demographic and geographic sub-groups, as shown in Figure 3.2. Men were significantly more likely to be aware than women (62% vs. 50%). Awareness also increased with age, from 32% of 16-24s claiming to be aware of the change to 69% of those aged 55+. Those in the AB social grade (i.e. those in professional or managerial positions)³ were also significantly more likely to be aware (65% vs. 53% of C1C2DEs) – an unsurprising finding given this group is more likely to be better informed about current affairs.

In terms of geography, 61% of those in the North of Scotland claimed to be aware of the decision, compared to 57% in the East/South and 55% in the West. Given the focus on the effect of the policy in the Inverness area, the higher level of awareness in North is also not surprising. Furthermore, 64% of those in rural areas were aware of the decision, compared to 52% of those in urban areas.

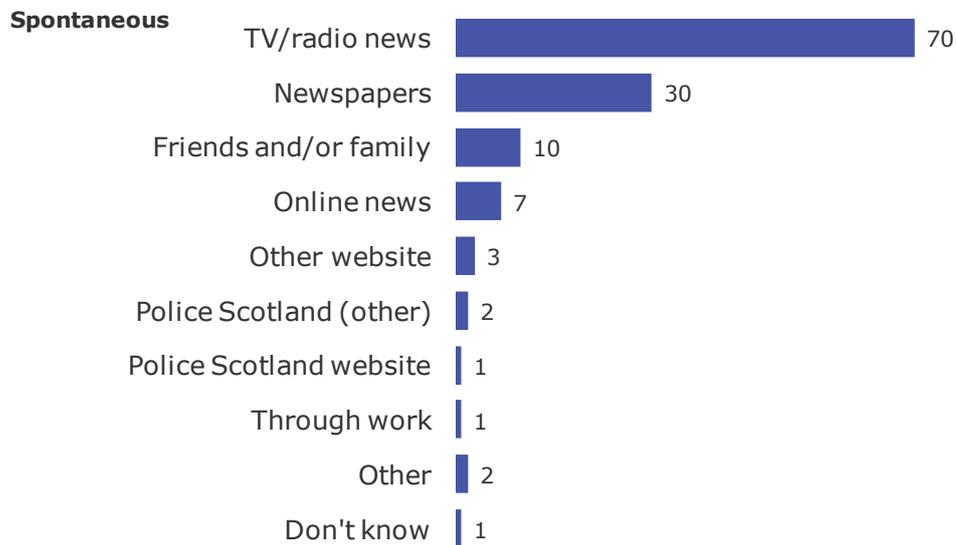
Figure 3.2: Awareness of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms – by sub-group



³ The standard six socio-economic (SEG) or social grades, commonly used in research, are based on the current or previous occupation of the chief income earner in the household. AB includes higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations, C1 includes supervisory or clerical, and junior managerial, administrative or professional occupations, C2 includes skilled manual workers whilst DE includes semi and unskilled occupations, state pensioners and the long-term unemployed.

Those adults who said they were aware of the decision were then asked how they first became aware of the change. The results of this are shown in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3: Source of awareness of decision (spontaneous)

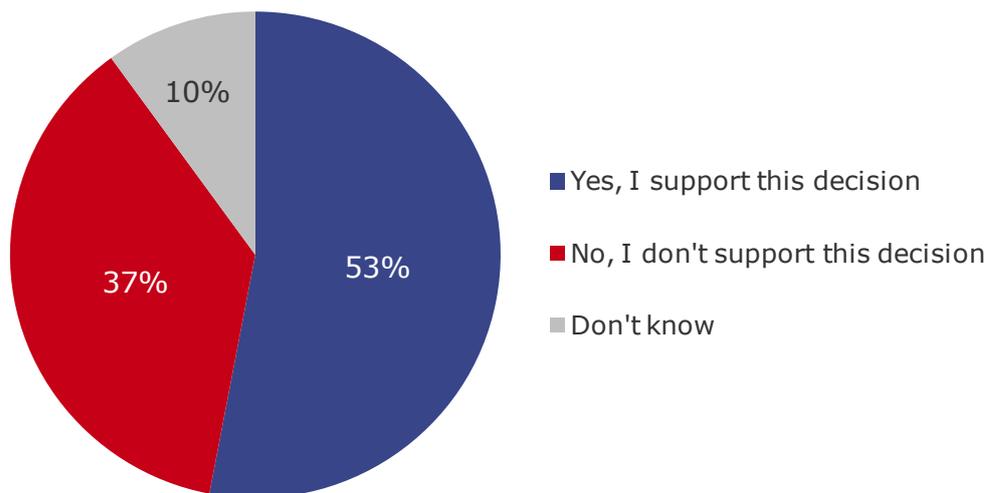


The channel spontaneously mentioned most often as the way in which respondents became aware of the decision was TV/radio news (70%), followed by newspapers (30%), through friends or family (10%) and online news (7%). 3% spontaneously said that they had been made aware by Police Scotland directly. It is therefore clear that for most, the broadcast media is the primary source of information about potential changes to policy.

Mentions of TV/radio news and newspapers were higher among those in older age groups (76% and 33% respectively for those aged 55+) and mentions of friends & family and online news were higher among those aged 16-34 (14% and 11% respectively). Newspapers were significantly more likely to be mentioned by those in the AB social grades who were aware of the decision – 41% compared to 27% of C1C2DEs. This pattern reflects current media consumption where we would expect those in older age groups to be more likely to read newspapers and watch TV news and younger people less likely to do so, with a greater reliance on online channels for news.

All respondents were then asked whether or not they supported the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms. As can be seen in Figure 3.4, a majority (53%) did support the decision, with 37% opposed and one in ten unable to answer.

Figure 3.4: Whether support decision or not



Overall, the levels of support recorded are broadly similar across most groups, with no significant differences by gender or social grade. Younger people are more supportive (59% of those aged 16-34), falling to 47% of those 65 and over. Higher levels of opposition among those 65 and over (46%) may be a reflection of changes to traditional views of policing held by older generations. In terms of geography, there are no significant differences either by region or by an urban/rural split, with just over half of all groups supporting the decision.

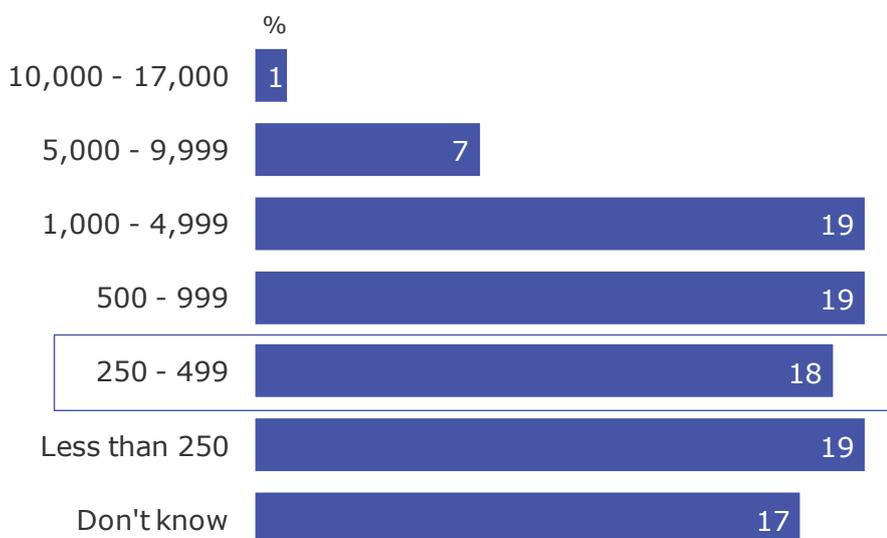
Of those who claimed they were already aware of the decision, 56% indicated their support for it – a significantly higher proportion than the 49% of those who were not aware of the change in policy before the interview.

3.2. Knowledge of the extent of armed policing

In order to better understand the extent of the public's knowledge about the change and the level of firearms within Police Scotland, respondents were asked: "There are over 17,000 police officers in Scotland. How many police officers do you think are attached to Armed Response Vehicles i.e. are able to operate with firearms?"

As shown in Figure 3.5, just under one in five (18%) correctly stated that the number of police officers who are attached to Armed Response Vehicles is between 250 and 499 – with the correct answer being c.300.

Figure 3.5: Number of police officers attached to Armed Response Vehicles i.e. are able to operate with firearms



There was essentially no difference in knowledge across the various demographic or geographic sub-groups, with the same proportion of just under one in five giving the correct response in most cases. There was also no difference in awareness of the correct levels between those already aware of the change in policy and those who were not – 19% and 17% respectively said 250-499. However, those already aware of the policy were significantly more likely to say that fewer than 250 officers were attached to Armed Response Vehicles (22% vs. 15% among those not aware of the change), suggesting they are slightly better informed about the scale of armed policing in Scotland.

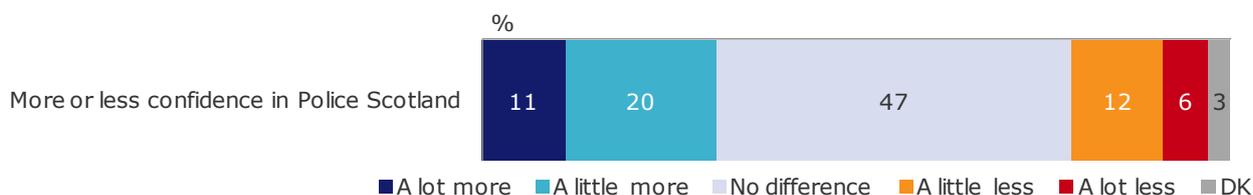
Overall, however, the results indicate that there is a lack of knowledge of the involvement of armed officers. Overall, 17% were unable to say how many officers they thought were attached to Armed Response Vehicles, whilst 19% thought that between 1,000 and 4,999 are armed, and 8% believe that 5,000 or more are armed. Better communication of the true extent of use of firearms may have helped provide reassurance to the public when the change came into place.

3.3. Attitudes towards Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents

The survey also sought to gauge the level and nature of public concerns over the current Police Scotland policy relating to the deployment of a limited number of firearms officers on routine patrol. To do this, a number of questions were asked to establish the effect of the change in policy on attitudes towards Police Scotland.

Firstly, respondents were asked whether or not the presence of a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents would make them have more or less confidence in Police Scotland. The results of this question are shown in Figure 3.6

Figure 3.6: Do you think that the presence of a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms will make you have.....?

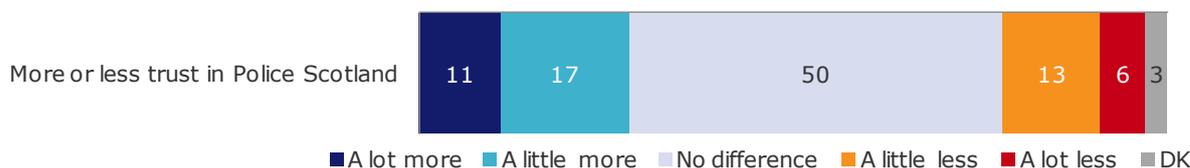


Overall, 31% said the change would make them more confident in Police Scotland, 18% less confident and 47% said that it made no difference to their views of the organisation. Taking both the positive and negative ends of the scale into account, there is a resulting net index score of +13% who are more positive about Police Scotland as a result of the change (i.e. 31% more confident minus the 18% who are less positive).

Whilst a relatively similar pattern of results was recorded across the different age groups and between men and women, those in the AB social grades were more likely to say the change made no difference to them (54%), whilst C2DEs were more likely to say it gave them more confidence in Police Scotland (36% vs. 27% of ABC1s). Unsurprisingly, those who support the decision were more likely to say it made them more confident – 49% compared to 11% of those who do not support the decision (of whom 33% said it made them less confident).

When asked to consider the effect on their levels of trust in Police Scotland, very similar results were recorded, with 28% having more trust in the organisation, 19% less trust and half (50%) saying it made no difference to their perceptions (see Figure 3.7). This is a slightly lower net index difference of +9%, but nonetheless represents a more positive view of Police Scotland. Again the pattern of results was very similar across most of the demographic sub-groups, although those in support of the decision were more likely to say it had increased their levels of trust (44% vs. 10% among those opposed to the change, of whom 34% had less trust).

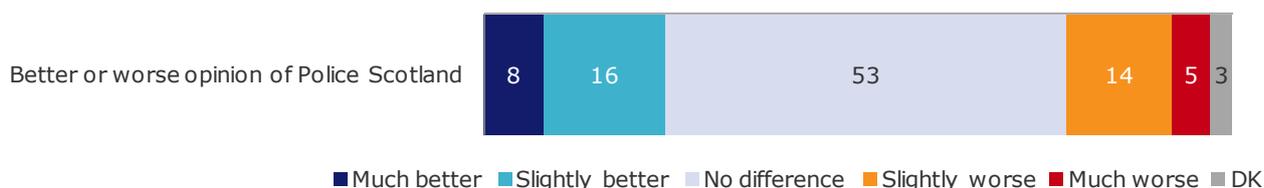
Figure 3.7: Do you think that the presence of a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms will make you have.....?



The third question sought to establish whether the change had resulted in a better or worse opinion of Police Scotland. Once again just over half (53%) said that the change in policy made no difference to their opinion of Police Scotland, with one quarter (24%) saying they had a better opinion and one in five (20%) a worse opinion (see Figure 3.8) – a net index score of +4%. In this instance, the results appear to be slightly correlated with social grade, with 18%

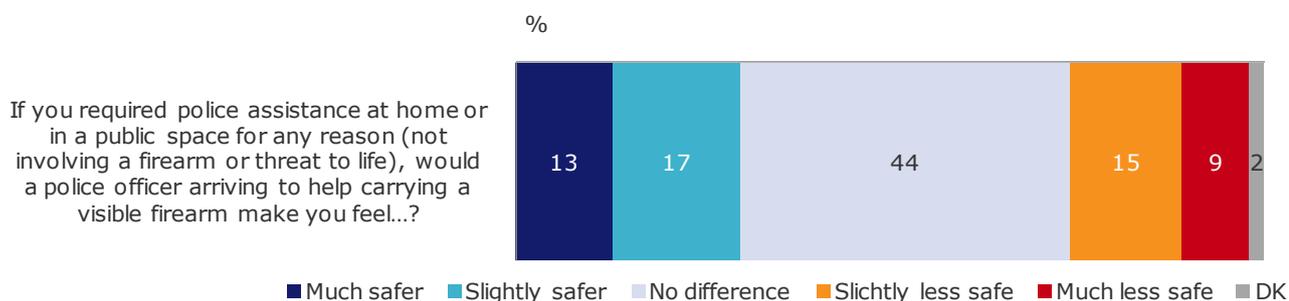
of ABs indicating they have a better opinion and 23% a worse opinion, compared to 28% of DEs holding a better opinion and 17% a worse opinion. Once again, as would be expected, the most marked difference is between those who support the decision (38% better opinion) and those who do not (36% worse opinion).

Figure 3.8: Do you think that the presence of a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms will make you have.....?



A further question was asked to establish what effect the change in policy would have on perceptions of safety. The results of this question are shown in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9: you required police assistance at home or in a public space for any reason not involving a firearm or a threat to life, would a police officer arriving to help carrying a visible firearm make you feel...



Three in ten (30%) stated that a police officer with a visible firearm arriving to help would make them feel safer, one quarter (24%) that it would make them feel less safe and 44% stated that it would make no difference to their feelings of safety – a net index score of +6%. In this instance there are a few more differences by sub-group, with 38% of 16-34s saying this would make them feel safer, compared to 26% of those aged 35 and over. Those in the lower social grades were also more likely to say they would feel safer (33% vs. 27% of ABC1s).

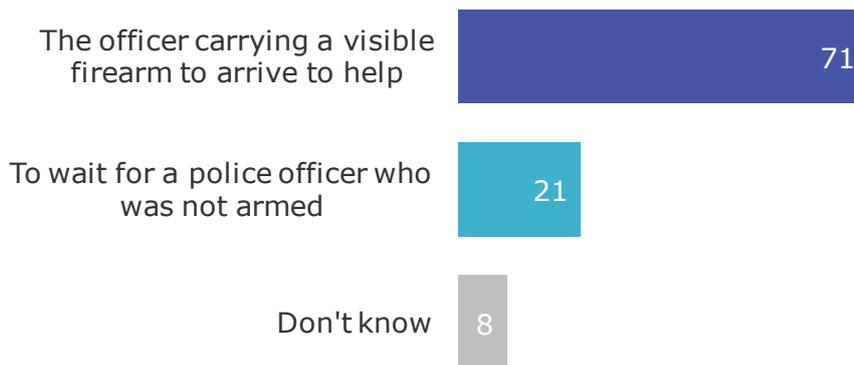
Once again, those supporting the decision were more likely to say they would feel safer as a result (43% vs. 15% of those opposed to the change). However, it should be noted that those not already aware of the change to policy were significantly more likely to say they would feel safer with an armed officer – 33% compared to 27% of those already aware.

Respondents were also presented with a scenario to assess the extent to which their need for police assistance would be affected by armed officers. Respondents were asked: "If you required police help at home or in public space for any reason not involving a firearm or a

threat to life, and the closest police officer was carrying a visible firearm, would you prefer the officer carrying a visible firearm to arrive to help or to wait for a police officer who was not armed?"

As shown in Figure 3.10, 71% indicated that they would want the armed officer to help them, whilst one fifth (21%) would prefer to wait for an unarmed officer. Just under one in ten (8%) were unable to indicate their preference.

Figure 3.10: Preference for armed or unarmed officer



Whilst there were no significant differences by gender or age, those in the lower social grades and those not currently working were significantly less likely to prefer the armed officer to help (64% of DEs and 67% of those not currently working). Presumably reflecting the distances and travel times involved, those in North and in rural areas were more likely (although not significantly so) to prefer the armed officer to help (76% and 75% respectively) rather than wait for an unarmed officer.

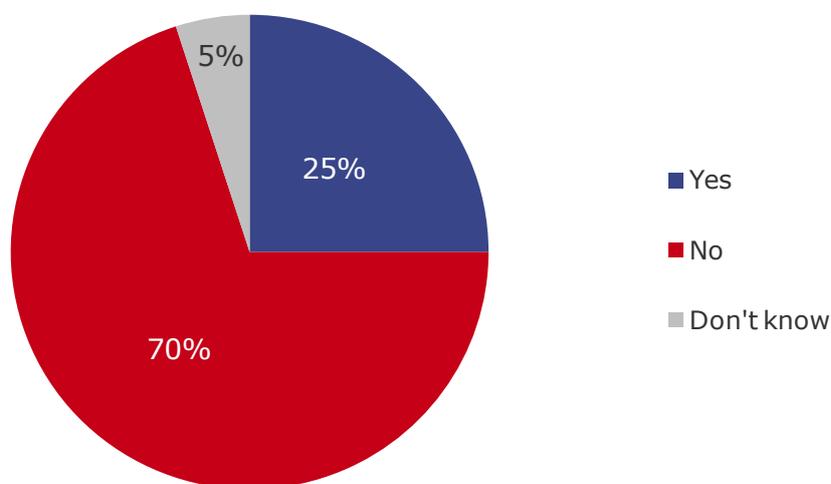
The biggest difference in opinion was recorded between those who support the decision to change policy and those who do not, with 81% of those supporting the change preferring the armed officer to help, compared to 60% of those who do not support the change. 28% of this latter group would prefer to wait for an unarmed officer.

3.4. Expected involvement in the decision making process

The survey also aimed to establish the extent to which the general public felt they should be involved in the decision making process. Questions were therefore asked to investigate how effectively Police Scotland is engaging with the public and how they can best address any public concerns and provide necessary reassurance to communities.

Looking specifically at the issue of armed policing, respondents were firstly asked: "Would you have expected to have been asked about whether police officers with firearms were deployed on routine police incidents not involving firearms or a threat to life?" Overall, one quarter (25%) said that they would have been expected to be consulted about such a change, 70% did not and 5% were unable to say (see Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11: Would you have expected to have been asked about whether police officers with firearms were deployed on routine police incidents not involving firearms or a threat to life?

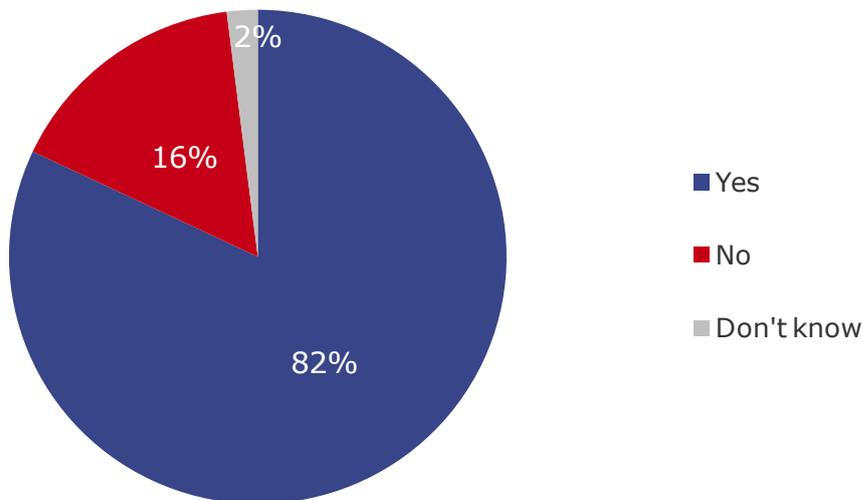


A similar pattern of results, with around one quarter expecting to be involved, was recorded among most sub-groups. The only notable distinction – although not a surprising one – is that those who do not support the decision were significantly more likely to say that they would have expected to be consulted – 32% compared to 19% of those who support the decision.

Those who stated that they would have expected to be asked about this change in policy were then asked how they would have expected Police Scotland to have undertaken the consultation. This was an open-ended question and as a result a variety of responses were given. These were reviewed and 'coded' into common mentions. Some respondents (16%) reiterated their opinion that the public should have been consulted and asked before the policy was changed. One in five (19%) of those who expected to be consulted spontaneously indicated their preference for a survey, 14% expected a letter, whilst 7% mentioned 'by/through post' and 5% leaflets. 10% mentioned a vote, with 6% mentioning a public meeting or debate. With few differences in the pattern of results by sub-groups, the variety of responses given to the question suggests it would be difficult for Police Scotland to undertake a form of consultation which would meet the expectations of all those who want to be involved, but that the most appropriate options would be via a survey or by a letter or leaflet delivered to homes.

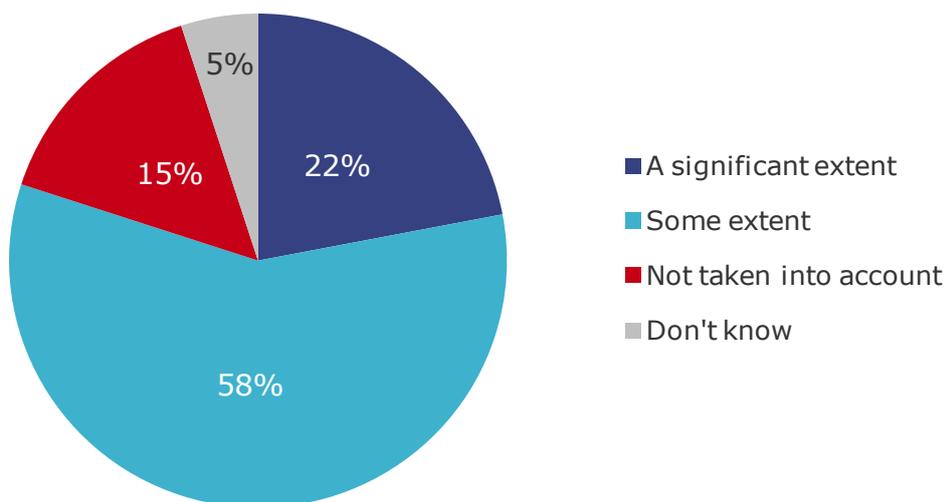
Those who stated that they would have expected to be asked about the change in policy were then asked whether they would have expected Police Scotland to consider changing its policy in light of the feedback it received from the public. Given the expectation of this group that they should be consulted, it is unsurprising that the vast majority (82%) said that they would expect a change in policy as a result of their feedback. However, as shown in Figure 3.12, 16% of this group said they did not expect Police Scotland to change their policy (although this may be a reflection of a negative view of Police Scotland), whilst 2% were unable to comment.

Figure 3.12: Would you have expected Police Scotland to consider changing its policy in light of feedback from the public?



Finally, looking at the issue of public consultation more broadly, respondents were asked: "Given that professional police officers are aware of threats from issues such as terrorism and serious crime that cannot be shared with the public, to what extent should the views and opinions of the public be taken into account as part of Police Scotland's decision-making process on issues - such as the deployment of armed officers on routine patrol?" The results of this question are shown in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13: To what extent should the views and opinions of the public be taken into account



Overall, four in five (80%) indicated that they thought the views and opinions of the public should be taken into account as part of Police Scotland's decision making. However, 22% believed that these views should be taken into account 'to a significant extent', with the majority of the population indicating that they thought the public's views should be noted 'to

some extent'. The one in five who believe their views should play a significant role in decision making is therefore very similar to the quarter (25%) who indicated at the earlier question that they would have expected to have been asked about the change in policy, suggesting that for the remainder their involvement, whilst potentially seen as beneficial or worthwhile, is not seen as being essential.

Again, the pattern of results for this question shows few differences by sub-group, with no one group standing out as feeling their views should be taken into account. Those in the higher social grades were more likely to feel their views should be noted (85% of ABC1 vs. 76% of C2DEs), as were those in more rural areas (88% vs. 77% of those in urban areas).

4. Conclusions

It is interesting to note that, despite the media coverage of the change in policy to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms, just over half of those interviewed as part of the public opinion survey were already aware of the change. This suggests that a large proportion of the population has not been engaged in the discussion or debate, with those aware of the decision having been informed as a result of the broadcast and print media, rather than any engagement with Police Scotland. Going forwards, there is clearly an opportunity for Police Scotland to engage more widely with the population to ensure higher levels of awareness of changes to policy which will impact on the general public. That said, it should be noted that with the vast majority aware of changes via news media, this is likely to continue to be the main way in which people get information.

The research findings suggest that the public is generally positive or, at the very least, unconcerned about the change to firearms policy. Over half support the decision and there is no evidence of any specific group being particularly opposed, with the exception of the older age groups who may simply see the change as detrimental to their view of traditional policing. Broadly speaking, around three quarters say the change either makes no difference to, or increases, their confidence, trust and general opinion of Police Scotland. A sizable majority would be happy to be assisted by an armed officer (in the absence of an unarmed officer), and many would feel safer as a result.

Nonetheless, a significant proportion of the population is opposed to the policy and does have some concerns. The research suggests, however, that there is currently a lack of knowledge of the actual impact of the change in policy, with only one in five aware of the correct level of armed policing in Scotland. Police Scotland need to ensure that for future changes in policy, efforts are made to inform the public beyond what is communicated by the news media. In doing so, there is the opportunity to reassure the public about the scale of any changes and address any concerns.

When considering public consultation more broadly, around one in five have an expectation that they should have been consulted about this change, with a similar proportion feeling that the public's views should have a significant influence on other operational or strategic decisions. There are a number of ways in which Police Scotland could consult or engage with the population and whilst the results suggest no one approach will suit all those who wish to give their opinion, surveys and letters/leaflets appear to be most appropriate. It is clear, however, that those people who wish to give their opinion also expect it to be listened to.

APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

Moving on to a different topic...

ASK ALL

READ OUT

Police Scotland recently took the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response Police Officers to attend routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms.

The Scottish Police Authority is seeking views from members of the public about this decision. The following questions are being asked to understand your views and opinions.

Q1 Were you aware of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms?

Yes

No

(Don't know)

IF YES AT Q1

DO NOT SHOWSCREEN

Q2 How did you first become aware of the decision to allow a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers to attend routine incidents with visible firearms?

Probe: Anywhere else?

TV/Radio news

Newspapers

Online news

Other websites

Police Scotland website

Police Scotland (other)

Friends and/or family

Other (specify)

(Don't know)

ASK ALL

Q3 Do you support this decision or not?

Yes, I support this decision

No, I don't support this decision

(Don't know)

Q4 Do you think that the presence of a limited number of trained Armed Response police officers attending routine incidents (those not involving firearms or a threat to life) with visible firearms will make you...

ROTATE ORDER OF ASKING A-C

a) Have more or less confidence in Police Scotland?

INVERT SCALE

A lot more confident
A little more confident
No difference
A little less confident
A lot less confident
(Don't know)

b) Have more or less trust in Police Scotland?

INVERT SCALE

A lot more trust
A little more trust
No difference
A little less trust
A lot less trust
(Don't know)

c) Have a better or worse opinion of Police Scotland?

INVERT SCALE

Much better opinion
Slightly better opinion
No difference
Slightly worse opinion
Much worse opinion
(Don't know)

Q5 If you required police assistance at home or in a public space for any reason not involving a firearm or a threat to life, would a police officer arriving to help carrying a visible firearm make you feel...

INVERT SCALE

Much safer
Slightly safer
No difference
Slightly less safe
Much less safe
(Don't know)

SHOWSCREEN

Q6 If you required police help at home or in public space for any reason not involving a firearm or a threat to life, and the closest police officer was carrying a visible firearm, would you prefer:

INVERT

The officer carrying a visible firearm to arrive to help
To wait for a police officer who was not armed
(Don't know)

Q7 There are over 17,000 police officers in Scotland. How many police officers do you think are attached to Armed Response Vehicles i.e. are able to operate with firearms?

10,000 – 17,000

5,000 – 9,999

1,000 – 4,999

500 – 999

250 – 499

Less than 250

(Don't know)

ASK ALL

Q8 Would you have expected to have been asked about whether police officers with firearms were deployed on routine police incidents not involving firearms or a threat to life?

Yes

No

(Don't know)

IF YES AT Q8

DO NOT SHOWSCREEN

Q9 How would you have expected Police Scotland to have asked for your opinion about his change?

WRITE IN VERBATIM AND RECORD AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE

OPEN

IF YES AT Q8

Q10 Would you have expected Police Scotland to consider changing its policy in light of feedback from the public?

Yes

No

(Don't know)

ASK ALL

READ OUT

Q11 Given that professional police officers are aware of threats from issues such as terrorism and serious crime that cannot be shared with the public, to what extent should the views and opinions of the public be taken into account as part of Police Scotland's decision-making process on issues - such as the deployment of armed officers on routine patrol?

A significant extent

Some extent

Not taken into account

(Don't know)