

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE NEWS UPDATE

SPA / Police Scotland Joint Forum

No. 4 – September 2021

Policing and the Pandemic – The Scottish Experience

A Research and Evidence Forum event

The fourth forum event “**Policing and the Pandemic – The Scottish Experience**” was held on 18th August 2021. This online webinar was co-hosted by Martyn Evans (Chair of the Scottish Police Authority) and Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor of Police Scotland. It focused on the policing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, both in Scotland and internationally, and confidence in policing over this period.

There were three sessions covering the following areas:

- Operational Policing and Covid-19
- Public Confidence in Policing
- International Perspectives on Policing during the Pandemic

Approximately 130 participated via MS Teams or the livestream over the day and over 1,000 viewed the event in the following week. Feedback from the event has been extremely positive, with forward looking discussions on learning to be gained from this period.

For more information on the Policing and the Pandemic RoundTable, including accessing a recording of the session, please go [here](#).

Our Speakers, Panel Chairs and Members:

DCC Malcolm Graham (Speaker and Panel Member) - Deputy Chief Constable (Crime and Operational Support - and Operation TALLA Gold Commander), Police Scotland

ACC Gary Ritchie (Speaker) - Assistant Chief Constable (Partnerships, Prevention and Community Wellbeing), Police Scotland

Professor Susan McVie (Speaker and Panel Member) - Professor of Quantitative Criminology, University of Edinburgh

Davina Fereday (Speaker) - Research and Insight Manager, Police Scotland

Martin Smith (Speaker) - Strategy and Research Lead, Scottish Police Authority

Amy Wilson (Speaker) - Head of Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government

Katrina Caldwell (Speaker) - Senior Assistant Statistician, Scottish Government

Dr Andrew Wooff (Speaker) - Associate Professor of Criminology, Edinburgh Napier University

Dr Liz Aston (Panel Chair) - Director of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research and Associate Professor of Criminology at Edinburgh Napier University

Kirsty-Louise Campbell (Panel Member) - Head of Strategy, Insight and Innovation, Police Scotland

Amanda Coulthard (Panel Member) - Head of Strategy and Performance, Scottish Police Authority

DCC Fiona Taylor QPM (Co-host) - Deputy Chief Constable (People and Professionalism), Police Scotland

Peter Neyroud QPM (Speaker and Panel Member) - Lecturer in Evidence-Based Policing, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge

Derek Penman QPM (Panel Chair) - Chair of the International Advisory Committee, Scottish Institute for Policing Research, Honorary Professor at the University of Dundee

Dr Megan O'Neill (Panel Member) - Reader (Geography and Environmental Science) University of Dundee and Associate Director of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research

Barry Sillers (Panel Member) - Deputy Chief Executive, Scottish Police Authority

Session 1: Operational Policing and Covid-19

Operation TALLA

DCC Malcolm Graham, (Gold Commander for Operation TALLA, the Covid-19 response), was the first presenter, outlining the policing response to Covid-19 and the learning gained in this time.

During his presentation, DCC Graham highlighted that in terms of expectations Police Scotland wanted to reassure, be visible, proportionate and fair in the response to the pandemic, and discussed 4E's approach to enforcement (Engage, Explain, Encourage, and Enforce). He acknowledged that there were many difficulties at the start and recognised the need for improvement. It was noted that while Police Scotland did not necessarily get everything right, and shouldn't expect that they did, they were willing to hear about it and reshape, change and adapt.

The role of independent scrutiny, advocacy and accountability was regarded as crucial for the success of Police Scotland's response, and at the start of the pandemic the Chief Constable invited independent advice (e.g. the IAG) in relation to Police Scotland's Covid-19 response. DCC Graham reflected that this helped demonstrate Police Scotland's response was appropriate and based on Police Scotland's values and human rights. The complex layers of scrutiny (public and media, SPA, Scottish Government, HMICS etc.) also helped Police Scotland understand what they were and were not getting right.

DCC Graham concluded with six strategic

implications:

1. What kind of policing to people in Scotland want?
2. Benefits of national co-ordination with local context
3. Rights based policing, pandemics and inequalities
4. Policing as part of wider systems
5. Enhanced scrutiny and accountability can improve public trust and confidence
6. People step up to challenges

Establishing OptICAL

ACC Gary Ritchie discussed the establishment of the OptICAL (Operation Talla Information Collation Assurance and Liaison) Group in response to Covid-19.

He started by acknowledging that with Covid-19 it was recognised that new data would need to be collected to capture police engagement. Due to this methods were put in place to collect data (e.g. CVI) with the information shared internally and with external organisations e.g. government, IAG etc.

It was in this context the OptICAL Group was created. Its remit included supporting local policing, ensuring data could be turned into real time advice on the policing approach, feeding into the GOLD Commander, ensuring EQHRIA process was in place, and providing information to the Independent Advisory Group (IAG). Membership ranged from operational policing to external stakeholders e.g. academics, third sector services etc.

The provision of real time advice from data was central to ACC Ritchie's talk. Over the course of the pandemic, a wide array of data and information was shared with the OptICAL Group and ACC Ritchie noted this allowed for a "real time assurance assessment" and independent and public advocacy of the policing response to incidents that occurred throughout the pandemic.

ACC Ritchie also emphasised that providing real time data and getting a real time response from IAG meant that Police Scotland could get a feel for how the policing response was perceived by the public and that could be used to shape the response.

Other benefits that ACC Ritchie highlighted included the provision of data and information quickly and comprehensively. This informed policing actions in light of changing legislation and

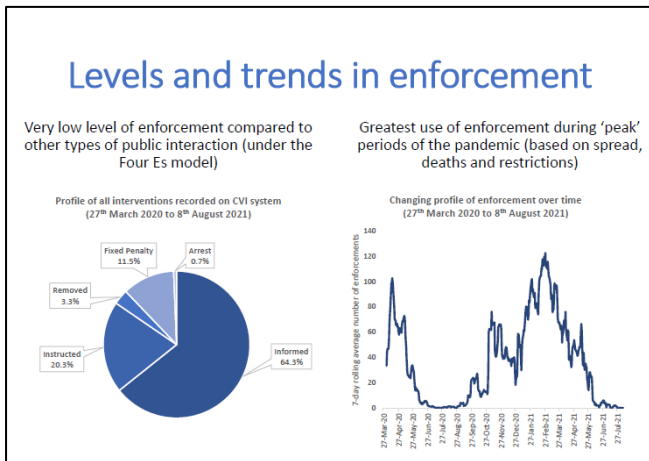
specific incidents and allowed real time assurance on the legitimacy of the policing approach.

Independent Advisory Group and COVID Interventions Data Insights

Offering further reflections on the IAG during the pandemic, Professor Susan McVie of University of Edinburgh described the importance of evidence – including statistical data, public views and experiences, professional input, human rights data and “live” discussions – in the role of the IAG.

Susan credited the value of evidence in the role the IAG in terms of ‘real time’ data capturing, openness and transparency, innovation in data sharing and data linkage, organisational learning around improvements in data quality and in creating further opportunities for research with mutual public and policing benefits.

In terms of levels and trends in enforcement, Susan identified very low levels of enforcement compared to other types of public interaction (under the 4 Es approach) with the greatest use of enforcement during ‘peak’ periods of the pandemic.



Links to prior offending and being known to the police pre-pandemic, including those with mental health issues, were also identified with repeat fixed penalty notice (FPN) ticketing being most likely to occur with those with a prior criminal history.

Demographic and geographical differences were also seen with men and younger people experiencing higher rates of enforcement during the early stages of the pandemic. Rates of

enforcement were also higher in deprived communities and more prevalent in the West of Scotland than the East or North, thus reflecting usual figures.

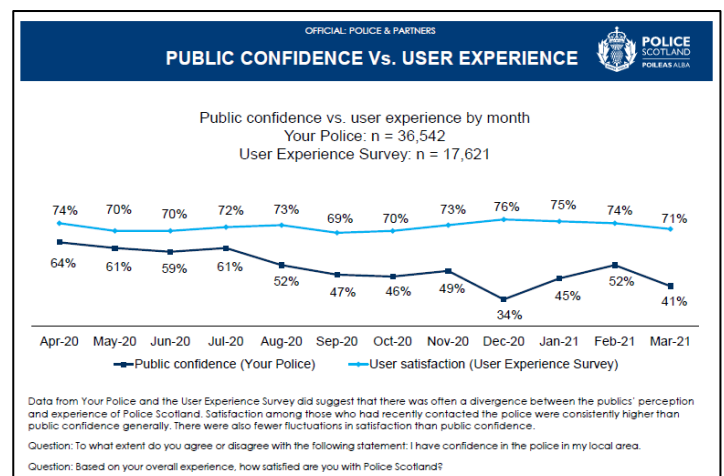
Susan’s research did find that more localised variations with some divisions being impacted more seriously by illegal travel by non-residents than others, particularly in Edinburgh and Argyle & West Dunbartonshire.

Session 2: Public Confidence in Policing

Public Confidence and User Satisfaction Insights

Davina Fereday (Research and Insights Manager at Police Scotland) discussed data from the Your Police 2020-21 survey and User Experience Survey.

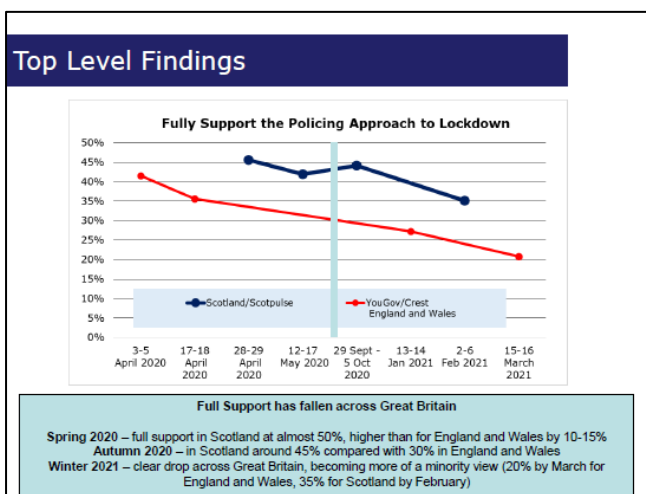
Confidence levels fluctuated month to month with an average of 57%. There was also a disconnect observed between confidence and user experience, with user satisfaction high and relatively consistent. Davina noted that it became apparent via qualitative analysis that public confidence was largely linked to external factors (e.g. Covid-19 rates, First Minister announcements) and that local events (e.g. large gatherings) could be felt nationally and impact confidence across the board. When restrictions and Covid-19 rates increased most people wanted police to take tougher action to ensure compliance, and when rates and restrictions changed people were less likely to want tougher action and returned to fully supporting the police approach.



Martin Smith (Strategy and Research Lead at the SPA) then presented the data from surveys commissioned by the SPA via the ScotPulse survey alongside England and Wales data from

YouGov/Crest surveys.

Support for the policing approach to lockdown was 10-15% higher than the England and Wales data – however a decline was observed in both sets of data. Martin also observed that calls for tougher police action peaked in Winter 2020/21 in both Scotland and England and Wales, with a desire for tougher action becoming the majority view in Scotland in February 2021. While a minority view, the view that the policing approach has been too heavy handed has been consistently higher in England and Wales, and the view that the police should have no role was also notably higher in the Autumn and Winter lockdown in comparison to the initial Spring/Summer lockdown.



In relation to enforcement, an SPA survey from October 2020 showed the lowest level of support for full police enforcement for “everyday life aspects” (e.g. visiting in homes, recreational travel etc.). Regarding compliance 91% of people said they had either easily complied or mostly complied with the regulations.

Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey

Amy Wilson (Head of Justice Analytical Services at Scottish Government) and Katrina Caldwell (Senior Assistant Statistician at Scottish Government) discussed findings from the Scottish Crime and Victimisation Telephone Survey (SVTS) 2020.

Amy highlighted that SVTS was created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic leading to the suspension of Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) 2019/20.

SVTS asked people about their experiences and perceptions of crime, safety and policing during

the Covid-19 pandemic, with around 2,700 participants. Katrina stressed that SVTS was not comparable with SCJS due to low sample size, conducted via telephone not face-to-face, fewer questions and unique questions etc.

Between September 2019 and 2020, it was estimated there was 445,000 crimes experienced by adults in Scotland, with 9% of adults experiencing crime in Scotland. Around 41% of crimes were reported to the police. It was estimated that the overall volume of crime (including those not reported) fell significantly from the start of the UK’s first national lockdown (approximately 35%).



Adults were also more likely to think there had been a change in crime levels nationally than in their local area since the virus outbreak. 91% also noted Covid-19 pandemic had not changed how worried they felt about being a victim of crime – although those who had previously been a victim of crime felt more worried.

In relation to policing, 60% believe police in their local area were doing an ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ job and 74% were satisfied at the local policing response to Covid-19.

Rural Communities and the Pandemic

Dr Andrew Wooff, an Associate Professor of Criminology, Edinburgh Napier University, presented research on the nature of policing in rural communities and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon policing in these communities. His research employed a case study approach to two rural locations in Scotland, including focus groups and semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and members of the local community. A notable theme within Andrew’s research relates

to health concerns within the community during Scotland's national lockdowns.

During the first lockdown, these concerns were rooted in anxiety and fear from the local community and police towards exposure to and transmission of the virus, including from visitors to these local communities. Challenges were identified in relation to quickly implementing – and ensuring compliance of – national legislation within a rural policing environment where a softer approach is usually applied.

During the second lockdown, Andrew found that the 4Es approach was well-received amidst changing local authority restrictions, as well as identifying the importance of multi-agency working and officers who understood the needs of the local community. As more traditional policing challenges re-emerged, addressing the mental health of the local community brought an increased demand to local police work.

partnership working between the police and local communities to address these

Session 3: International Perspectives on Policing during the Pandemic

Dr Peter Neyroud from the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology assessed international perspectives on policing approaches during the pandemic, including states from across the Global North and Global South. This was done via a questionnaire to establish the extent to which countries adapted their approaches to policing. Countries submitting more than one response were condensed into a national average for that particular state.

In terms of the policing organization as a whole, Peter considered that "policing had to self-isolate as much as anyone else had to self-isolate" with policing contact with the public seeing wide changes, particularly in the Global South where in-person crime reporting is more widely seen. This was also seen in terms of engaging with the public who may have engaged in criminality, including traffic stops and bringing offenders into custody.

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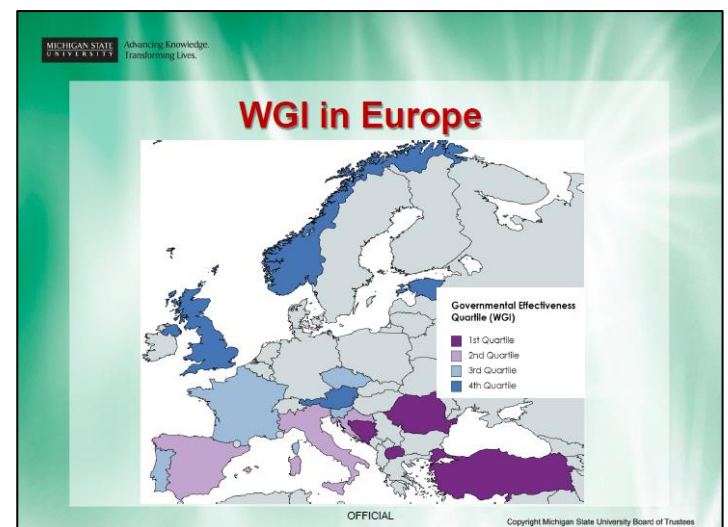
Research Questions

RQ1 How has public demand for policing in rural areas changed in response to Covid-19? (e.g. what are the priorities, how have they changed and what are the potential implications for trust and confidence in the police?)

RQ2 What impact(s) has Covid-19 had on other organisations, agencies or community groups that play a role in the order maintenance of rural communities? How have these different communities organised, adapted, and innovated to maintain social order and access justice?

Key findings within Andrew's data addressed questions of a disconnect between policing at a national a local level in these rural communities:

- Tensions between local and national decision-making processes and the importance of re-engaging local communities in decision-making
- A greater re-engagement with rural communities in the national policing model is recommended as Andrew believes it currently neglects the social context of rural communities
- An exacerbation of pre-existing problems related to mental health and digital divides which require more work in addressing
- The impact of pre-existing structural factors upon the public's experience of the pandemic and the need for



Internally, Peter found consistency across respondents in their increased use of PPE in supporting adapted approaches to policing and the number of police staff working remotely. In contrast, the frequency of in-person roll call and training decreased widely. In addressing any expected consequences to be experienced by police organisations, Peter noted that there was a considerable level of optimism about improvements in quality in post-pandemic policing.

Comparing countries throughout Europe, Peter found differences between countries in Southern

Europe (Quartiles 1 and 2) and Northern Europe (Quartiles 3 and 4) in relation to proactive policing and reactive policing. In reactive policing, it was found that Quartile 4 countries, including Scotland and the U.K., deployed fewer arrests in COVID-19 enforcement compared to other countries. Peter noted that this approach might be consistent with the 4Es approach.

Upcoming Events

COP26 – Policing the Protests

On **Thursday September 9th 2pm to 4pm** the SPA and Police Scotland are convening a roundtable to bring together key partners and academics to consider the policing of protests connected with COP26 in Glasgow. For more information see [here](#).

Further Reading

Below are some links to information on policing the pandemic that may be of interest.

- APCOF (2021) [Why rights-based policing responses to pandemics are good for the police and good for policing](#)
- Maskály et al. (2021) [Policing the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploratory Study of the Types of Organizational Changes and Police Activities Across the Globe](#)
- Scottish Government (2021) [Scottish Victimization Telephone Survey 2020: main findings](#)
- SPA (2020) [Overview of SPA Public Opinion Survey Results during COVID-19](#)
- SPA (2021) [Oversight of policing COVID-19](#)

For more information on the Research and Evidence Forum please visit our webpage:

<http://www.spa.police.uk/performancepages/evidenceandresearchroundtable/>

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