



Meeting	Policing Performance Committee
Date	16th March 2023
Location	MS Teams
Title of Paper	SPA Public Confidence Polling Report - March 2023
Presented By	Martin Smith, Strategy and Research Lead
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	Yes (Diffley Partnership report)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to inform the Committee of the results from the latest phase of public polling, conducted in early February 2023 by the *Diffley Partnership*.

The results feature core questions on public confidence and trust in policing (with comparisons made to the first phase of polling undertaken in the summer of 2022) as well as thematic questions relating to policing, mental health and vulnerability.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Authority undertook a series of standalone public polling exercises over the period 2020-22, focused on gathering independent and representative data for the Scottish adult population on public confidence on a range of issues. For example four separate polling exercises were undertaken during 2020-21 to gather public confidence data on the policing of the pandemic. Following this, surveys were carried out to gather views on use of new and emerging technology in policing and the policing of COP26.
- 1.2. Building on the insights gained through previous polling, the Authority subsequently commissioned routine independent public polling for the period 2022-24. The polling contains a set of core questions exploring public attitudes towards the police; providing the ability to baseline and then track public confidence and trust; along with an option to include topical, spotlight questions exploring areas of significant and emerging public interest.

2 ROUTINE PUBLIC POLLING

- 2.1. There has been significant value to the Authority in undertaking this independent and representative polling to complement a range of external data sources from both Scottish Government and Police Scotland.
- 2.2. Additionally, in this interim period before new Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) results become available, it is important for the Authority to have a consistent time series of data to inform its oversight and scrutiny of Police Scotland.
- 2.3. The Authority has put in place regular independent polling of a representative sample of the Scottish public, with a view to enhancing its understanding of public confidence. This is aligned to the Authority's vision of policing in the public interest, by providing a sample which is representative of the demographic profile of Scotland. The polling seeks views and levels of confidence in, and support for, policing in Scotland, both in general and related to specific areas of work.
- 2.4. The independent direct polling of the Scottish public will provide the Authority with a better understanding of public trust and confidence and variation in this across the population, by analysing opinion from a broad representation of the demographic profile of the country. Providing these insights, and demonstrating that they have been taken into account in shaping policing practices and activities, also builds awareness and understanding of, and subsequently informs support for, operational policing activity.

- 2.5. This paper presents findings from the second phase of polling carried out during February 2023 and covers views on policing, and the specific subject of policing and mental health. The full report, produced by the Diffley Partnership on behalf of the Authority, can be found as Appendix A.
- 2.6. It should be noted that 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from the statistics presented in the analysis.
- 2.7. In total there were 2,662 responses between 31st January and 5th February. This is a sufficiently large enough sample to be representative of the adult population in Scotland and allow a degree of disaggregation, which is central to upholding the validity of statistical observations and inferences. Data tables are also weighted to make them representative of gender and age.

3 CONFIDENCE IN POLICING

- 3.1. In general terms, confidence in the police in Scotland remains strong, with only 19% of people saying that they have a low level of confidence (21% in August 2022). There are two areas where public confidence in the police is lower: in tackling antisocial behaviour (35% saying low – compared to 37% in August 2022), and preventing crime (31% - unchanged from August 2022).
- 3.2. In a similar vein levels of trust in policing in Scotland remain very strong, with only 21% of people saying that they have a low level of trust in the police (23% in August 2022).
- 3.3. In terms of views on how well the police are performing, performance is viewed positively with regard to tackling crime and keeping areas safe, however more people are negative rather than positive when referring to police performance in tackling antisocial behaviour and bringing communities closer together.
- 3.4. The report from the Diffley Partnership (Appendix A) expands on these main findings and explores variations by location, gender, age and other socio-economic factors.

4 POLICING, MENTAL HEALTH AND VULNERABILITY

- 4.1. In December 2022 the Authority convened a [conference](#) on the theme of policing, mental health and vulnerability, bringing together a range of partners from across the Scottish public sector, third sector and law enforcement sector, including representation from England and Wales. Delegates were asked to provide their thoughts on what critical questions might be asked of the Scottish public in relation to the role that policing plays in supporting people

experiencing mental health distress, relative to the role played by other agencies, and relative to other policing priorities and responsibilities.

- 4.2. A number of key insights have been obtained through the polling, with additional analysis and detail available in the Diffley Partnership report.
- 4.3. The public were asked about the importance of various aspects of police service delivery, including the role of safeguarding people experiencing a mental health crisis. The most important policing activity from the perspective of the public is responding to crime-related incidents (76% saying this), followed by solving crimes (64%), patrolling neighbourhoods (43%), protecting vulnerable adults and children (37%) and supporting victims of crime (24%). In relation to safeguarding people experiencing mental crisis, only 7% of people rated this as being a top-3 policing activity, alongside the policing of social media and the digital work (also 7%).
- 4.4. Additionally, with regard to a range of services that could be contacted in the event that a family member or friend was experiencing a mental health crisis, only 14% of people said that they would contact the police service. This is much lower than health and social care services or third sector groups by a high margin e.g. 77% would contact a GP, 72% a mental health charity/helpline, and 60% community mental health services.
- 4.5. Regarding police involvement in situations where a mental health crisis presents, 80% of people identified community mental health services as the most appropriate agency to partner the police, with only 25% identifying ambulance services and 21% A&E services.
- 4.6. There is also a perception that the police would not perform well in meeting the needs of people experiencing mental health crisis relative to other agencies, and almost half of people would not be confident that the police would be able to make an effective referral to the right agency of service.
- 4.7. In terms of overall insights from the questions asked regarding policing and mental health, we have a better understanding of public feeling as summarised:
 - Traditional police activities (tackling and solving crime and patrolling neighbourhoods) are regarded as being most important;
 - The police would not be the first-choice agency for people to call regarding mental health crisis situations;

- The public have less confidence in the police than in community-based health/social care services in relation to meeting the needs of people and making effective referrals.

5 NEXT STEPS

- 5.1. Authority staff propose to progress analytical work on the two sweeps of polling data, looking at intersectionality in more detail, and will bring a more detailed report to a future meeting of the Committee.
- 5.2. In relation to the findings on policing and mental health, Authority staff are currently developing a work plan, in collaboration with Police Scotland staff and SPA Forensic Services, for the Joint Research and Evidence Forum. The work plan will detail further knowledge development and exchange activity, and mental health and policing will be incorporated into the work plan as a priority. The work plan is due to be published in Q1 of 2023-24.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are/ are no financial implications in this report.

7 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are/ are no personnel implications in this report.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. There are/ are no legal implications in this report.

9 REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are reputational implications in this report. It is critical that the policing system listens to the opinions of communities and promotes and enhances public confidence.

10 SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are/ are no social implications in this report.

11 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 11.1. There are/ are no community implications in this report.

12 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. There are/ are no equality implications in this report.

13 ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

13.1. There are/ are no environmental implications in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss to content of this report.

Public Perceptions of Policing in Scotland: Key Findings

Research report by The Diffley Partnership for the
Scottish Police Authority

March 2023



From many voices to smart choices

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Background and methodology

Diffley Partnership was commissioned to conduct regular polling of the Scottish adult (16+) public on policing in Scotland and related issues germane to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). This report sets out the key findings of the second wave of polling, conducted from 31st January and 5th February 2023.

Methodology

The survey was drafted by Diffley Partnership in consultation with the SPA. The survey and its insights include both key indicators which are captured at regular intervals as well as topical elements to inform the SPA's decisions and strategy.

Invitations to complete the survey were sent out through the online ScotPulse panel between the 31st January – 5th February, and received 2,663 responses. Responses were tabulated and analysed quantitatively, including significance testing for between-groups differences in opinion. Survey data is weighted to the age and gender profile of the Scottish population.

Presentation and interpretation of findings

This report summarises the key findings of this polling, drawing out noteworthy findings and between-groups differences. We begin by exploring people's confidence and trust in the police compared to the last wave of data collection, before exploring new questions asked about the role of police in providing mental health services.

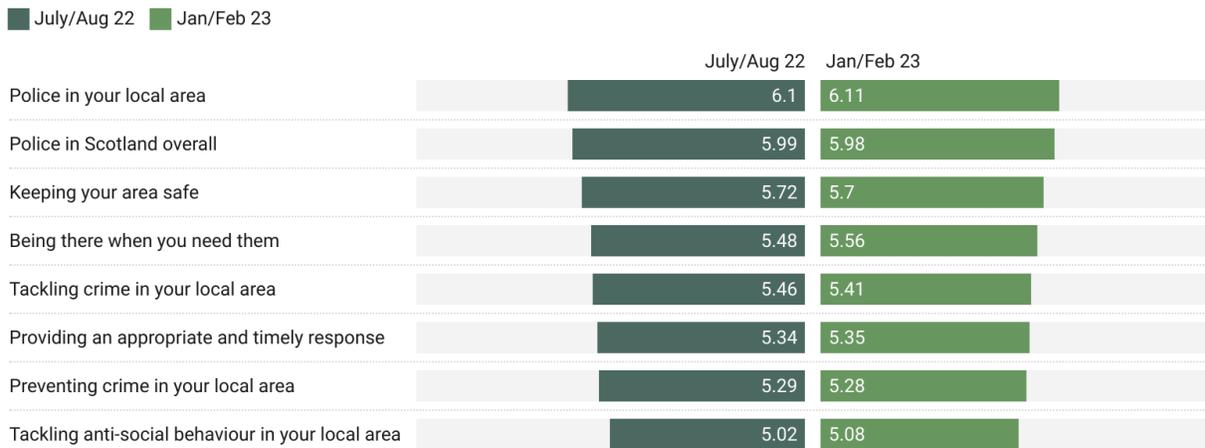
We explore each aspect in turn, with the aid of data visualisations, and comment on significant differences between demographic groups.

Confidence & Trust

Levels of Confidence in Policing

Figure 1: Confidence in Police

How much confidence do you have in the police in the following regards?



On a scale of 0-10
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Respondents were asked how much confidence they have in the police in a number of areas on a scale of 0 to 10. Comparing both waves of data collection, six months apart, demonstrates that there has been little change in confidence in police during this time. For all measures, the average level of confidence reported by members of the public is at least 5 out of 10, meaning that slightly more confidence than lack of confidence is displayed. As with the first wave of data collection, police in local areas enjoy the highest levels of confidence from the public, while police’s ability to tackle anti-social behaviour in local areas has the lowest level of public confidence.

Although average levels of confidence have remained static over time, there are statistically significant differences in confidence levels among specific demographic groups. For instance, respondents over 65 display higher levels of average confidence than some of their younger counterparts on a variety of policing issues. Specifically, they are more likely to be confident in police tackling anti-social behaviour in their local area (average confidence score of 5.38) than

respondents younger than 54 (respondents aged 16–34 had an average confidence score of 4.91 on this measure).

Different attitudes were also observed among respondents from different areas. For instance, respondents from the Highlands and Islands generally reported higher levels of confidence across several measures than those from Mid Scotland and Fife, Central Scotland, South Scotland, Glasgow, North East Scotland and Lothian. This result is additionally reflected by higher levels of confidence in the ability of police to tackle crimes in their local area among people from rural areas (average confidence score of 5.71) compared to urban areas (average confidence score of 5.32).

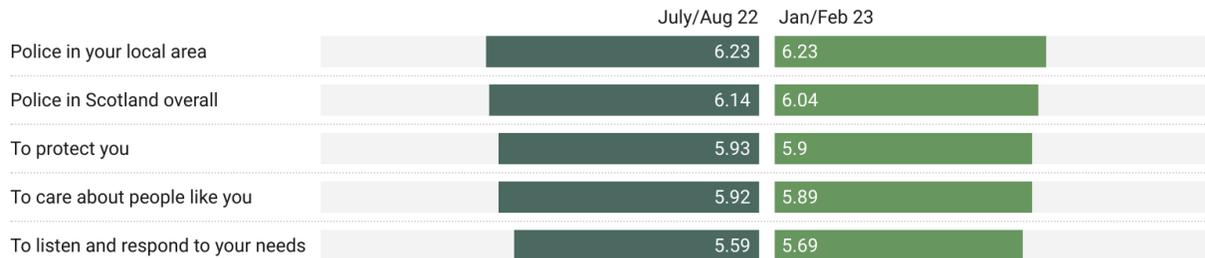
Finally, deprivation plays a key role: respondents from the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) are on average less confident in the police on every measure than respondents from the most affluent neighbourhoods (SIMD 5). This is particularly stark on the measures '*preventing crime in your local area*', '*tackling crime in your local area*', and '*tackling antisocial behaviour in your local area*' where a plurality of respondents from the most deprived areas state that they have low levels of confidence (giving confidence ratings from 0–3) in the police.

Levels of Trust in Policing

Figure 2: Trust in Police

How much trust do you have in the police in the following regards?

■ July/Aug 22 ■ Jan/Feb 23



Please answer on a scale from 0-10, where 0 is 'Do not trust at all' and 10 is 'Trust completely'

Created with Datawrapper

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of trust in the police on a range of issues on a scale of 0 'Do not trust at all' to 10 'Trust completely.' As Figure 2 shows, levels of trust, much like confidence demonstrate very little change across the 6-month period between data collection cycles. Local police continue to enjoy the highest level of trust but are closely followed by police in Scotland overall. In terms of police actions, police are trusted to protect and care about respondents to around the same degree, with trust in their ability to actually listen and respond to people's needs slightly lower. Nonetheless, the average trust ratings show that, overall, police are more trusted than not trusted on all measures.

Once again, interesting trends across demographic groups can be identified. Male respondents are more likely than female respondents to report low levels of trust (giving trust scores of 0-3) in the police on the following measures: police protecting them (28% vs 23%), police caring about people like them (30% vs 23%) and police listening and responding to their needs (30% vs 25%). However, the average 'trust scores' remain similar across genders.

Once again, where people are from also shapes their trust in the police. People from West Scotland expressed higher levels of average trust in police on all measures than respondents from Central Scotland. Additionally, the average level of trust expressed by people from the most affluent areas, SIMD 5, was significantly higher than that expressed by people from SIMD1 and SIMD2 areas for all indicators.

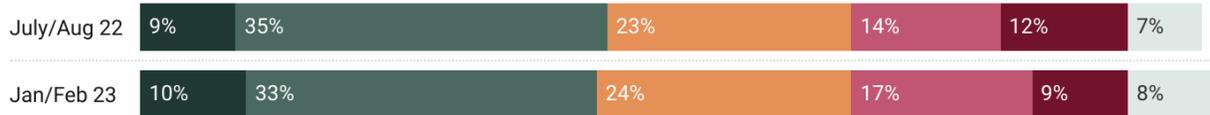
Performance of Local Police

Figure 3: Police Performance

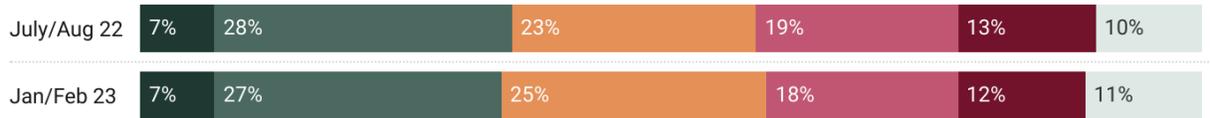
How good or poor a job do you think the police in your local area are doing at the moment in the following regards?

A very good job
 A somewhat good job
 A neither good nor poor job
 A somewhat poor job
 A very poor job
 Don't Know

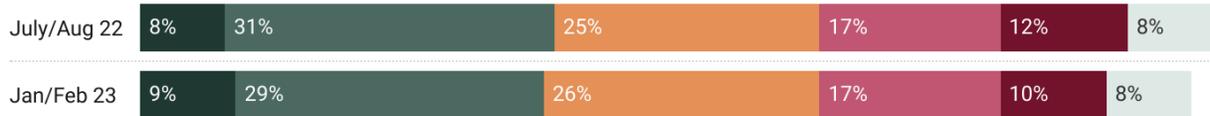
Policing in general



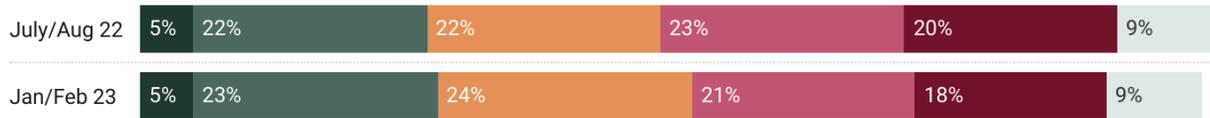
Tackling crime



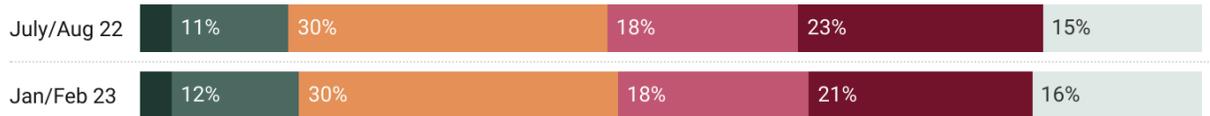
Keeping your area safe



Tackling anti-social behaviour



Bringing the community closer together



Data not shown for bringing the community closer together answer option: 3% a very good job in July/Aug 22 and 2% a very good job in Jan/Feb 23

Created with Datawrapper

Respondents were asked to evaluate how well or poorly police in their local area perform across a range of tasks. Figure 3 compares respondent answers to this question across both waves, and once again demonstrates little movement in opinion over the past six months. It remains the case that local police are viewed as performing best at 'policing in general' and are evaluated least favourably on the measures 'bringing the community closer together' and 'tackling antisocial behaviour'. Additionally, across both waves of data collection, a notable level of ambivalence regarding local police is evident in the form of high percentages of 'neither nor' and 'don't know' answers.

Once again, demographic breakdowns highlight differences of opinion amongst the population. Again, male respondents have less favourable opinions than female respondents, with 30% believing local police are doing a *poor job* at policing in general (compared to 21% of females), and 33% believing the same about local police tackling crime (compared to 27% of females). When it comes to age, there is an interesting flip from the trends in confidence and trust: the youngest age group, 16–34 year olds, express more favourable evaluations of local police than their older counterparts. 44% of 16–34 year olds evaluate local police as doing a good job keeping their area safe, compared to 35% of over 55s, and 33% believe local police are good at tackling anti-social behaviour compared to 25% of over 65s.

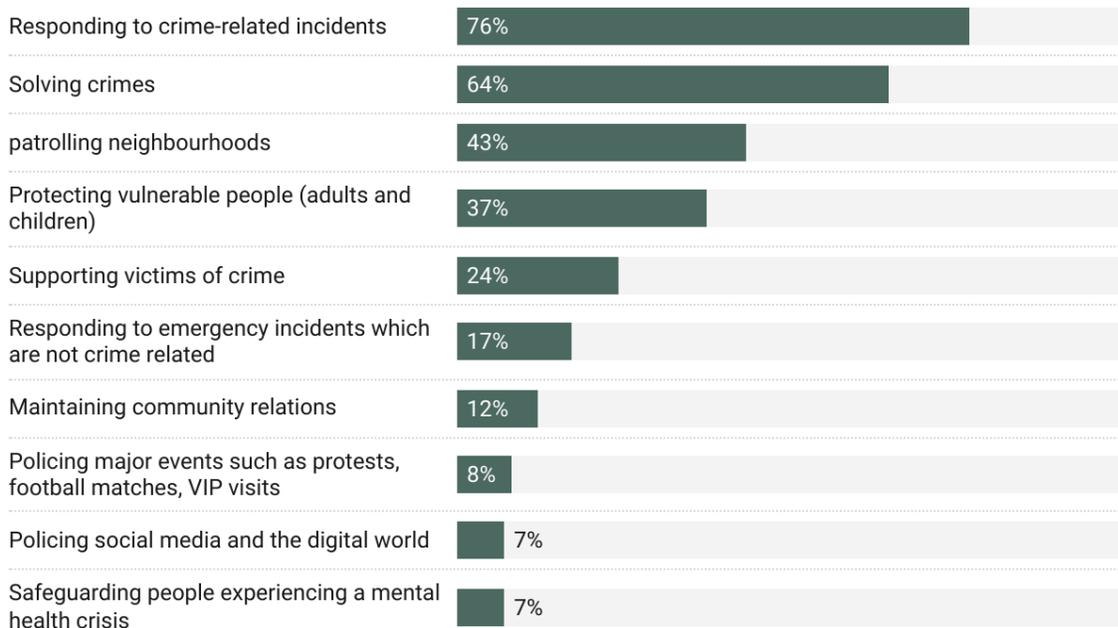
Perhaps unsurprisingly given the lower levels of confidence and trust identified amongst respondents from the most deprived neighbourhoods, respondents from SIMD 1 areas were more likely than people from more affluent areas to believe the police were doing a poor job on all measures. Of particular concern is that almost half (49%) of people in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) think their local police do a poor job in tackling anti-social behaviour. People from urban areas are also more likely to report that the police do a poor job of tackling anti-social behaviour than those from rural areas.

Role of the Police

For this latest wave of data collection, we asked several new questions on the role of the police and their involvement in mental health matters. The results of these new questions are presented below:

Figure 4: Role of Police

Most important roles for police in Scotland



Thinking about the wide range of issues that the police deal with, what would you say are the three most important roles for the police in Scotland from the list below?

Created with Datawrapper

Survey respondents were asked to identify the three most important roles for the police in Scotland. Figure 4 shows that responding to and solving crimes are viewed by the vast majority of respondents as important roles for police. ‘Protective’ elements of police work such as patrolling neighbourhoods and protecting vulnerable people are viewed as priorities by around 4 in 10 respondents. Less than a quarter of respondents believe the other options listed are top priorities. Of particular relevance to this wave of the survey, only 7% believe safeguarding people

experiencing a mental health crisis is one of the top three most important roles for police in Scotland.

Respondent answers once again varied across several demographic groups. By gender, 70% of male respondents identified solving crimes as a key responsibility, compared to 58% of female respondents. Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to prioritise police protecting vulnerable people (42% vs 33%) and supporting victims of crime (27% vs 21%).

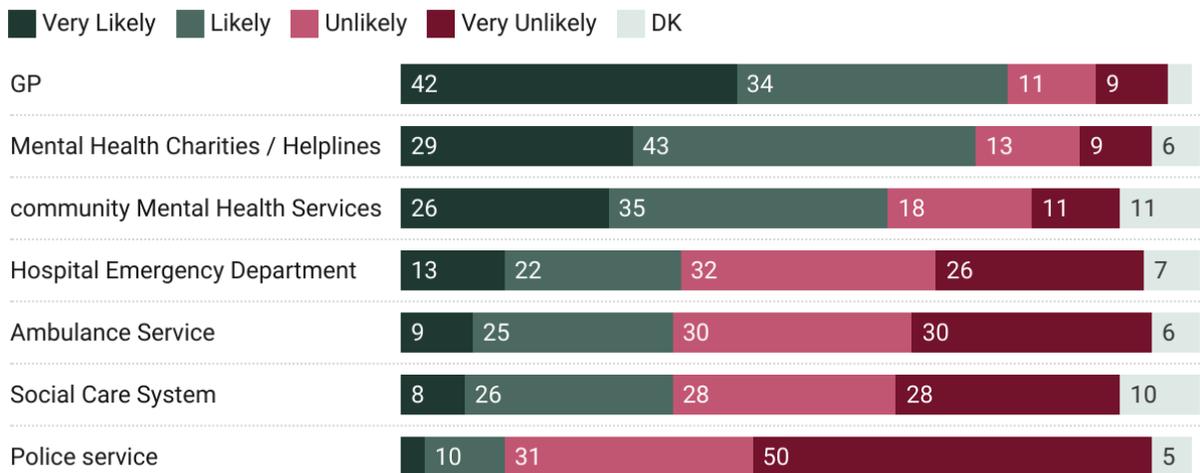
There were also significant differences present by age: the youngest respondents (aged 16–34) were more likely than all other age groups to see a role for the police in protecting vulnerable people (46%), supporting victims of crime (32%) and safeguarding people experiencing mental health crisis (13%). People from the West were more likely to support policing major events like protests, football matches, and VIP visits as a key priority (10%) than people from the North (6%).

Mental Health and the Police

Several questions were asked in this wave of data collection about the role of the police in assisting people during times of mental health crisis. The results presented in Figure 5 align with the finding from the previous question that only a small minority of people view safeguarding people in mental health crisis as a key role for police in Scotland: here only 14% report that they would likely contact the police if they, a friend, or family member were experiencing a mental health crisis, and half explicitly say that they would be 'very unlikely' to contact the police. On the other hand, GPs, mental health charities/helplines and community mental health services are favoured by the majority respondents as key points of contact.

Figure 5: Mental Health Agencies

Likelihood of contacting various agencies during a mental health crisis



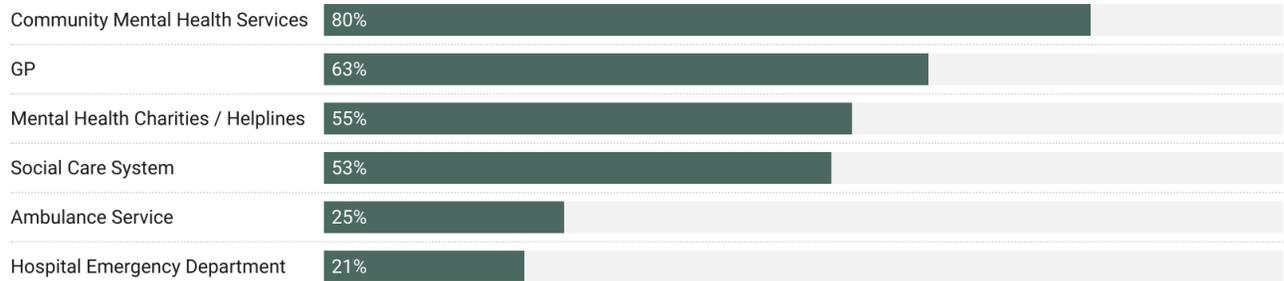
If you or a friend or family member was experiencing a mental health crisis, how likely would you be to get in contact with the following agencies?

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Demographic differences in responses to this question are present, but it should be noted that the vast majority of respondents from every sub group are still unlikely to report such incidents to the police. Male respondents are more likely to say they would not contact the police service if they or a friend or family member were experiencing a mental health crisis (84%) than female respondents (79%). Respondents from the Highlands and Islands are more likely (18%) to say that they would likely contact the police service in this scenario than respondents from Glasgow and Lothian (10%). Interestingly, respondents from SIMD 2 neighbourhoods are more likely than respondents from all other SIMD categories to say they would contact the police in a mental health crisis scenario, with 1 in 5 (20%) stating that they would be likely to do so.

Figure 6: Agencies other than the police involved in mental health

If an emergency response to ensure the immediate safety of people experiencing a mental health crisis is a police role, which other agencies should be involved in this response or in providing prevention and early intervention to avoid crisis?



Created with Datawrapper

When asked which organisations should also be responsible for responding or avoiding/preventing mental health crises, the vast majority of survey respondents believed this role should be taken on by community mental health services. A role is also envisioned by a majority of respondents for GPs, mental health charities/helplines, and the social care system. Emergency services such as ambulances and the hospital emergency department do not appear to be expected to play as significant a role in prevention and early intervention.

Figure 7: Perceived agency performance regarding mental health

Rank these agencies according to how you think they would perform in meeting the needs of people at times of mental health crisis



Please use a scale of 0-10 where 0 is where you think they would perform very poorly and 10 is where you think they would perform very well

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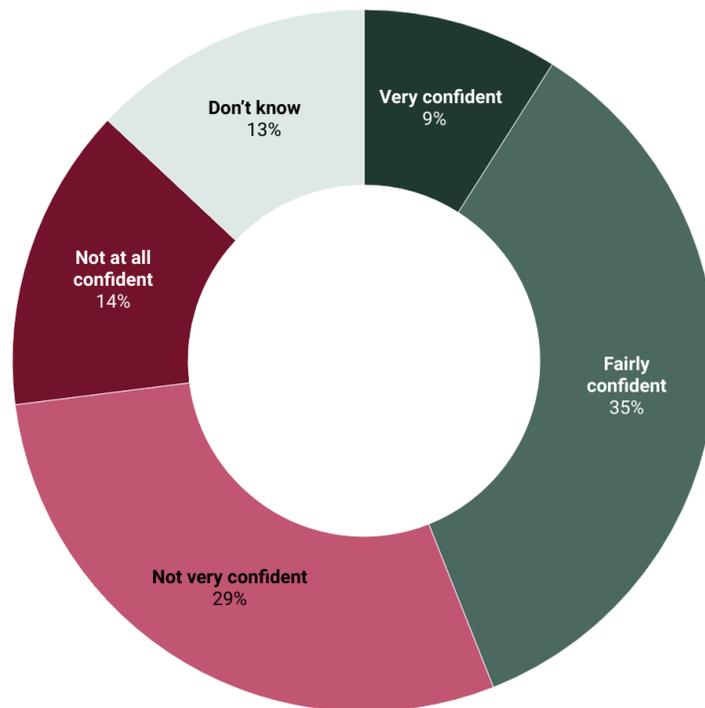
Respondents were asked to evaluate how well various agencies would perform in meeting the needs of people at times of mental health crisis on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 represents ‘very poorly’ and 10 represents ‘very well’. Figure 7 demonstrates that although all agencies, including the police service, scored on average over 5 out of 10, meaning they are viewed as performing more well than poorly, the police service is still ranked as the agency that would perform poorest in this situation. Instead, people favour services specifically dedicated to mental health such as charities, helplines, and community services.

Different sub-groups have different opinions on how the police service would perform in this scenario. Many of these are largely in line with the trends identified above regarding general trust in the police. For instance, respondents from the most deprived areas SIMD 1 are more likely to rank police capability in this scenario as low than respondents from the most affluent areas. Similarly, males are more likely to rank police performance in this area a low than female respondents.

Figure 8: Confidence in police mental health signposting

How confident are you in the police to refer a person in mental health crisis to the right agency or service?

Very confident Fairly confident Not very confident Not at all confident Don't know



Created with Datawrapper

Finally, people were asked how confident they are that the police could refer a person in crisis to the correct agency/support service. Figure 8 demonstrates a fairly even split of opinion on this topic: 44% are either very or fairly confident and 43% are not at all or not very confident that the police could perform this role. The percentage of people that are not confident in the police's ability to fulfil this role rises to 50% among respondents in the most deprived areas, in line with previous trends identified in this report.

Conclusion

This report has demonstrated the following key findings. Firstly, general opinions on trust, confidence, and performance evaluations of police and local police remain fairly static when compared to data collection six months ago. In terms of trust and confidence, these opinions can be described as tentatively positive, while performance evaluations are more varied depending on the police duty.

Secondly, new questions covering mental health and the role of the police service in times of mental health crisis demonstrate low public appetite for police involvement in this area. This is not viewed as one of the top three roles for police by most respondents, and public opinion remains fairly split on how effectively the police service would work in this arena.

Differences across demographic groups persist across all questions asked in the survey. In particular, the police service could work to engage with people from the most deprived areas of Scotland better.



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