

Meeting	Policing Performance Committee Meeting
Date	9th March 2021
Location	MS Teams
Title of Paper	SPA Public Confidence and Support Surveying during COVID-19 Wave 4
Presented By	Amanda Coulthard, Head of Strategy and Performance
Recommendation to Members	No
Appendix Attached – No	

PURPOSE

This paper provides the Committee with a summary of the main findings from the Authority's fourth wave of independent public opinion surveying regarding the policing of lockdown restrictions and general attitudes towards police effectiveness and visibility.

The paper examines the latest Wave 4 findings and compares them, where possible, to previous survey findings, including external sources of data such as the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey findings from 2018/19 and recent polls carried out by YouGov across Great Britain.

An additional section of this paper explores regional analysis.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Authority has commissioned a number of public opinion surveys exploring attitudes towards the police, lockdown restrictions, and the public's ease of compliance and experiences of policing. Findings have been published on the Authority's website¹ and discussed at previous Authority Meetings and at the Policing Performance Committee. The most recent Wave of surveying took place in mid-February 2021.

¹ <https://www.spa.police.uk/strategy-performance/oversight-of-policing-covid-19/>

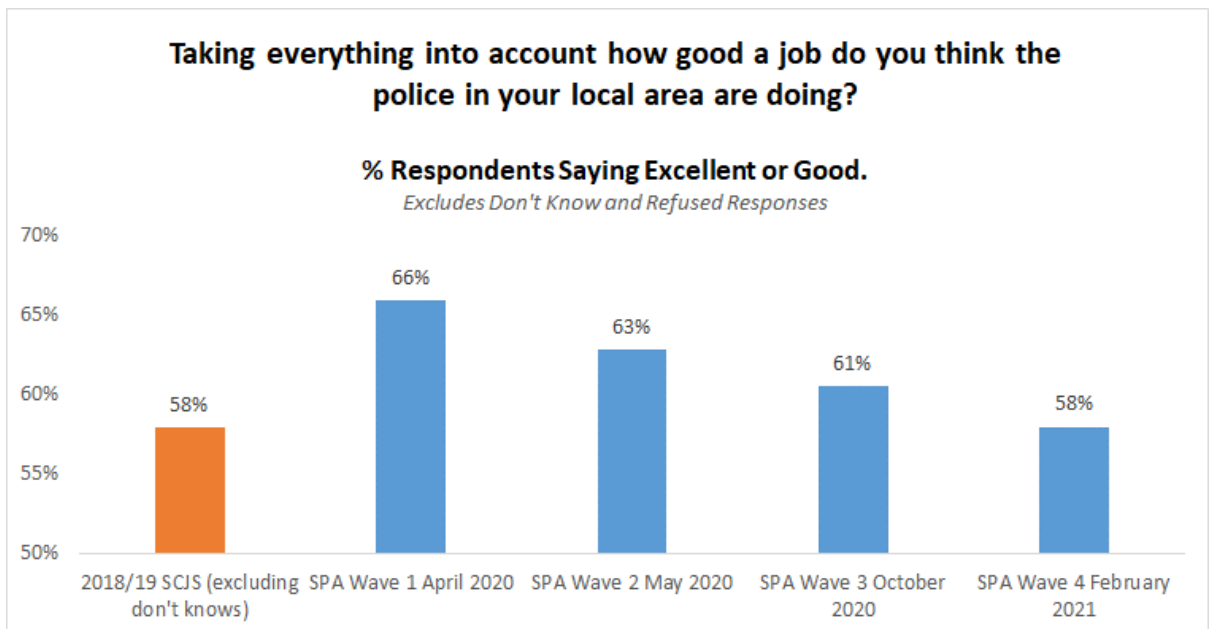
- 1.2 The Authority has surveyed the public using the ScotPulse panel survey, via its chosen independent supplier, the Diffley Partnership. The ScotPulse panel comprises over 28,000 adults from across Scotland, and samples taken are representative of the Scottish population. Participation is on a non-self selection basis.
- 1.3 This paper presents the findings from the February 2021 Survey (Wave 4) and examines observations in the context of past findings and external sources of information.

2. WAVE 4 SURVEY RESULTS

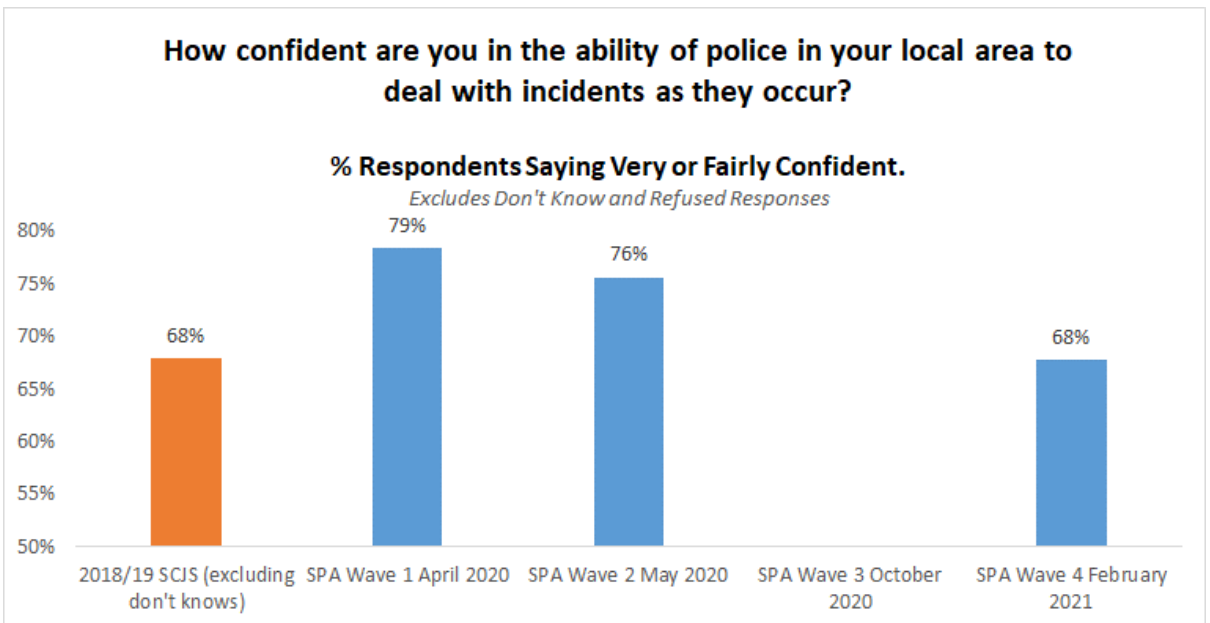
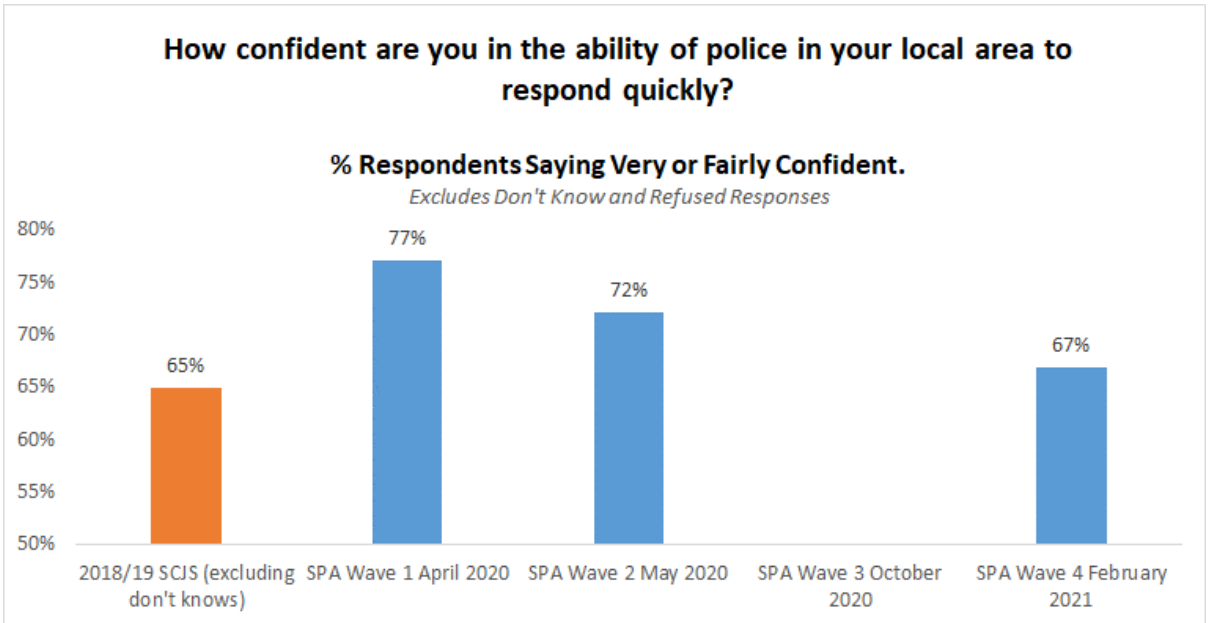
- 2.1 Six questions were asked of the public in the Wave 4 survey. All six questions have been asked previously by the Authority in earlier waves of the survey extending back to April 2020. Additionally, the questions asked allow for comparison with external surveys, namely the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2018/19 or surveys carried out at the level of Great Britain by YouGov / Crest.
- 2.2 Wave 4 of surveying took place between 2nd and 6th February 2021, during a period of a full Stay at Home lockdown. Previous survey waves have taken place in different circumstances, as follows:
- **Wave 1** (April 28-29th 2020): Stay at Home National Lockdown. Sample size: 1,660
 - **Wave 2** (May 13-15th 2020): Stay at Home National Lockdown. Sample size: 1,575
 - **Wave 3** (29th September to 5th October 2020): Localised lockdowns/restrictions and a pending 'circuit breaker' National lockdown. Sample size: 3,791
- 2.3 The Wave 4 Survey generated a sample of 2,617 respondents, with results weighted against the make-up of the Scottish population to produce a representative national sample. The large sample size allows for further, disaggregated analysis to be undertaken to examine how Wave 4 results vary geographically across Scotland. Additional demographic analysis of the results will also be undertaken, as part of a wider analysis of disaggregated data and thematic lines of enquiry. The Authority is working with both the Independent Advisory Group and the Police Scotland Public Confidence Governance Board to develop lines of additional

investigation of the data. A further report will be presented to the Policing Performance Committee at its meeting in June 2021.

2.4 One of the core questions asked in all four Authority surveys relates to the public's view of how good a job they think the police in their local area are doing. This question has also been asked in previous editions of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey. The latest Wave 4 findings show that there has been a further reduction in the proportion of people saying that the police in their local area are doing an excellent or good job (down from a high of 66% in April 2020 to 58% in February 2021). It had been apparent through much of 2020 that this level of confidence was slightly above levels previously recorded through the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey. The level of 58% corresponds with the level in the 2018/19 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

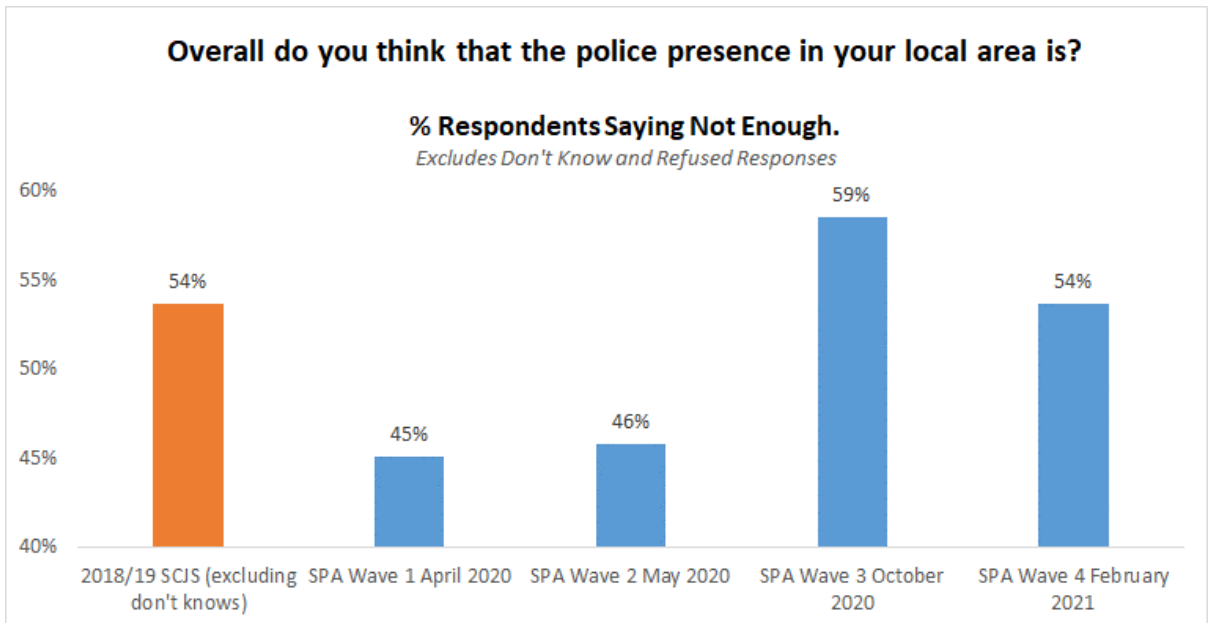


2.5 The Authority also asked in Wave 4 about levels of confidence in the police's ability to respond quickly and to deal with incidents as they occur. These two questions were not asked in Wave 3 (October 2020) but were asked in Waves 1 and 2, and also in the 2018/19 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey. The Wave 4 results show that for both measures, confidence remains high but has reduced compared with the position in the Spring of 2020. Confidence levels in the Wave 4 survey are closer to the levels reported in the 2018/19 Scottish Crime and Justice Survey.

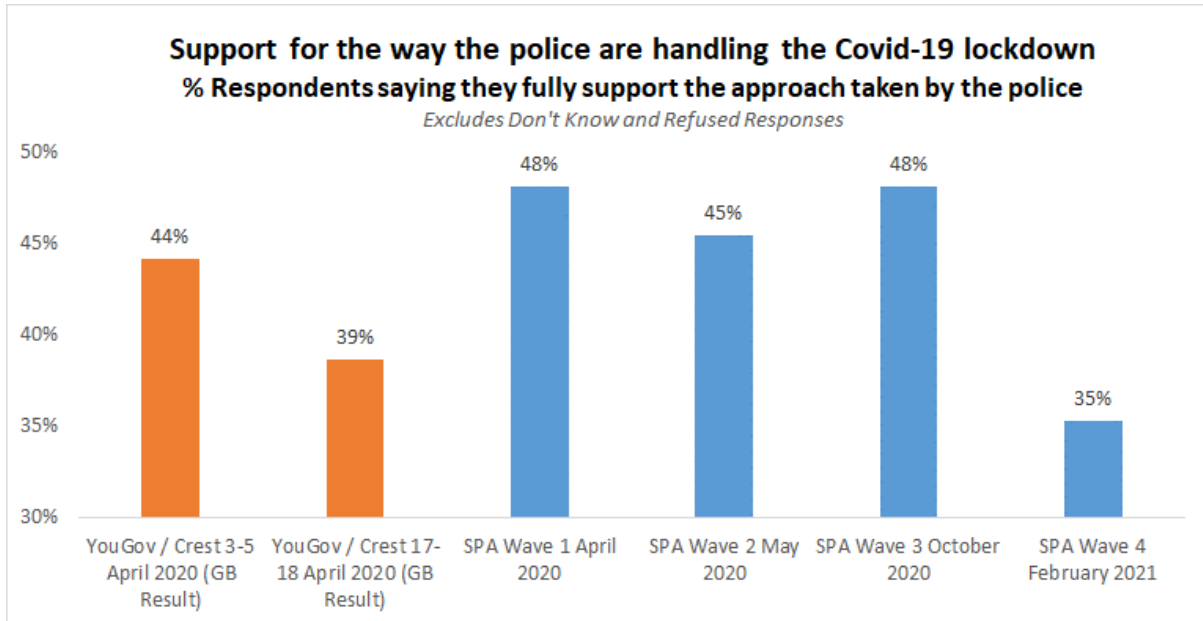


2.6 The public have been asked in all four Authority surveys about their view on police presence in their area and whether they think it is sufficient. This is a question that has also been asked in the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2018/19. In Wave 3 (October) it was notable that a very large shift (up by 13 percentage points from May 2020) in perception had occurred, with 59% of respondents saying that the level of police presence was not enough. This has fallen back slightly in Wave 4 to 54% (in line with the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey findings from 2018/19), but has not reached the levels of Spring 2020 when the majority (53%

in April 2020 and 52% in May 2020) of respondents were saying that the level of police presence was 'about right'.



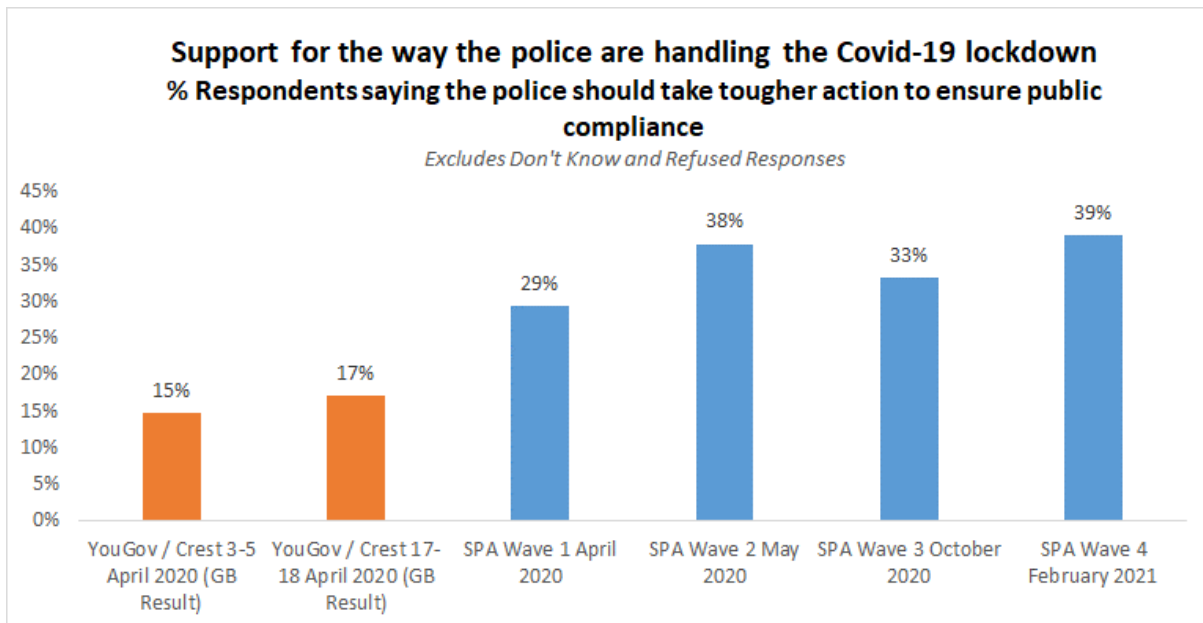
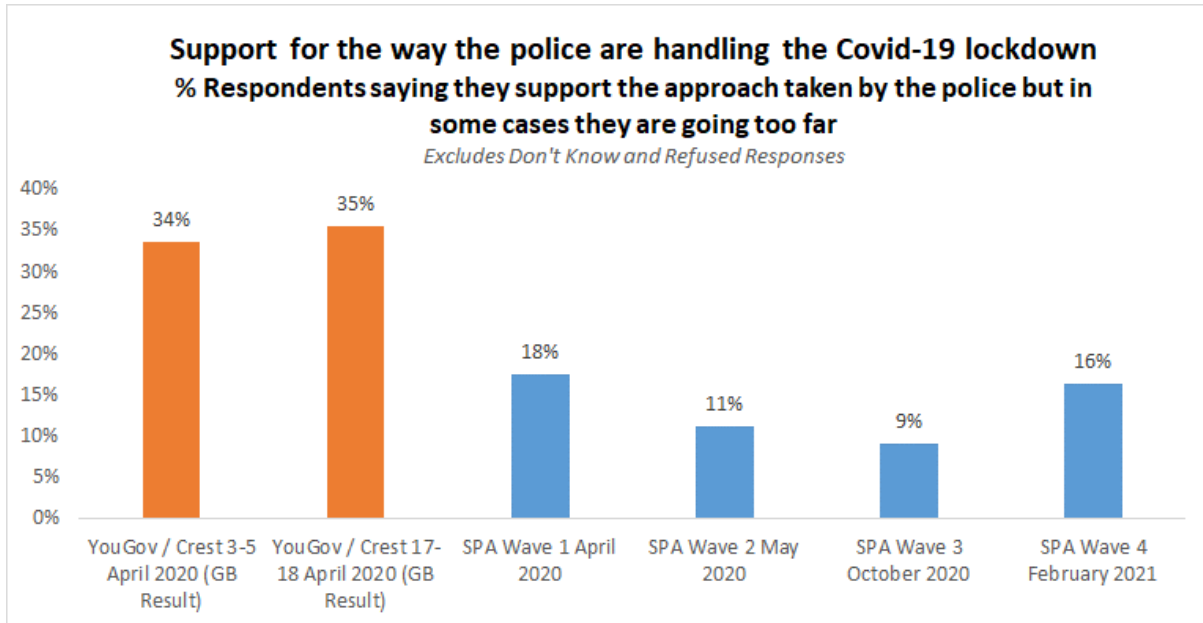
2.7 The Authority once again used Wave 4 to ask the public about their views on the way the police were approaching the policing of lockdown restrictions. This is a question that was asked of the wider British population by YouGov / Crest on two occasions in April 2020. Throughout Waves 1-3 in Scotland, the level of support for the police, whilst just under half, had been above the levels reported by YouGov / Crest by some margin. In Wave 4, however, only 35% of respondents said that they fully supported the approach being taken by the police.

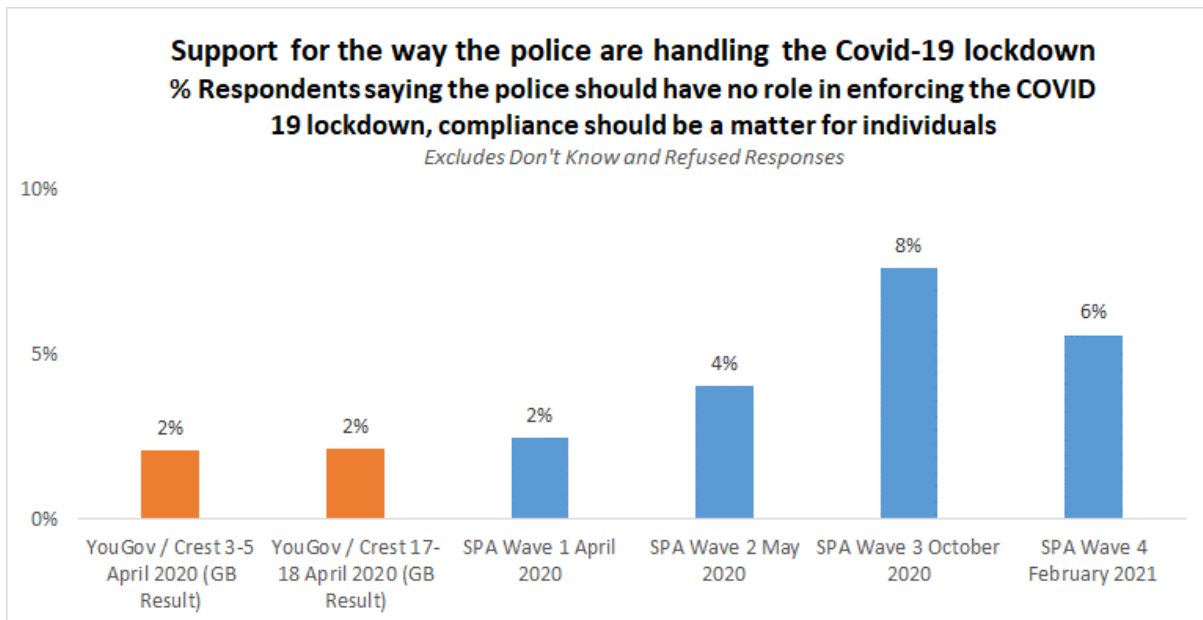
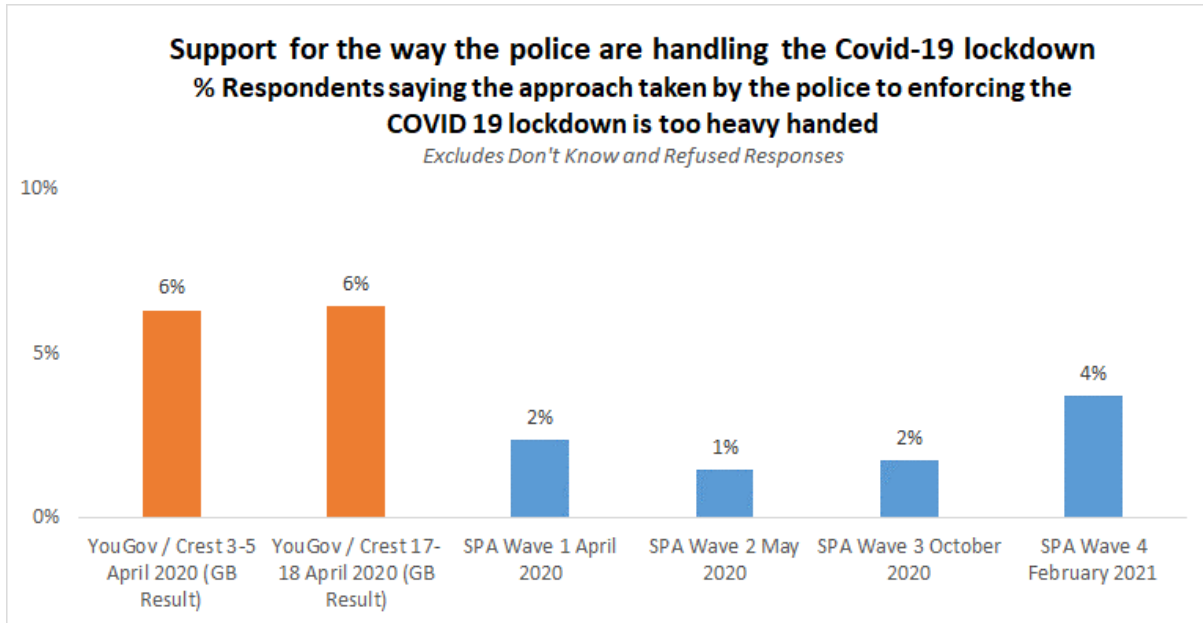


The proportion of respondents saying that they support the approach but feel that in some cases the police have been going too far has risen to 16%, but still represents a much lower level than was picked up at the beginning of the pandemic by YouGov / Crest for Great Britain as a whole.

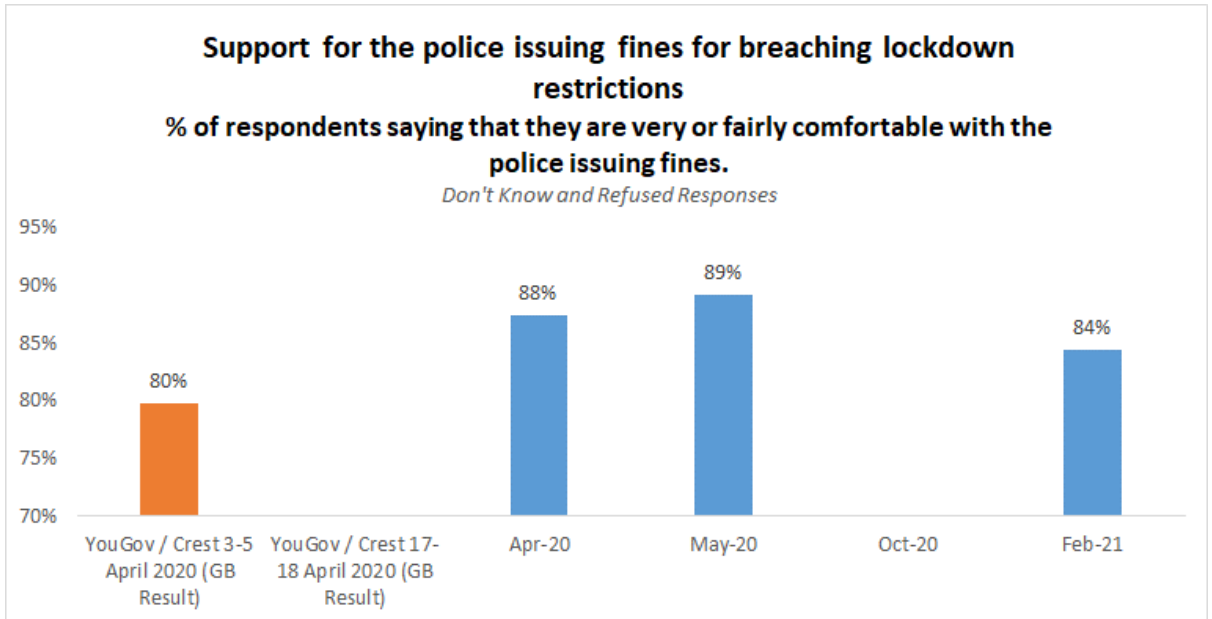
What has been in evident in Scotland is a stronger level of support for the police taking a tougher approach to the policing of lockdown than has been the case for Great Britain as a whole. This rose slightly in Wave 4 (to 39% of respondents) compared with Wave 3, however Scotland has previously reported a similar level (38% in May 2020).

A small but growing segment of the Scottish population is detected in Wave 4 of believing that the police are being too heavy handed, or should have no role in enforcing restrictions and leaving compliance as a matter for individuals to take themselves. The combined segment represents 10% of respondents in Waves 4 and 3, compared with 5% in May 2020 and 4% in April 2020.



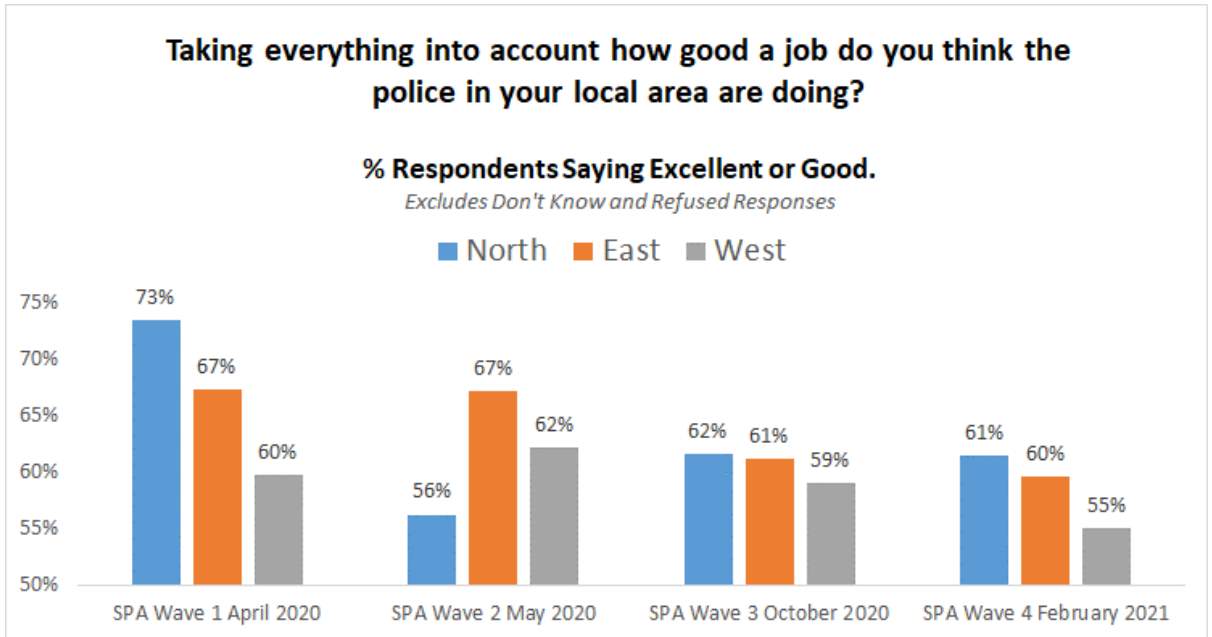


2.8 Finally, the Authority has asked the public in Wave 4 about their attitudes towards the policing issuing fines for breaches of lockdown restrictions. The question was asked in Waves 1 and 2 previously. YouGov / Crest asked this question in their first survey in April 2020. The findings show that support for issuing fines remains strong at 84%, however this has fallen slightly from the high levels of 88% and 89% observed in April and May 2020.

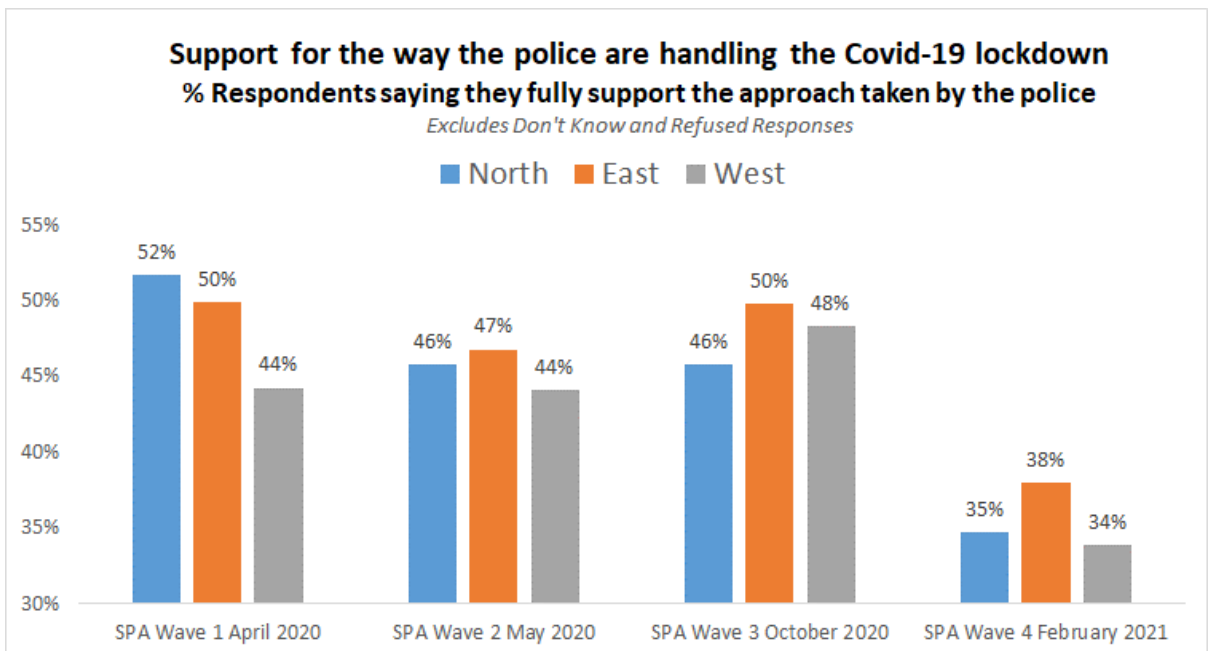


4. PRELIMINARY REGIONAL ANALYSIS

- 4.1 At the request of the Police Scotland Public Confidence Steering Group and based on emerging findings from the Your Police Survey, an analysis of regional variations in key Wave 4 confidence data has been carried. This is preliminary analysis, and a more detailed analysis of regional variations in all survey data (Waves 1 to 4) is currently being carried out.
- 4.2 In terms of the core question on how good a job people think the police in their area are doing, variation between the three main regions has been evident in each Wave, with the Wave 4 figure of 55% saying excellent/good for the West being lower than in the North and East of the country (61% and 60% respectively). The fall of 4 percentage points in the West at Wave 4 (compared with Wave 3) appears therefore to play a part in the overall reduction in confidence at a national level between Waves 3 and 4. It is noticeable, however, that differences between the regions have reduced in Waves 3 and 4 compared with Waves 1 and 2.



4.3 All three regions have seen a reduction in the proportion of people who say that they fully support the policing approach to policing lockdown-related restrictions. The fall-off in support has been greatest for the West region when compared with Wave 3 (the proportion fully supporting the policing approach falling from 48% to 34%). The East region has seen slightly higher support across Waves 2-4).



5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The level of confidence in the police service remains high and in line with levels of confidence that we have seen prior to the pandemic/first lockdown (based on a baseline of SCJS 2018/19 data). During the Spring of 2020, public confidence and support for the police (and the policing approach being taken during the pandemic) was particularly high, with 66% rating local police performance as being either excellent or good in April 2020. As 2020/21 progressed there has been a slight fall-off in confidence compared with the Spring, however the latest findings from Wave 4 (early February 2021) show that confidence remains high, at the same level as the SCJS 2018/19 i.e. 58% once "don't know" responses have been discounted. It should also be noted that the recently published Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey² found that 60% of people believed the police in their local area were doing an 'excellent' or 'good' job.
- 5.2 Support for the policing approach over the course of the pandemic has shifted in Wave 4 (early February 2021), with an evident reduction in the proportion of people saying that they *fully* support the approach that the police are taking (35%). This level of full support fluctuated between 45% and 48% in Waves 1-3. A larger proportion of the public are now saying that they want to see the police take tougher action in relation to breaches of lockdown regulations (39%). However, there has also been a rise (albeit from a low base) in the proportion of people who are saying either that the policing approach is too heavy handed, or the police are going "too far" on some occasions, or that the police have no role to play and that compliance should be a matter for the individual. Thus where full support has waned in Wave 4, there is a degree of polarisation into two segments (more enforcement and less enforcement). The growth of the relatively small "no enforcement" segment is supported by evidence in relation to views on the issuing of fines. In April and May 2020 respectively, 88% and 89% of people said that they were comfortable with the police issuing fines for breaking lockdown rules. In February 2021 (Wave 4) this has fallen slightly to 84%. In terms of the recently published Scottish Victimisation Telephone Survey findings the majority of people (74%) during over the course of the last year have been satisfied with the way the police in their local area were responding to the virus outbreak.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-victimisation-telephone-survey-2020-main-findings/> published by Scottish Government on 26th February 2021

- 5.3 Wave 4 has also seen some other notable changes. Confidence in the police's ability to (1) respond quickly to incidents and (2) deal with them as they occur remains very high (67% and 68% saying that they are very or fairly confident) and in line with SCJS 2018/19 results (65% and 68% respectively). However these levels have fallen from higher levels seen in the Spring of last year. For example, in April 2020, 77% of people said that they were confident that the police would respond quickly to incidents, and 79% said that they were confident that the police would deal with incidents as they occur. Similarly, in Wave 4, the proportion of people saying that the level of police presence is "not enough" is higher than in the Spring of 2020 (54% in February 2021 compared with 45% in April 2020 and 46% in May 2020). Wave 3 (October 2020) appears to have produced an exceptional finding on visibility, with 59% of people saying that the level of police presence was "not enough".
- 5.4 Small regional variations persist in the level of support for, and confidence in the police, however there is evidence that these variations have narrowed during the last two waves of surveying.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 It is proposed that further analysis of Wave 4 data (and previous waves of data) continues, in line with discussions taking place at both the Independent Advisory Group and the Police Scotland Public Confidence Board in relation to ongoing knowledge requirements and gaps, as well as research findings emerging through the analytical work being undertaken by the Independent Advisory Group.
- 6.2 One option, in particular, is for the collective sample of more than 9,500 respondents across the four waves to be analysed in a deeper, multivariate way to establish deeper insights on, for example, attitudinal variations between particular demographic and geographic groups, trend analysis, and the relationship between confidence, support for the police, compliance with lockdown restrictions, and personal circumstances.
- 6.3 It is also proposed that the forthcoming Scottish Crime and Justice Survey findings for 2019/20 are incorporated as baseline and comparative information into the Authority's ongoing analysis, as well as relevant findings from the recently published Scottish Victimization Telephone Survey. It is suggested that key findings from these two Scottish Government surveys is presented to the next Policing Performance Committee (June 2020).

6.4 It is also proposed that a detailed plan for additional research and investigative analysis on the collective sample of more than 9,500 respondents is developed over the coming months and presented to the next Policing Performance Committee (June 2020) for consideration. The Plan would be developed in collaboration with the existing supplier, Diffley Partnership, and involve engagement with the Independent Advisory Group and the Police Scotland Public Confidence Governance Board.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are **no** financial implications associated with this report.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are **no** personnel implications associated with this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are **no** legal implications in this paper.

10. REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are **reputational** implications in this paper associated with the need for the policing system to listen to the opinions of communities and promote and enhance public confidence.

11. SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are **no** social implications associated with this paper.

12. COMMUNITY IMPACT

12.1 There are **no** community implications associated with this paper.

13. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are **no** equality implications associated with this paper.

14. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are **no** environmental implications associated with this paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to:

Discuss and note the main findings from the Wave 4 Survey and consider the proposed Next Steps at Section 6 of the paper.