



Community Confidence Action Research – Letham Engagement Results

Introduction

On February 3rd 2023, the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland held an engagement session with representatives from the community of Letham, Perth as part of the Community Confidence Action Research Project. There were approximately 30 attendees for the day, including council officers, locally elected members, community group leaders and members of the public. The day focused on the findings of a [recent survey conducted in Letham](#) and sought to gain insights on how people felt policing in Letham could be enhanced via table and room discussions of the following questions:

1. Do you recognise Letham in these findings and in what ways?
2. Is there anything you feel is missing or would want to add?
3. What do you think could enhance confidence in policing in Letham?

This was followed up with direct engagement with community groups in the area and their members asking what they felt impacted confidence in policing and how they felt it could be enhanced.

This paper summarises the key themes from these engagements and the ideas people had for enhancing confidence in policing. Notes taken by facilitators at each discussion table were collated, along with notes from the engagement with the community groups, to identify ideas expressed by people that could enhance confidence in policing in the area. This led to the identification of five key areas which are detailed in this paper (Communication and Engagement, Education, Partnerships, Training and Uniform).

Views on the survey results

There were differences in opinion on whether people agreed the results were an accurate depiction of the issues in the area. However, there was general agreement that the findings were not surprising.

Participants felt that people's expectation of police and public services were different post-lockdown compared to pre-lockdown (e.g. tolerance levels lower and current issues perceived as bigger now than they were years ago). Furthermore, it was noted that 'social confidence' is lower post Covid-19 so getting people to engage, work together and come to events is harder.

Participants highlighted that it was felt nothing would be done or change if a crime/incident was reported to police, and that receiving no follow up after reporting a crime/incident could deter reporting. However, it was noted by some that much of the work done by police and partners can be invisible, and that

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there can sometimes be confusion around responsibilities of police and local authority (e.g. antisocial behaviour, neighbour issues and Antisocial Behaviour Order management). This was evident in some suggestions for ways to enhance confidence in policing which would not be within the remit of policing e.g. parks and streets needing to be better lit.

Lack of police resourcing was also expressed as a possible reason for not contacting the police, with a belief expressed that only serious crime would be prioritised. Participants noted a general lack of respect for authority figures (e.g. police and teachers).

Ideas for Enhancing Confidence

Communication and Engagement

Communication and engagement from the police was felt to be a key element in building confidence from both the event and the follow up meetings with community groups. It was noted that officers being active in the area on foot and meeting with the community was invaluable, along with smaller gestures such as waving to children from vehicles when driving past. It was noted at the event that policing seemed very centralised and participants queried if they were receiving a local service or if it was instructed by the centre (Note: it was highlighted at that table that all central divisions are there to service the frontline and do things for them to allow them the space and time to police locally).

Having a meeting between local policing and the community to provide a space for discussion and Q&A was suggested several times. It was noted by some that it did not need to be frequent and could be once a month. It was also highlighted that officers could attend existing meetings/events (e.g. warm spaces, community groups) instead of creating a new one, and that representatives from the Scottish Ambulance Service and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service already attend some local meetings with the community but policing has not. The need for consistency was stressed and, while it was noted by some that it could be different officers attending, officers introduce themselves to the community and then get moved on which makes it difficult to form relationships.

It was highlighted that some emergency and public services have stands at fairs where members of the public can, for instance, see inside response vehicles and speak with representatives from those organisations about their roles. It was felt a similar initiative could be run by police.

The idea of publishing materials related to a 'day in the life' of a police officer was also suggested to give members of the community greater understanding of the various roles of officers. This was seen as particularly valuable given the event, and conversations with members of the community highlighted incorrect assumptions that had been made about policing and a lack of knowledge about policing in 2023 in general.

There were suggestions that policing stories should be publicised more, and that permission should be sought from those who had benefited from the more

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hidden aspect of police work to tell their positive stories. Related to this, it was highlighted that social media presence was largely focused on arrests/operational matters, and that more use could be made to publicise positive stories and local services. However, it was also noted that there was too much of a reliance on social media and so varied communications could be beneficial to reach a wider audience.

It was noted that there needs to be a move away from the visual of 'bobbies on the beat' in materials issued by Police Scotland as it reinforces the idea that effective policing relates to patrolling streets where people live.

Other suggested communications were having posters in local businesses (e.g. the local Co-op), a newsletter, and email (although there were concerns about scams). It was suggested that the Chief Inspector's update is shared more widely than statutory partners and councillors e.g. via community groups social media platforms. The production of 'easy read' and accessible materials was also noted via platforms that are widely accessed (e.g. TikTok).

Education

Linked to communications, it was felt there needed to be better education about the Scottish legal system and what police do to help. It was also noted there is a lack of knowledge on the call handling process (including reporting issues online), and that there should be education on the value of longer-term preventative work compared with short-term ineffective fixes (e.g. 'bobby on the beat').

Partnerships

People felt there was a need for greater partnership working in the community. For instance with local authority housing officers, schools and youth clubs. It was noted that police could ask for help more and work with the local authority and local organisations.

The need for greater partnership with local authority community wardens was also expressed – e.g. having drop-ins with police and community wardens. It was noted that people may be aware of community wardens but not that they are carrying out a form of policing. It was felt they could assist with visibility, welfare and wellbeing.

The desire for diversionary activities was also expressed, particularly in relation to children and young people.

Training

It was felt that police were dealing with things that they should not be (e.g. mental health) and that due to lack of training it can aggravate issues/situations. It was highlighted that there is a high proportion of officers time used in chaperoning people in hospital and felt they are undertaking social work roles rather than primary policing.

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Related to the point around mental health demand, it was queried whether all police officers receive trauma training to help them better understand the people they are dealing with. It was highlighted that the local housing office had received such training and this was positively received by staff.

Uniform

For engaging with communities, it was noted that police officers' high visibility uniform was official and intimidating and the suit of detectives could convey an aloofness from those they were trying to help and also be intimidating. However, the black tops and trousers uniform was considered to be most likely to attract conversation from community members.

Event Feedback

In total 11 feedback forms were received. 10 found the event useful, and of the nine comments it was noted that it was useful to hear from Police Scotland (e.g. more information on day to day duties, workloads etc.), other services and the members of the public present and that they had learned a lot at the event.

The feedback form also asked if there were any other suggestions on how confidence in policing could be enhanced. Out of the eight comments received, half related to engagement. Ideas included showcasing good work via lived experience of service users, engagement with groups, schools and organisations on modern policing how it has changed, organisations talking more to each other, creating a better understanding of what organisations do and working together better.

Other comments were either more general ones related to the event or that there needed to be more respect for police, parents and teachers from children.