

Public Perception Consultation 2023/4

Key Findings Report V2.2

Prepared by SMSR Research on behalf of
Northamptonshire Police & Fire Commissioner



Contents

1.0	Executive summary	04
2.0	Introduction to SMSR Research	13
3.0	Sample and methodology	15
4.0	Northampton Borough Groups	19
4.1	Northampton Central	19
4.2	Northampton East.....	26
4.3	Duston and Dallington	33
5.0	Kettering Groups	41
5.1	Kettering	41
5.2	Burton Latimer.....	49
5.3	Desborough.....	54
6.0	Corby Groups	64
6.1	Corby (Central).....	64
6.2	Corby (West)	71
6.3	Gretton	79
7.0	Wellingborough Groups	88
7.1	Wellingborough Town.....	88
7.2	Earls Barton and surrounding areas.....	96
7.3	Wellingborough	104
8.0	East Northamptonshire Groups	114
8.1	Oundle	114
8.2	Thrapston	120
8.3	Rushden	128
9.0	Daventry Groups	139
9.1	Daventry	139
9.2	Rural Woodford Halse, Long Buckby, Moulton, Brixworth, Byfield etc.....	145
9.3	Crick.....	151
10.0	South Northamptonshire Groups	158
10.1	Towcester	158
10.2	Brackley and Middleton Cheney	165
10.3	Hackleton, Bugbrooke, Deanshanger, Grange Park etc	171
10.4	Silverstone	180

1.0

Executive Summary

1.0 Executive summary

This Executive Summary draws from extensive public consultations held across Northamptonshire, capturing the community's perceptions and experiences with local policing and emergency services from December 2023 to February 2024. The consultation engaged with 187 residents, reflecting a broad demographic spectrum, and focused on understanding their safety, experiences with the police, and expectations for local policing.

This Executive Summary and Recommendations provide a strategic roadmap for Northamptonshire Police and the PFCC, aiming to enhance their operational effectiveness and relationship with the community, based on the insights gathered from the public consultations.

Key Findings

- 1. Diverse feelings of safety:** Urban areas such as Northampton, Corby, and Wellingborough reported low feelings of safety, often citing increased crime and declining urban conditions. Rural areas felt safer but noted concerns about reckless driving and less visible police presence.
- 2. Police visibility and responsiveness:** There is a prevalent concern across both urban and rural communities about the lack of visible police presence, which is perceived to impact safety negatively. Residents noted a mismatch between police priorities and community expectations, particularly regarding responsiveness to crime and antisocial behaviour.
- 3. Community trust and confidence:** Confidence in local policing is moderate, with an average score of 5/10 across groups. Factors influencing confidence and trust include the effectiveness of communication from the police and national media coverage of policing issues. Word of mouth and personal experience are also key drivers. Social media is impactful and local media is becoming less relevant. Perceptions of a young force and a force that is over stretched and under resourced to cope with the increasing demands was also considered a key factor in assessing confidence.
- 4. Willingness to invest in policing:** There is conditional support for increased funding through higher council tax, provided it results in tangible improvements in policing visibility, responsiveness, and crime handling.
- 5. Comparative perception of services:** The Fire & Rescue Service is viewed much more positively than the police, credited with being efficient, reliable, and proactive in community engagement.

1. Feelings of safety

Feelings of safety are notably low in key urban areas, particularly in Northampton, Corby, and Wellingborough. In contrast, rural areas are perceived as significantly safer, though concerns such as reckless driving are frequently highlighted.

In urban centres, Northampton is frequently cited as a point of comparison. Residents often express feeling safe *until* they visit Northampton, or they compare the relative safety of their own areas favourably against it. Issues like knife crime and violence are closely associated with Northampton and to a lesser extent Wellingborough and Corby. The decline in urban areas, characterised by the closure of shops and recreational spaces, is believed to contribute to these safety concerns. This decline is also linked to an increase in the presence of '*rough sleepers*', groups of young people, and large gatherings of older men, often cited as '*Eastern Europeans*'.

Both during the day and night, many residents report feeling unsafe, a trend that is becoming more pronounced. There are widespread concerns about petty crime and intimidation. Women, in particular, mention having to modify their behaviour for safety reasons, such as jogging only during daylight hours, choosing busier locations for exercise, and opting for longer, well-lit routes home at night and safer routes at day.

Parents and younger residents talk about going out less frequently or being advised against going out altogether. For reassurance, many prefer visiting larger, better-policed areas with more robust night-time economies, citing examples of Milton Keynes and Birmingham. Parents were particularly concerned for their children's safety in these key towns. Again, knife crime was a significant concern.

There was an emerging narrative related to the perceived reduction in the police estate, specifically the closure of stations, undermining feelings of safety. This was separated from the impact it may have on responsiveness and engagement and framed as the loss of a deterrent and a general decrease in the sense of '*police being nearby*'.

Safety concerns in urban areas

Residents in urban locales like Northampton, Corby, and Wellingborough often reported an increase in crime, notably theft, drug related crime, antisocial behaviour, and violent crime, including knife-related incidents. These issues are perceived to be concentrated in the town centres or areas with active night-life, exacerbating safety concerns.

The physical decline of these urban environments is seen as a key factor in the diminishing sense of safety. The closure of shops and community spaces reduces foot traffic and increases vacant properties, contributing to a sense of insecurity and susceptibility to crime. There was acknowledgment from residents that a general decline in community assets, for example youth orientated services like generic youth clubs has contributed to a deterioration within communities. This was typically described not as an explicit policing challenge but a broader partnership barrier.

The increased visibility of rough sleepers and groups of young people or gangs also raises safety concerns, often reflecting a broader decline in area maintenance and public order.

Impact on community behaviour

Due to these safety concerns, individuals in urban areas report changing their routines, such as avoiding certain areas after dark, visiting town centres less frequently, and opting to socialise in areas perceived as safer and better policed outside their immediate community. There was fledgling evidence of young people, when socialising locally, particularly during the night-time economy attending more family orientated venues and restaurants, perceiving them to be safer.

Rural areas safety concerns

The main safety issue in rural areas centres around traffic and driving behaviours, with reckless driving and speeding being major concerns. The infrequent patrolling of these areas, often narrow and poorly lit, contributes to a sense of insecurity.

Whilst many residents feel that the visibility of police in rural areas is insufficient, (leading to a sense of neglect and delayed responses to incidents, which is particularly problematic given the geographic spread and logistical challenges of policing isolated areas), others did appreciate the fact that policing was needed elsewhere and that many rural areas should not be a priority for patrolling.

While rural areas generally enjoy a higher sense of community or neighbourliness, and lower crime rates, the lack of visible policing is seen as a threat to these positive aspects, especially if crime rates increase or traffic incidents become more frequent.

Policing needs

There is a clear call from residents in both urban and rural areas for policing strategies tailored to their unique environments—more foot patrols and community policing in urban areas, and enhanced traffic patrols and responsive policing in rural areas.

Overall, there is a strong desire for improved engagement between the police and the community. Residents emphasised the need for police to be more involved in community events, maintain regular communication about safety concerns and policing activities, and foster relationships that build mutual trust and respect.

Stakeholders talked positively about various initiatives that they feel will ultimately help increase feelings of safety such as Safer Streets, Safer Routes, ASB Action Plans and Task Force, Street Marshals and a general feeling that most partners were aware of the issues and are trying to respond to them effectively. There was agreement that significant aspects were out of the forces control to some extent such as declining areas of the high street and an escalation in rough sleeping, even though often the police were seen as unable to keep people safe. All agreed that positive initiatives need to be communicated effectively to the public.

Those who represented their communities agreed that the areas mentioned are not considered 'safe' and that feelings of safety during both day and night are increasingly similar. Station closures was also considered a key driver for a reduction in feelings of safety.

2. Police visibility and responsiveness

Safety concerns are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the visibility and responsiveness of Northamptonshire Police. Many residents expressed concerns over the noticeable lack of police presence, which they feel significantly impacts their sense of security. Visibility is considered the principal driver to feelings of safety in Northamptonshire.

One resident's experience encapsulates a common sentiment: *"I haven't heard anything around here, I haven't seen any police, there's no patrols, I've seen one police car go by and that was it."* This highlights a broader perception that visible policing is essential for fostering a safe environment.

Although this was considered a nationwide issue, the perceived scarcity of visible policing in Northamptonshire notably undermined confidence in local policing, despite instances where residents report prompt and professional responses when needed.

The discussion becomes more complex concerning specific crimes like theft and antisocial behaviour. For example, one resident described a frustrating experience with a car theft, criticising the police's approach: *"Car theft is bad, very bad. They [Northamptonshire Police] just push it away though and want the insurers to sort it out... That's all they were doing in my mind."* This reflects a perceived misalignment between the police's priorities and the community's expectations for security and justice.

This theme of insufficient police visibility and responsiveness recurs in residents' narratives, significantly affecting their trust and safety. The limited patrols and perceived slow response times to antisocial behaviour or crime contribute to a developing erosion of community trust.

Emerging and local crime priorities

Residents are increasingly concerned about emerging local crime priorities, such as drug-related issues, antisocial behaviour (ASB), knife crime, and reckless driving.

The apparent lack of action against known problems can heighten community frustration and feelings of abandonment by the police force. For example, issues of drug use in green spaces are frequently cited, highlighting a gap between police action and community expectations.

Key community groups within the stakeholder sessions mentioned a *'significant lack of focus on hate crime'*, with one attendee stating, *"...hate crime responsiveness is the worst I have known in twenty years"*. Others talked about a lack of specialist knowledge on areas such as hate crime and domestic violence. It was argued that discontinuing the Hate Crime Unit had affected how the force respond to and understand hate crime.

Stakeholders also described a need to prioritise cybercrime and fraud and argued more should be done to promote awareness of the crimes and how Northamptonshire Police are trying to address them.

Stakeholders did talk positively around current knife crime initiatives, in particular Exodus, and school engagement generally. Personal and online safety initiatives were highlighted as best practice. The developing local youth offer was also recognised; however, it was considered *'more needs to be done'* to develop this further and offer improved diversionary activities. Stakeholders did argue that initiatives around drug use and knife crime needed to start being introduced at primary school age and not secondary school.

Challenges in urban and rural areas

In urban settings, the absence of visible police presence in busy public spaces made residents feel particularly vulnerable during evenings and weekends. There was a fledgling sense that the separation between feelings of safety during daytime and the night-time economy was also narrowing and there was increasingly less separation between the times of day. Rural communities, faced with geographical spread and fewer resources, report a similar lack of police resources, contributing to feelings of neglect and a sense that their safety needs are not prioritised.

Mismatch between police priorities and community expectations

Residents in both urban and rural areas noted delays in police responses, particularly to non-violent crimes such as property theft or and vehicle crimes. This often resulted in frustration and a perception that these issues are not taken seriously by the authorities.

The gap between community expectations and actual police presence and responsiveness can lead to a significant reduction in trust in local policing. This erosion of trust undermines the foundation of community-police relations, increases fear and anxiety among residents, and impacts their daily activities and willingness to participate in community life, especially during the night or in less populated areas. Rural residents often felt isolated and there was a concern that response times would be slower, if the service was ever needed, this is despite many positive experiences from victims around response times. This was reinforced during the stakeholder sessions.

3. Community trust and confidence

Trust and confidence in Northamptonshire Police are shaped by several factors, with communication standing out as pivotal. Effective communication in policing was crucial influencing public perceptions of transparency, approachability, and efficacy. There is a notable scepticism towards government institutions, which is mirrored in the residents' attitudes toward the police.

National media coverage was often pointed out by most groups as significantly influencing confidence in national policing, and to a lesser extent, in Northamptonshire Police. Residents frequently recalled national stories that are predominantly negative, such as the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions and the Sarah Everard case, which have also undermined trust in local policing. This media influence prompts residents to be more questioning of officers' behaviour, and more cautious about interacting with police unless in a safe or public space. 'Confidence' in policing often referred to feelings towards the organisation and 'trust' was in relation to its officers and personnel. Negative press coverage influencing both trust and confidence was most frequently referenced in relation to the Metropolitan Police. Stakeholders agreed that that increase in national media around policing did inevitably have a impact on levels of confidence and trust.

In rural areas, the limited exposure to local officers and perceived slower response times due to station locations or priority levels further erode confidence. Additionally, word of mouth, particularly within non-White British communities, served as a crucial source of local policing information, further impacting trust and confidence levels – the research elicited that confidence in policing generated through word of mouth or perception were often aligned to lower customer satisfaction versus direct experiences of policing, which typically yielded a higher level of satisfaction.

Residents were asked to rate their confidence in Northamptonshire Police on a scale from 0 ('Not at all confident') to 10 ('Extremely confident'). Although the average score was 5/10, residents noted that their confidence levels were volatile and could shift significantly based on personal experiences with the police. Many said confidence was decreasing.

Communication and community engagement

Improving communication is seen as essential for rebuilding trust. The current communication gap affects not only the immediate perception of police effectiveness but also has long-term implications for community trust. Enhancing dialogue and transparency could significantly improve perceptions of police responsiveness and effectiveness.

Police communications were typically described in two tiers; the first aligned to the follow-up and ongoing feedback related to any investigation. The second was general engagement with the public. While both are considered to have significant value, the feedback process was considered the weakest mechanism and a significant underminer to victim and resident satisfaction. Diminished trust and confidence are being seen to impact community engagement with the police adversely, leading to underreporting of crimes and reduced cooperation in community policing efforts.

Communities are looking for meaningful engagement and timely communication about their concerns and incidents affecting them, not just police presence. Building trust requires fostering positive, ongoing relationships. Stronger communication around any lack of investigation is also hugely important, especially when expectations are raised with CCTV for example.

However, the impact of these engagements varies, with some residents feeling that these efforts are either insufficient or too isolated to effect substantial change. There is a need for more consistent and comprehensive community engagement strategies that cater to the diverse concerns and needs of different community segments, including youths, schools, and vulnerable populations.

Several stakeholders representing various groups felt strongly that confidence in policing was lower amongst key local demographics including the black, Somali, and Bangladeshi communities. They argued that these groups felt '*insignificant*' and that stop and search was still a key issue in driving down trust and confidence. There was a call for a stop and search working group and renewed effort across the force to work more closely with these residents.

Stakeholders identified the Beat Bus as an excellent local initiative and community engagement tool but were critical of the promotion of the service and a lack of communication around its presence. This was especially relevant in the rural areas, often describing the initiative as positive, but access to the service was poor as a result of communication.

4. Investment in local policing (and Precept)

The willingness of Northamptonshire residents to financially support enhanced policing services is conditional, tied to expectations of clear benefits and improvements. The idea of paying a higher precept for better police services finds some support, if the additional funding leads to visible and effective changes.

This conditional willingness to contribute more financially is tempered by a desire for accountability and clarity regarding how these funds would be utilised. Residents sought assurances that increased investments in policing will directly address their concerns and priorities, including heightened police visibility, faster response times, and more effective crime prevention and resolution.

Conditional support

Residents were willing to consider higher council tax payments if they can see clear, measurable improvements in policing effectiveness, particularly in visibility, responsiveness, and crime handling. This indicates a pragmatic approach to community investment where returns in the form of enhanced safety and service quality are expected.

The willingness to pay more was influenced by economic factors, with residents weighing the cost against perceived benefits. In communities where economic challenges are more pronounced, there might be greater scrutiny regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of how additional funds are utilised.

Residents also demonstrated a desire for more clarity in relation to 'what' investment would achieve, believing existing proposals around precept communication at times felt like 'electioneering' but also was quite convoluted. Residents wish for investment outcomes to correlate to their community needs, for example, a number of station opening hours or a dependable number of police patrols in their locality. The narratives related a specific number of officers and ambitions for innovation appeared to gain little resident traction. Residents want to see a difference at a local level, many felt they had not seen any changes despite an increase year on year, subsequently support is starting to wane.

5. Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

In contrast to the mixed views on policing, the Fire & Rescue service in Northamptonshire is held in high regard by residents, often described as 'efficient', 'reliable', and 'highly responsive' to emergencies. This stark difference in public perception underscores the critical role that visibility, accessibility, and proactive community engagement play in shaping public trust and confidence. A participant encapsulated this sentiment by stating, "Confidence is sky high," which reflects the overall positive perception towards the Fire & Rescue service.

The favourable view of the Fire & Rescue service is further bolstered by its active involvement in community education and safety initiatives. This stands in contrast to the perceived shortcomings in the police's engagement with young people and schools/ education. The Fire & Rescue service's commitment to building relationships through educational programs for children exemplifies effective community engagement.

The service is viewed as highly efficient, largely due to their consistent and quick response times to emergencies, which are well-documented and publicly recognised, although this is often measured on perception rather than personal, direct experience.

The operational protocols of the Fire & Rescue services are considered clear and structured, enhancing their reliability although this was a point consistently used to mitigate the reduced customer satisfaction of Northamptonshire Police. The police were considered to be more diffuse in their duties, often described as more 'dynamic' and as a result more stretched and challenged. The common example was a perceived evolution of the police roles to respond to social care challenges and community mental health needs, a development not wholly supported by residents.

While residents did not support the police requirement to increasingly incorporate social care responsibilities, they did reference the Fire & Rescue Services managed development from traditional firefighting to a more diverse emergency service as a positive.

Although residents had difficulty in comparing police and fire and rescue as like for like services, believing their roles were too different there was a clear sense that Northamptonshire Police could utilise a number of Fire & Rescue principles to enhance confidence. These were chiefly:

- Improved public visibility
- Enhanced engagement with young people and education providers
- Greater focus on localism and use of estate/ stations
- Less vulnerability and negative coverage in national and local media
- Clearer operational remit to be measured against

2.0

Introduction to SMSR Research

2.0 Introduction to SMSR Research

Established in 1991, SMSR Ltd. is a dynamic and innovative social research agency with over 30 years' dedicated consultation and evaluation experience. Conducting both public interest and social policy research for over 200 organisations, SMSR has operating divisions that design and deliver research projects on behalf of the public sector across the UK, Europe, and the Far East.

As a full-service agency we offer a suite of quantitative and qualitative solutions in addition to dedicated project management, data processing and analysis functions, from research design to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Based on technical excellence and social science our data produces opportunities for clients to build insight and make confident operational and strategic decisions.

SMSR supports public agencies to understand the populations they serve and specialises in connecting organisations to communities that are often seldom heard which are often less likely to be engaged. SMSR has been successfully engaging, consulting, and collaborating with often marginalised, underrepresented and minority groups for over three decades. We challenge the term 'hard to reach' by operating effectively in the community, representing its many demographics with equality and efficiency.

Our methodologies are demonstrably effective across the UK, where we have developed relationships with community services, not as a single-serving resource for research but working relationships for long-term sharing of information and ideas. We support approx. 25 UK police forces and OPCCs across the UK in addition to our support of Local Government, health services, education, and the charitable sector.

Examples of our consultancy assignments include: • Essex Police – Understanding public perception • Merseyside Police – Increasing diversity within recruitment • Humberside OPCC – Understanding vulnerability • Great Ormond Street Hospital – Patient pathway re-engineering • Dove House Hospice – Public & Stakeholder perception • West Yorkshire OPCC – VAWG evaluation • Greater Manchester Combined Authority – Understanding knife violence & young people

Alongside our Information Commissioners Office registration, SMSR Ltd. is a Market Research Society Company Partner and holds the Fair Data accreditation and Microsoft Cyber Essentials assurance. The SMSR workforce is vetted through UK police forces to a NPPV3 level.

3.0

Sample and Methodology

3.0 Sample and methodology

Resident engagement sessions were held between 12th December 2023 and 22nd February 2024, held at various venues and locations across Northamptonshire.

The groups were held in the following locations:

December 2023		
1	12 December 2023	Northampton
2	14 December 2023	Oundle
January 2024		
3	10 January 2024	Towcester
4	11 January 2024	Wellingborough
5	17 January 2024	Corby West (Oakley Vale area)
6	18 January 2024	Corby Central
7	24 January 2024	Brackley & Middleton Cheney
8	25 January 2024	Kettering
9	25 January 2024	Northampton East (Billing or Rectory Farm areas)
10	30 January 2024	Burton Latimer, Rothwell and other rural
11	31 January 2024	Thrapston
February 2024		
12	01 February 2024	Silverstone
13	06 February 2024	Gretton and rural beat
14	07 February 2024	Rushden
15	08 February 2024	Wellingborough Town (Hatton Park area)
16	13 February 2024	Earles Barton, Mears Ashby, Finedon
17	13 February 2024	Desborough
18	15 February 2024	Daventry Town Centre
19	19 February 2024	Hackleton, Bugbrooke, Deanshanger, Grange Park
20	20 February 2024	Woodford Halse, Long Buckby, Moulton, Brixworth, Byfield
21	21 February 2024	Crick
22	22 February 2024	Northampton, Duston or Dallington

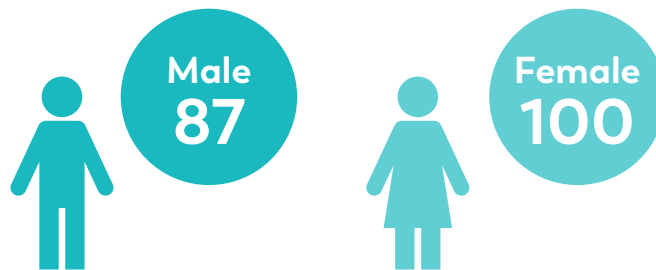
In addition to the public engagement exercise, two (virtual) reflector sessions were facilitated on 29th February and 01st March 2024. Seventeen stakeholders participated in the process, representing local support services, AIG members, local councillors, Neighbourhood Watch representatives, police officers, Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue and NPFCC partners.

Demographic Reach

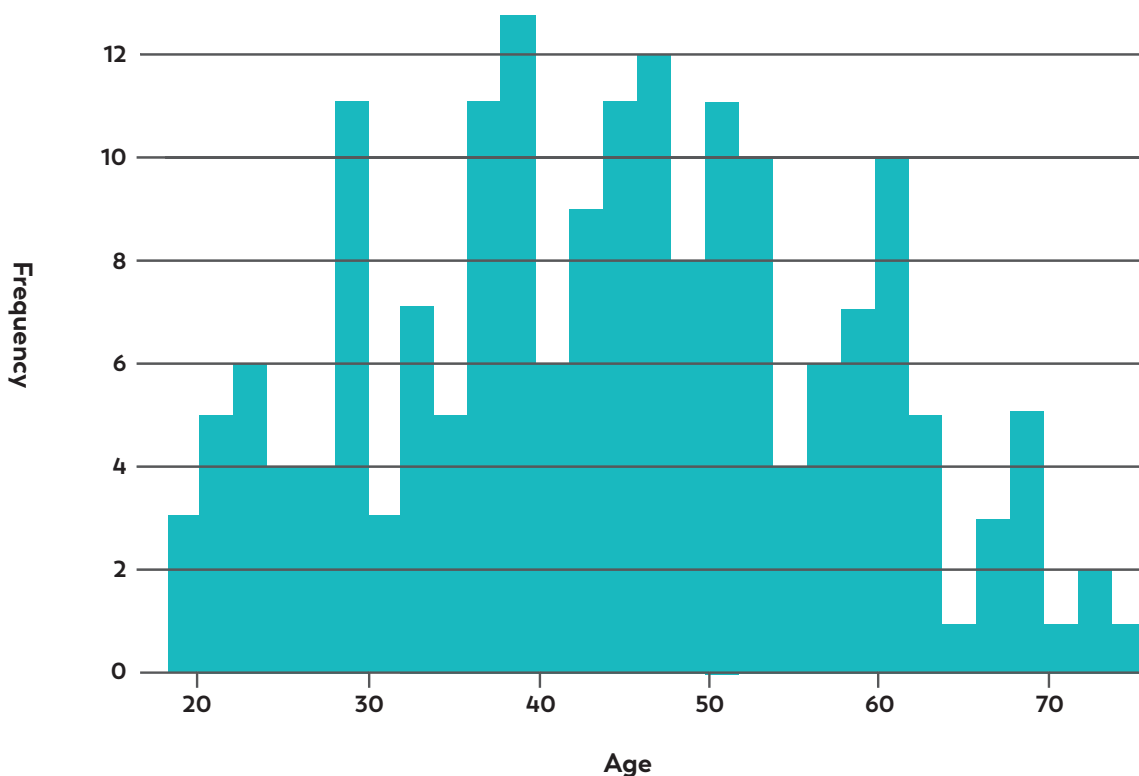
In total, almost 200 Northamptonshire residents attended the focus groups and were representative of the county, with each area profiled against the latest census data for the specific location.

A total of 100 females (54%) and 86 (46%) males attended the groups. The youngest resident was 17 years old and the oldest 78 years old with an even split across the main age ranges within each group.

Gender frequency Northamptonshire (n=187)

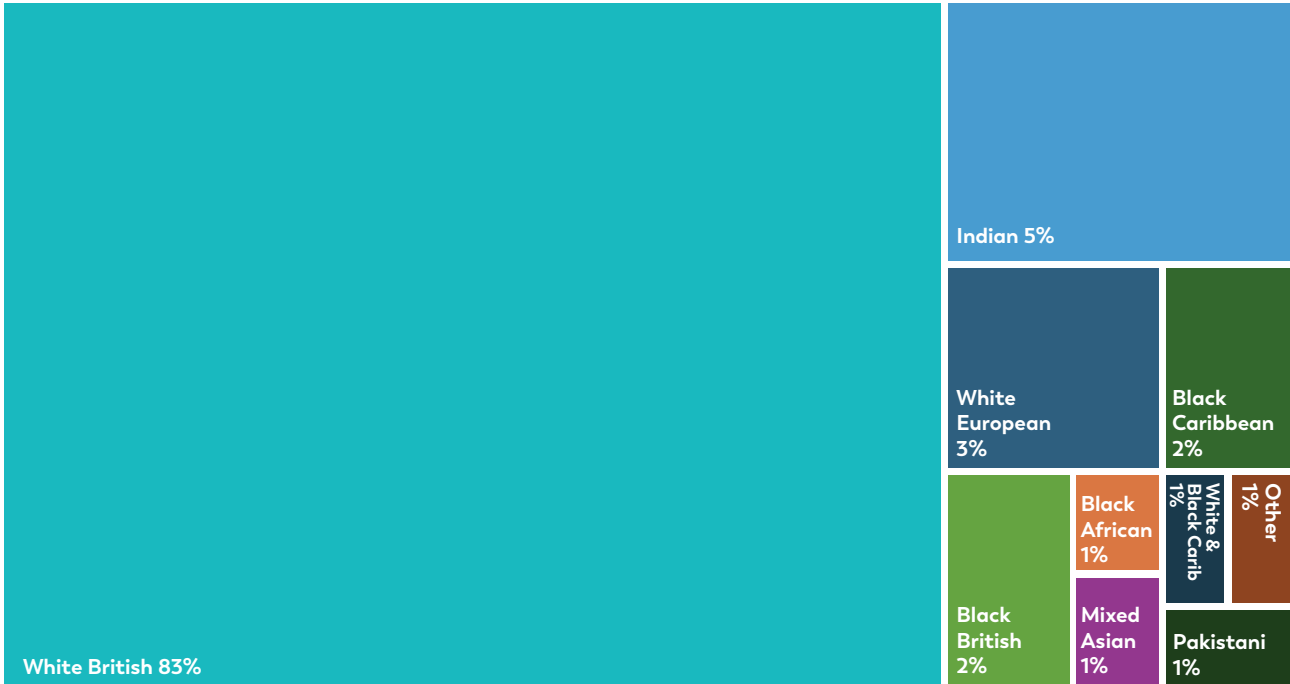


Age distribution Northamptonshire (n=187)



83% of all research attendees identified as White British. 17% represented a variety of other ethnic backgrounds including, 7% from an Asian or Asian British background, 6% from a Black or Black British background, 3% from a White European background 1% from an Other background.

Ethnicity Distribution - Northamptonshire (n=187)



4.0

Northampton Borough Groups

4.0 Northampton Borough Groups

4.1 Northampton Central

The group was held at the Guildhall in Northampton on the 12th December 2023. A total of eight Northampton residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	30	White British
Male	30	White British
Female	31	Indian
Female	33	White European
Male	41	Pakistani
Female	46	Indian
Male	49	White British
Female	52	White European

Police visibility and responsiveness

The view of Northamptonshire Police was generally very positive, and the majority said that they considered the force to be doing a good job and this was based on either previous experience or a general perception. There was also a general sense that the force is underfunded and under resourced making service delivery more challenging.

Victims of crime (across various different crime types) reported a good service and a response that has left them feeling satisfied and reassured. Victims said the service had been supportive and had often surpassed their expectations.

“From experience (attacked) they are very good but also, I know they have no money. They can only do what they have the resource to do. My response, I was pleasantly surprised it was good from start to finish.”

“I’ve got to say they seem friendly and professional from what I hear and see.”

“Yeah, yeah. I see their presence everywhere. A year ago, I did a wine tasting and I gave a policeman a hug and he was lovely.”

“I think they take things seriously, I know there’s been reports that family and friends have made, minor things that I thought they wouldn’t look twice at, and they’ve taken it quite seriously, as well as major incidents. I had to ring them yesterday actually, the traffic lights were off at quite a major roundabout, and they said they’d deal with it straight away.”

“I second that, I’ve had a situation where I had to call the police and I felt supported, and I felt like I mattered and my circumstances matter despite the fact I was in a secure environment. Something not so secure was happening and I had this gentleman on the phone with me walking me through things. They listened to the story I had to tell, made several phone calls, and called me back and I was in touch with him all day and it wasn’t a life-threatening situation. I’m quite surprised with how good they made me feel because back home the police aren’t as likeable as they are here, so when I had my first contact and met a police officer, I was quite scared, but they were really friendly.”

The one aspect of the victim experience that several considered less satisfactory, and frustrating was the force’s lack of action around CCTV footage and if anything, a lack of rationale or communication to explain why it has not been utilised.

“Once I got burgled, 6 weeks later my neighbour got burgled, by that time I had CCTV, I went for the cheapest option, so I downloaded the video, and I sent it to the police. I never once got a ‘thank you’ or ‘your video worked’ or ‘we’re having issues with your video’ or anything to help my neighbour. I know it’s dark, but it would have been nice to say, ‘thanks for the video.’”

“We have that in our area quite regularly actually, in our Facebook group ‘someone burgled my house last night, someone took my car’ and the neighbours say, ‘show you Ring CCTV’, probably 50% of our street have Ring cameras but it’s a shame that we have to ask neighbours for CCTV and it’s not the police knocking or asking for footage.”

“I did find it a bit frustrating because I spent hours, I had to teach myself how to take it down, watched two hours of the video to get it downloaded and get it there.”

Visibility was not a significant issue for Northampton residents, however all agreed that there needs to be more of a police presence in the town centre. There was also scepticism around the current figures of serving officers.

“The population has increased too so those figures don’t work in that sense.”

“How many more houses and estates have gone up? What area is that covering, Northampton or Northamptonshire?”

“I feel like the policing may have gone up 10% but the actual population has gone up 100%.”

“I get the feeling it’s probably because it’s easy, it’s easy to go ‘we’ve got more officers than we’ve ever had’ and then you weigh it against the population and then you go ‘statistically it’s a 4% drop’ but no one really wants to say that.”

Feelings of safety

Feelings of safety were very low in Northampton. This was across all ages and genders within the group. Many cited feeling safer in bigger, alternative cities such as Birmingham and Milton Keynes and often opted to visit these for that very reason, with better policing cited as the main driver to feeling safer. The group felt the town was on a downward spiral and attracted the wrong type people, resulting in all saying they had felt intimidated by gangs of people, in particular groups of men congregating.

“I think it would be nice to see them walking around the town centre. Tonight, I was worried about parking in the dark and walking here by myself.”

“My wife won’t come into Northampton to go shopping; she doesn’t feel safe. During the day, during the night, it doesn’t matter what time it is. My kids won’t, even I won’t, I go to Milton Keynes because I feel a lot safer going to Milton Keynes than I do going into Northampton.”

“Gangs, groups of people hanging around, all hanging around coffee shops, there’s groups of males hanging around coffee shops.”

“I’d say a feel in the town centre, I moved, I live as far as possible from the town centre. Even today I was thinking ‘should I be bothered?’, I just hate it. For whatever reason I feel unsettled, unwelcome, there’s something wrong but I can’t say what’s wrong in the town.”

“McDonalds every weekend there’s something going on, stabbing or youths, fights. I’ve got an 18-year-old and a 21-year-old, and they won’t go into Northampton.”

“I think the town itself has become so dead, it’s getting the wrong crowd in almost, it’s attracting the wrong crowd.”

“Yeah, there’s only pound shops here, there’s no posh shops, there’s pound shops and charity shops so it attracts that sort of character. Not character but that sort of class.”

“I used to feel safe getting on the bus, I’ve been getting on the bus since I was 8 or 9 coming into town, going to watch football, but not nowadays.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

When asked for a score related to overall confidence in local policing, the average score was 6/10.

“7 out of 10 I’ve not really had any dealings myself but when I have, it has been resolved so I can’t say 0 because there’s some confidence there.”

“I was going to go a 5, I probably would have given them higher but in terms of the police as a whole, I think the whole thing with Sarah Everard and police officers and officers I’ve met in person, not through their jobs but I’ve got divorcee friends who went out with police officers, I’ve got no confidence. So, it’s gone up but that’s brought it down. I worry what kind of people the police attract to work there.”

“My suggestion if the police deal better with the youth, that will make it an 8 or a 9. Where I live it seems like the police are helpless when they deal with the youths, especially when the youths are dealing the drugs. Most of them are teenagers, I don’t know what the law says but it seems like their hands are tied.”

“I’m going to be controversial, I feel there’s so many different areas within the police, if you’re talking police handlers and call handlers, I’m saying 10 because I think they’re brilliant, they’re supportive, they’re understanding. If you’re talking about police officers for example that I’ve had dealings with, that friends have, that family have, 8 or 9. They’re in the job and the majority of them I’ve had dealings with are in there because they want to and they’re passionate and they care about what they do and they want to deliver a service. If you’re talking about management, higher level employees who decides where the budget goes and who allows behaviours and issues within the police force and let staff continue, I’m giving you a -10.”

Around half the group mentioned national media as a key driver, with around a quarter of the attendees stating social media or local media as having an impact.

“They’re human and I feel like you were saying, if something good happens, nobody celebrates that. A police officer saves a child from a burning house, nobody talks about that, it’s expected. Somebody is out on a night getting drunk and kisses a girl in their uniform and it’s like ‘oh my god, 5,000 need to see this and react.’”

“I feel a lot of the time, I don’t look at it and go ‘that paints the police in a bad way’. I look at it and go ‘why are people antagonising them on purpose?’. But it’s not by its nature illegal to antagonise someone and they are people, they are humans and that wouldn’t, it’s one of those where it’s difficult, they almost have to hold themselves to a higher standard than your everyday person does.”

Word of mouth was considered the most impactful in terms of influencing individuals' confidence. A couple of attendees knew officers which had a negative impact on their confidence and others discussed how other people's opinions based on experience would often affect how they felt. As mentioned earlier a belief that the force is underfunded also impacted on levels of confidence.

“Yeah, and I know first-hand from friends experience with police officers as well. I think it's going to take time to change the perception.”

“What's going to influence my opinion more than anything is someone I immediately know at work, a friend, at the gym. Regardless of what's going on nationally, when someone comes to me, and I see it in my work all the time. How my friends and family perceive things and how they're treated are going to make up my opinion.”

“Again, talking about local opinion, I personally have never had to go into Northampton General but when I have patients saying to me ‘refer me anywhere but Northampton General’ and that adds to my feeling on it. People say, ‘how do you feel about the NHS as a whole?’, I’ll have an opinion on it but if someone says, ‘what do you feel about hospitals across Rugby?’ I’ll say, ‘my patients seem to think it's alright’ and they're spending a lot more time there than I am.”

Emerging and local priorities

Local priorities were very much centred around the issues discussed earlier within the town centre, however in addition knife crime and violence was also seen as a key issue and a high priority for Northamptonshire Police. Despite few incidents, many were significantly concerned about knife crime, many again had heard stories from others and read local news articles around stabbings locally.

“There's been a lot of stabbings and its terrifying, I won't let my kids go into town for that very reason.”

“I'm concerned about the kids basically, they're at that age where they're going out in town, that's my biggest thing and you hear all these stories about knife crime and gangs, it's awful.”

“Drugs and weapons are more accessible now than ever and it just takes one idiot, knife crime seems to be a huge issue at the moment.”

“You hear about all these stabbings; it needs sorting out.”

“I find Northampton town there’s a lot more Eastern Europeans and that’s my main problem. There’s so many gangs or groups of Eastern European men hanging around together, around coffee shops, yeah there’s gangs of youths, but that’s the biggest thing over the last 10 years with Northampton. I have no problem with families or anything like that, but you see big groups of men hanging around and it’s not comfortable.”

“Just word of mouth, not long ago it was outside a pub, a teenager got stabbed. You know straight away because people go past.”

“I think with a news story the more likely you are to share, like ‘oh my god did you hear?’. As soon as it’s published, we all know about it.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

There was a general willingness to support an increase in their council tax if it ensured Northamptonshire Police could maintain and develop the current workforce and objectives. A £15 increase was considered inappropriate. The group did suggest the police need to improve how they communicate how they intend to spend the money and promote the aims and objectives.

“If they propose a plan for us to feel safer in the town centre before, then yes.”

“I think it would help if we knew what they were going to spend that extra £10 on. If it was to put more speed cameras up, then no we don’t want to increase but if it’s for extra police to be more visible or to investigate crimes, then yes, I’d probably pay more.”

“Communication to let us know where it’s going and what it’s been used for.”

“Something tangible we can see as the public as well, it’s okay telling us this is going to happen but if we don’t get feedback from that, then how do we know it has.”

“Then for them to publish whether or not things actually did stay the same. Imagine a world where you give them an extra £15, and things got worse.”

“£15 a year we’re talking. That wouldn’t bother me.”

The importance of communications was discussed throughout the group, and all said they would like to hear and see more about Northamptonshire Police and their local policing team.

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

No recent experience of Fire & Rescue Service but everybody loved the service. It was a complete and instant sea change with lots of stereotypical perceptions of the service. Confidence in FRS higher than Police but then in perspective confidence in policing was higher than in the NHS which was interesting to hear.

“A bit of reassurance sometimes, if there’s something that’s happened around your area, it could be anything, a letter through the post box. Usually, we find out through our community group that something has happened but that’s all that we hear.”

“I think it would be more interesting to know of convictions or things that have happened whereby they have solved a case or put people away, it would be good to see that so people on Facebook or Twitter or TikTok see that things are being done and things are happening, and it gives you more faith in the police service. But to be told about incidents that aren’t maybe solved yet is a bit.”

This led to a final conversation around awareness and perceptions of the Fire & Rescue Service and whilst there was little recent experience of FRS everyone spoke very positively about the service. Confidence in FRS was higher than Police but then in perspective confidence in policing was higher than in the NHS. This also led to a debate about how the police service should promote themselves as more accessible and “human” because many felt that was one reason the FRS were generally discussed more favourably.

“They’re all lovely (F&RS).”

“Years ago, my shed was on fire, and they all came through my house to get to the shed.”

“I bet if you looked at their response rates, they are so much better which must make a difference to how people feel.”

“No, I think it would be a bad rep if they worked too much with the police.”

“I love the fireman calendar, that’s a great idea, makes you think well about them, they look like they have a fun side which the police don’t.”

“It’s important and it helps their PR, just having fun and being human. I think that’s what’s missing here because when you see the police, that word behind it goes as well. PIG or whatever.”

“If they take into account how they’re perceived on social media, you look at any video, Notting Hill carnival is a big one.”

“The dancing police, that was brilliant.”

“But I would say over 50% of the comments underneath that are ‘what the hell are you doing out there doing this? You haven’t got time for this’. So, if they were to take that level of public engagement, it’s a tricky one.”

“If they want to take the time, they can change their image but it’s not going to be over night, not even probably in the next 10 years.”

4.2 Northampton East

The group was held online on the 25th January 2024. A total of eight residents from the Northampton East area (including Billing and Rectory Farm areas) were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	29	Black Caribbean
Male	31	Indian
Female	34	White British
Female	39	White British
Female	41	White British
Male	58	Indian
Male	61	White British
Female	62	Indian

When attendees were asked for any words, they might use to describe Northamptonshire Police, the familiar theme was a lack of visibility. Words such as ‘absent’, ‘unseen’ and ‘non-existent’ were mentioned along several negative comments including ‘abysmal’ and ‘frustrating’ both the latter based on previous experience as a victim.

Police visibility, responsiveness & feelings of safety

A lack of visibility was a key theme within the group both in the area they lived and in Northampton as a whole. This was compounded by the fact many identified areas of concern locally in terms of crime and disorder and it was clear the majority thought it was all getting worse.

“Certainly, in this area at the moment there seems to be a lot of car thefts for example. There’s also a high rate in this area of violence and sexual crimes unfortunately, so again, if you go to certain areas there’s anti-social behaviour and all of that kind of thing and it’s just a general thing of feeling on safe. In particular people are concerned about things like their cars and their belongings.”

“The main thing where I live is a fair bit of anti-social behaviour, so we’ve got these really loud bikes that go out in the middle of the night, you hear a bit of noise and stuff. You see the police car go around on the odd occasion but it’s nowhere near as much as it probably should. I was quite shocked to hear you said there’s a lot more resource available because I’d be quite keen to know what they’re doing or where they are because like a lot of people said, they don’t seem very present. When I say priorities, I feel like their focus is maybe elsewhere, maybe the higher priority crimes or higher issues don’t really seem to be getting addressed.”

“The other thing I reported is speeding crimes because we’re the back of the A45 and our main road is used to bypass that road and the cars are speeding and they don’t do anything about it, they came at 11am and put speed cameras, there was about 10-15 cars an hour, they need to be there at 3-6pm to spot the cars. You’ve got kids crossing the roads, we’ve got 4-5 schools in the area, but we don’t see the police cars in that time and anti-social behaviour is continuing to grow in this area as well. The mobile vans, I’ve never seen one, if there was one in the area that we live in, that would deter people because there’s a van there.”

“To be honest, I did hear recently that there are only 6 officers for the whole of Northamptonshire every night which kind of makes sense. I get it because they probably haven’t got the funding and the staffing or whatever, but that doesn’t help where it’s needed. So, I know certainly in this area there’s certainly places I avoid purposely because they’re known for high crime rates and generally feeling dangerous, and I think a lot of people are the same and maybe a bit more presence and knowing that someone was around if you needed them. It’s impossible to have them on every street but occasionally just to show a presence would be something.”

Many argued that visibility was very important in terms of not only as deterrent but also to show local residents that the police do care. Most held the belief that the force is under resourced for a county of its size and that Northampton as a main hub does not see enough officers. All attendees had their say on the perceived lack of visibility. It was also very clear that this impacted on feelings of safety as many did not feel safe in their local area or the town centre.

“I don’t see police, you might see the occasional police car or whatever when you’re out and about but to say they’re patrolling the areas, especially the area we’re speaking of, I think it’s notoriously known that these areas have a lot of crime and drug related offences and stuff like that, to say there’s police actually governing the area and looking after peoples safety, no. I think years ago I would say personally I felt like the crime rate and how things were back in the day, you would have more responses with police and maybe I think with what X was saying about drug dealers and stuff like that, nowadays it’s a different set up so you don’t really see, they’re just not present.”

“I was shocked to hear those figures (1,500+ officers) because in my mind I’m thinking where are they? Whereabouts are they patrolling because they’re not present within my community or where I specifically live so that was quite a shock to hear.”

“Personally, I would say just to see officers patrolling the area, not necessarily because there’s a certain situation that’s occurred, but just so you can come out of your home and maybe see a police officer and know they’re on duty going around the area. I think you’d have a bit more confidence in them, but I think because you don’t see it, it’s like okay, they’re not to be seen or they’re elsewhere.”

“Yeah, I think yes there is a lack of engagement. Like people have said, they only come out every now and again, they don’t come out to every call, the police officers are not around considering how many of them there are. Yes, it’s a big county but again, if you divide the size of the county and the amount of the population in the county, have we got enough officers? Like I said, the other problem, is it the political side stopping the police officer from policing because they’re spending too much time on the political and paperwork side of things?”

“It would be good if there was more of a presence from police in schools because a lot of the things, I see happening are young kids and teenagers unfortunately. It would be good if they could go and talk to kids at school a bit more and get in there early and it’s more of a prevention than coming in when something does happen. It might help a little bit. I know they have done and it’s been done before, initiatives were they’ve gone into schools to talk to them, but maybe a bit more because things have changed and there’s different things with parenting and stuff and it would be good for them to be involved in ‘this is what will happen’ and having that presence, rather than coming in when they are committing crimes.”

“Ultimately is not a safe place anymore and it feels even less safe when you don’t see any police around here.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

All of which did affect residents’ overall confidence in local policing, many could not see past the current issues and the lack of police presence, and the third significant driver was based on previous experience whereby a significant number of attendees had felt let down by the response of Northamptonshire Police. There was a general feeling beyond personal experience within the group that there was a lack of care for the community where they lived. The average score out of 10 in terms of confidence in this group was 4/10.

“Last year I think it was, we had a window get shot, it didn’t collapse, it was okay, but I had to report it to the police to get an insurance number, a police number for the insurance and they took my word for it for what kind of bullet it was. I did know what it was, but no one came around to check it wasn’t a rifle or anything a bit more serious. It was just an air rifle, but no one came just to make sure no one is walking around with a shot gun or something. We do have quite a lot of air rifles in this area, and we have had armed police around here quite a few years ago now because of an air rifle, so I do think it was a bit odd they didn’t just come and check to make sure it wasn’t anything a bit more serious.”

“That call was it; I think I probably got a crime number and a ‘sorry you were a victim of crime letter’ which is really pointless. I wasn’t a victim of crime, I was quite sure it was just kids shooting at pigeons, that wasn’t the problem, the problem was that they weren’t really that interested.”

“I had drug dealers living next door to me for quite a few years and it was no secret, they did nothing about that, they weren’t very nice people and there was a lot of trouble on and off for a few years.”

“I’ve had a recent situation that I relied heavily on the police for safety for me and my children and they didn’t follow procedures, they were absolutely awful and because of it, everything got dropped because they didn’t do their job properly. I went to the commissioner, and they were made aware of it, that’s how bad it was.”

“I felt completely forgotten about and that I didn’t matter which wasn’t very good because of the situation we were in, and it was because I just don’t think they knew what they were doing, and they weren’t prepared to put any more work in other than what they could get away with.”

“My thing is I’ve been in Northampton a long time and it’s been renown for crime and that’s been going on since the 70/80’s that I’ve been here. Talking about the area I live in we have had issues; we’ve had theft a lot in the area and like someone said, you ring up and get a crime number so you can get your insurance claim but there’s no follow up, you just get a Victim Support letter. I’ve got a relation who’s had their house burgled 3 or 4 times and the police have only been there twice, the third and fourth time they just never bothered. They just came in and said ‘okay, it’s an incident we’re looking at, there’s a lot of it around’ and all they do is put a leaflet in your letterbox.”

“I felt completely forgotten about and that I didn’t matter which wasn’t very good because of the situation we were in, and it was because I just don’t think they knew what they were doing, and they weren’t prepared to put any more work in other than what they could get away with.”

“Again, it’s difficult because you can’t put police everywhere, but maybe if they were to show up in certain areas more often than it would deter certain things. If they responded quickly to things, I’ve certainly seen things where there’s a lot of unsolved crime, so these things are happening or people but there’s no outcome. So, it just doesn’t go anywhere, it doesn’t give people confidence that if something does happen to them, that anything is going to be fixed or anything is going to come out of it, it carries on and people are almost policing themselves a little bit. I know certainly on social media its people looking out for criminals, I’ve seen a lot of things like on video cameras that ‘this man was seen trying to break into my car, look out for him’ kind of thing. If there was that faith and police presence, then that wouldn’t be as necessary.”

This was perhaps summed up by one attendee who told the group what his friend had said about him taking part in the research and that it was on behalf of the PFCC.

“I’ve read about him in the paper, I think I’ve got a friend who lives at the other side of the area who was involved in a similar survey last year and the world was promised to them, and they’ve not seen anything. It is the Delapre area, maybe the visible offer is a van there but when I told him I was doing this survey for the police, he said ‘don’t waste your time, they won’t do anything about it.’”

Several attendees did mention the mobile police units that they had seen in various places, and all agreed these were a positive step in terms of increasing the local police presence.

“That’s been going on but that’s only the areas you see these mobile units, I’ve seen them in our area where we’ve got the superstore and I’ve also seen then Delapre which isn’t our area but there was a mobile unit there as well. However, I would still say you don’t see the physical presence in the area as such, you don’t see them patrolling and there has been crimes and thefts next door and there were no enquiries or follow up. So maybe this is something new because I do see these mobile units in quite a few places where they’re promoting safety, giving you more information, leaflets, who to call etc.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

There was an understanding that the police needed to increase the amount of money residents paid as part of their council tax however most said they did not feel they had seen any significant changes in their area despite continual increases year on year. There was a strong desire to see tangible outputs on the back of any increase to justify any uplift. Residents wanted to see improvements in their area in terms of lowering crime level and more visibility. They want to see something change and improve that they can relate to.

“Personally, from what we’ve all kind of been saying, it looks like the budgeting has been increased recently and no one has seen a change, we don’t seem to see anything being done with that. I think if we knew that actually it was being spent well and we were seeing a difference then we’d be happier to invest in and put something back into it. But we’re also talking about, there’s a lot of parts of this area that are quite deprived as well and people don’t have the money to give more on the council tax and then if you don’t see anything happen from it, it’s not great. Just add more officers that we’re not going to see seems a bit, so no I wouldn’t. If we could see what they were doing, and it was well spent then maybe but not as it currently is.”

“Probably not looking at paying more based on what we currently see day in and day out, if there was a bit more of a noticeable change or any sort of improvements, see the plans being followed through then possibly, but given what I’ve seen and my experience, it seems like false promises almost.”

“I agree, we haven’t really seen an awful lot go on and out of that number of police that we’ve got in the area, how many are on sick leave, how many are on career breaks, how many of them can’t work for whatever particular reason and have got a desk job? The number sounds big, but I think actually, once you whittle down how many are actually out on patrol, those who actually go out into the community, it’s probably quite a small number. I’m inclined to agree, I’d like to see something happen or at least solid plans of what they do with this money if we did increase the council tax. To ask for more when we’re not seeing much of a result anyway, I know they need the money to then have the resources to do things but yeah, it doesn’t feel right.”

“I would just echo what the last 3 people have said. It doesn’t seem right to ask for more money when we don’t see anything at present. We’re not seeing any changes, it just seems to always be a lot of talk, these empty promises of what it’s going to be invested into or what’s going to be done and then low and behold, nothing. So, I would say no I wouldn’t want to pay more.”

“Again, I’d probably reiterate what everyone else has said to be honest, I think the problem is the accountability side of things. Yes, if they could justify the reasons behind it and give purpose justification for it, then that would be fine. But because we never see any difference and it is like we said, it comes out of a council tax budget, to be honest everything seems to be on an increase, everybody wants more money for this, that, and the next thing. Not just the police, the council and everybody else, you need to see the justification behind it and if you’ve got no justification then I can’t see any reason for putting it up. I’d need to see some figures and some justification for it first.”

“I think they need to be accountable for where they’re saying the money is going and if that isn’t actually happening, that needs to be investigated because clearly what they’re doing isn’t working. I’d also like to potentially see the ratio of the time spent out to the time spent doing paperwork and seeing how that actually correlates to their actual day job. I just think there’s a policy and they should be held accountable if they aren’t following it because that’s not always happening.”

“There’s only 8 people on here and we all say no we won’t pay the extra. Nevertheless, the taxes will go up anyway, we’ll have to pay it anyway, but we are substituting, or we are paying for people who are working for us, but we are not seeing a service basically. One example is, I think last year the previous constable got pay £180,000 for leaving his post, money wasted basically. Yes, there’s going to be a council tax rise, £15 is going to go to the police but we’re not going to see it, it’s going to go into somebody else’s pocket. Stephen Mold, he’s going to go to the Chief Constable who’s accountable for the services they provide to us but he’s doing his job but he’s not going to get anything out of this. So, we’re sat here talking about it and we’re saying no, but the council tax is going to happen, they’re going to get their extra £15, we’re going to be stuck with 1,500 officers and providing no service.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

No attendee had directly had to engage the Fire & Rescue Service; however, one local resident had witnessed the service inaction the day before the group and was very positive about the response.

“There was an incident at the college yesterday where two fire trucks turned up, they were brilliant. They were fantastic, they were really quick to respond, they were really good with the college students, they were brilliant yesterday.”

4.3 Duston and Dallington

The group was held at Duston Community Centre on the 22nd February 2024. A total of seven Duston and Dallington residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	29	White British
Male	30	Pakistani
Female	41	White British
Male	44	White British
Male	50	White British
Female	70	White British
Female	70	White British

Police responsiveness

More than half of the group had recently had a need to call Northamptonshire Police as a victim of crime and overall, the feedback was mixed, with victims that said the initial response was good, with officers generally attending the reporting incident and responding in good time. Where victims felt less satisfied is at the investigation or follow-up stage of the experience, often left with a sense of not knowing where the case is at in terms of progress and at times victims have higher expectations as they have been told to expect follow up.

“We’ve had a break-in in the cul-de-sac recently one of the neighbours behind had caught it on CCTV we passed it onto the police as requested and they haven’t even bothered to ever tell us what is happening with it all.”

“I’ve had an incident where I went to the bathroom in the early hours of the morning and saw headlamps coming down the cul-de-sac and I thought it was very unusual, that particular house I knew the lights wouldn’t be on, they wouldn’t be out at that time and this guy got this great big, all I could see was a big square thing, out of the car. The other one parked up and he came out with a big tube, and they were syphoning petrol from the cars, so I phoned the police, they attended and spoke to me, but I didn’t hear anything back about it which was disappointing.”

“Another parent at school had been robbed just around the corner actually, it was an outdoor bit and they said they’d come and dust it for prints and they were a bit worried they knew exactly where they’d gone. I said, ‘did they catch them?’, ‘I don’t know’, they hadn’t heard anything back. Why hadn’t they called and are on top of that? It was apple products stolen so they could pick up a location originally, but the police didn’t want to pick up a location, there was some sort of excuse ‘if we go to that location it might not be them that have taken it’. ‘It’s your stuff, go and get it back’, that was my thought. On top of that ‘I’ll go get it’ and he strongly advised against it ‘then you’ll be this, you’ll be that’. You’re threatening him but not the people handling stolen goods. It sounds like they’re a bit slow. That just gives me a more negative few than positive. Do people tell us more negative things?”

“My recent two incidents were last year. Firstly, my house got burgled and the police were absolutely spot on, they managed to actually find the offenders, it’s due to go to court so hats off to them. The most recent one, my Mercedes got stolen off my drive, this happened in August last year about 05:45am. I called the police, absolutely fine, I got a crime reference number and they said someone would come to the property to ask some questions and that never happened. At the same time, I’ve read a lot of articles online that there’s been a car crime and they’ve been found at the other side of the UK. So, I called the police and asked if my car had been found and I felt as if my car has been stolen so I should hear something back from the police. Ultimately it was me doing the leg work finding out if there’s any leads but to this day Northamptonshire Police haven’t called me about it all.”

“Just frustrating more than anything, you work so hard and within 5 minutes the car got taken away and no one from the police has made an effort to call me or come to my house. I feel like I’ve been let down.”

“When it first happened, the police came that night then the following morning they came for prints and then literally every day for a couple of days they came knocking on our door to see how we were and everything. One of the police officers was in touch with my other half, just giving us a regular update so they were quite good which I thought was quite nice to hear. I thought I’d get the same with my vehicle theft but nothing at all.”

“My car got broken into in town and the carpark has CCTV, I rang the police and said about the CCTV. They said ‘there’s nothing we can do with CCTV, it’s only useful if somebody sees it happening on CCTV and can chase the person down and get them. It’s absolutely no use to us retrospectively whatsoever’. They just gave me a crime number over the phone.”

A number of attendees felt resigned to the fact that because of the demand on Northamptonshire Police and the perceived lack of resources and a feeling they are “overstretched” lower levels crimes were not seen as a priority and often not investigated to the disappointment of certain victims within the group.

“I feel like with theft they have an attitude of ‘well it’s insured’, almost like ‘here’s a crime number for insurance company.’”

“I think there’s a threshold as well. What crime constitutes as one above the threshold where they actually turn up to do something?”

“I was involved in a car accident on the M1, a lorry pulled out and side swiped me and wrote my car off. I went to the police station to report it and they weren’t interested basically.”

“They gave me a form to fill in, I had a witness who had a camera, took a picture of the lorry but they said it was a foreign lorry and they can’t do anything.”

“One resident was even more surprised with the reaction he received when reporting an incident to Northamptonshire Police. They were also left with a sense of disbelief.”

“In St Crispin there’s a little wooden park, my neighbour found a dagger, one with the holes in, in the park. He obviously grabbed it, called the police and they said, ‘just chuck it away’ and that may be the right thing to do but for me, maybe I’m going overboard but they don’t want to dust it for prints? Who touched it, do they know who’s touched it, who’s had it, is there any bloody on it? I just think it’s a kid’s park and I know we’ve got problems in the town at the minute with knife crime but no they just said chuck it away.”

These experiences discussed in the group in addition to the general feeling that the force was asked to deal with more issues than they had the resources to cover resulted in lower confidence levels.

“Yeah, I agree but they’re not responding to thefts now from shops unless it’s over a limit. Things like that. The manager at Lidl, they were literally robbing it and running out. They were running out the door with trolleys full of shopping, they were all sat in the car, and I went passed one and thought I better grab them. I said, ‘he’s there’, ‘leave him, they do it all the time’. He’s like ‘we call the police and they come sometimes. I get it from his point of view, he said ‘If I go over there and get whacked, I don’t get paid enough to get whacked’. I get it. It’s okay, it’s the norm to rob that shop.”

“It comes back to ‘you’re insured’, there seems to be a threshold of the type of crime that is, I suppose they have to do a cost benefit analysis don’t they? ‘It’s going to cost us X amount of resources to respond to this one and do all of this stuff and really, the benefit is the person getting their stuff back which will come from the insurance company’. I’m not saying that’s right, but I think it feels to me that is the thing, they just don’t have the resources.”

“How can you have confidence when it feels like they’re prioritising other stuff because they just don’t have the staff.”

One attendee that represented Dallington said that he was very happy with the level of community engagement in the village and the regular presence of a PCSO whom he argued was highly valued by village residents.

“In a sense I represent Dallington village because we’re part of the Dallington committee and there was a meeting the night before last and knowing I was coming here I said ‘what are your views? You’ve all been here longer than I have’ and a short version of that is the police from a community perspective work well. There are quite a few older people, even older than me, a lot of people that are quite old and the police presence is fairly obvious. We’ve got a community police officer, two, one was a post office lady, she’s now a PCSO, so they are seen regularly, both of them are known in the village and make themselves seen and given that Dallington village, basically you’ve got two council estates that back onto the Dallington area. So, there’s a fair influx of things from there, however, I’ve been really pleasantly surprised in the last year how little problems there have been.”

Others agreed and several attendees from both Duston and Dallington were able to give positive example of good community policing and community engagement.

“I have to say, in Dallington there is a community police presence, not a strong one, I wouldn’t want to look for one but there is one, we even know who it is. Maybe that’s unusual.”

“The only thing I would say is after the Christmas period or in the Christmas period they do always do pretty good at random spot checks for drink driving and that’s a big thing. I cannot stand people who drink drive, so I like seeing it. They pulled me over in St James carpark and they were doing it for every 5th car or something like that, just doing spot checks.”

“On the big stuff I think they do a good job, my partners uncle was murdered a couple of years ago and the work they put into the investigation of finding the guy and getting a conviction, I was impressed, they really made the effort with the community, they made an effort.”

Attendees agreed that in a smaller community such as Duston or Dallington word of mouth and local chat groups were the most likely source of information in terms of crimes, actions and many said that this did impact on their perception of crime and local policing.

“Just hearing stories like you, you probably hear a few when you speak to people. Maybe they don’t tell us enough when the police are good but over the last few weeks I’ve spoken to a couple of people and the feedback was very negative.”

“There is no doubt, most people know people around here and if something happens, we are all quick to find out through the local grapevine.”

“News travels fast around here, so if anything happens or doesn’t happen, you find out and it does affect how you feel.”

Feelings of safety

Attendees of all ages and genders said they didn’t feel safe in certain parts of the town or its surrounding areas, mainly the routes into and out of Duston and Dallington. Residents again relayed stories they knew, or incidents friends and family had relayed that increased this fear. Female attendees and parents also mentioned changes in behaviour and coping mechanisms adopted to increase their feelings of safety.

“I like to think I’m a pretty confident person, I can hold my own, but I know there are friends of mine potentially wouldn’t walk from my house to the pub. I’ve had dealings where I’ve walked home from the pub, and I’ve seen between two wheelie bins a pair of feet and I’ve gone ‘you alright mate?’ and he’s absolutely blasted. Whether there’s not enough presence, there definitely is in the village, that’s great, but what about the in between areas?”

“Both of my children walk home from school, in the winter sometimes it’s getting dark, and I have to say to them ‘make sure you walk the long way, don’t walk down the bike path’ because we live right near that bike path that would be their natural way home, but they’re not supposed to do that.”

“I worry about my kids getting jumped by a guy, I worry about knife crime, on that bike path we’ve had kids with knives holding people up for phones and things like that. I just say to them ‘give them your phones and get the hell out of there.”

“I wouldn’t walk through town by myself. My mum has been in a situation where she’s been caught between two people, someone’s pulled a knife and she’s just stood in the background in the town centre. There’s a lot of dark areas, town is not very nice, everyone knows Northampton town is not a very nice town centre. There was a little boy, I think he was 14/15 and he recently died from being stabbed. What am I going to do against a knife?”

“I run and I do run in the dark, I shouldn’t but I do, not at 10pm but I will go in the winter at 5/6pm and yeah, I think it’s quite hard to find a lit route, like a fully lit route. I do have routes I do and there’s certain points on my route where you’d go ‘that’s the house, that’s the house’. I’m sure you’re the same when you walk anywhere, you think of your exist points as you go if anything happens, but I wouldn’t say I feel safe. With respect, it’s probably because I’m female. My partner does have me Find My and I asked him to check, I say if I stop moving, come and find me.”

Emerging and local priorities

There was significant concern around burglaries in the Duston area, with many of these residents, aware of someone that had experienced a burglary or had read or seen or heard locally about burglary incidents. Drugs and dangerous and reckless driving were also mentioned by several attendees.

“Just burglaries. There’s been quite a few lately around the area.”

“There’s two, one is drugs. We’ve got two known drug sites and there’s a community effort at the moment to fund lights. So, drugs are one and probably the other one is speeding. In fact, thinking back, speeding is probably my bugbear because even when I used to live over at West Hunsbury at 2am you could hear, there’s a racetrack between Upton Way and the M1 15a and you can hear them going up there. They use it as a racetrack and there’s never anybody caught, so speeding in general but especially in Dallington, it’s a real bugbear. Unfortunately, it all comes from the direction of the council estates which is unfortunate because almost certainly it’s not just the council estate people, it’s others using it as a cut through. So that’s a general thing, it’s not against the council estate at all.”

“On that point, we had the same, the police actually issued a dispersal order because on the junction 16 the other night they had 100’s of cars meeting up, boy racing. They had to issue at whatever time of night, a dispersal order to tell all the people to go home so it’s obviously an issue, you’re saying that bit on the other side, which again I don’t think would be too difficult to stop. If you know you’ve got people racing there, surely, it’s not a hard thing to put a camera there.”

“Burglaries are probably the main concern; you hear about them happening all over around here.”

“Yeah, what you hear on social media, on Facebook you’ve got a lot of groups. Last year quite a few houses were hit in Duston, Dallington, Spencer, all those areas. They’re ultimately targeting Asian households because of the gold, when burglars go in there they’ll spot something quick for access and it’s gold. So when my house got robbed, obviously we don’t have any gold but they just took some of my high valuable shoes, my watches and that was it, I knew they were looking for gold.”

“I also think burglaries are probably on the increase. A colleague of mine was burgled last week, their car off their drive, another friend who’s probably a bit more wealthy, they were burgled up in Brampton and there was a gang that had come to rob the house and the police did eventually get there, then they wanted support after and there was none.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

Whilst no one had directly needed their local Fire & Rescue Service several attendees recalled very positive incidents that they were aware of whereby the service had been very responsive and very effective, ensuring those involved or aware had a high opinion and high confidence in the service generally.”

“One of my, where I previously lived in Wooton, a car was set on fire and the tyres burst and it rolled into the house and took the house up, three floors. They were there, they were there the whole week. I actually have a few friends who are in the fire service, they’re often out on calls, my PT, he’s actually on call as well, all the time he’ll leave my session just to go. I know they put a lot of money and effort into their training as well, so for me I find the fire service is there. There was a fire on Bridge Street, and they were there all night. I think their presence is there for sure, I see a fire truck more than I see a police car sometimes, honestly.”

“I’ve never had to call them but when we had the heatwave a couple of years ago, I work out in the countryside and the fields were on fire and they were there and they were absolutely sweating in their suits, working hard to put it out.”

5.0

Kettering Groups

5.0 Kettering Groups

5.1 Kettering

The group was held at Cornmarket Hall, in Kettering on the 25th of January 2023. A total of ten Kettering residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	22	Other
Female	28	White British
Male	35	White British
Female	40	White British
Male	40	White British
Male	43	White British
Male	48	White British
Female	48	White British
Female	50	White British
Male	61	White British

During consultation with Kettering residents regarding local policing, participants shared their experiences and perceptions, which highlight a mix of dissatisfaction and occasional positive feedback regarding the responsiveness and effectiveness of local policing.

Feelings of safety

Residents expressed a significant concern about their safety, particularly at night, with many feeling unsafe due to a perceived lack of adequate police presence and the behaviour of groups in public spaces. The feeling of insecurity is magnified by incidents of crime that seem to be inadequately addressed by local policing efforts. For example, one participant highlighted the lack of prompt and effective police response to theft and property damage, leading to a lingering sense of vulnerability among the residents.

“I don’t think I really want to walk back down the High Street at this time of night, I know it’s early but.”

“...lot of teenagers hanging about, dressed in black, hoods up, sometimes balaclavas on. I’m sure a lot of the time its innocent, but it is intimidating.”

“I think it is the combination of gangs of young people, and very little police visibility.”

“...I get scared to go by McDonalds, I’m walking through the street at 4pm and it’s just getting dark and there’s so many dodgy people around. I just don’t feel safe here, I felt safe when I was in Bristol, for some reason I felt safer there even though I was born in Kettering.”

“My boys are scared to go out in town on a night, they don’t go out in town anymore and they’re only 23 and 21, but they don’t go out in town. They’d rather go somewhere to eat and come home.”

“My daughter is on the way for the bus right now and I’m panicking, that’s why I keep checking my phone because she’s walking from Compton to here and I’m checking my phone to make sure she’s alright.”

Many residents shared experiences that suggested a lack of effective police presence and action, which significantly impacts their sense of security. One individual highlighted the frustration with what they perceived as police ineffectiveness, stating their disillusionment after witnessing multiple police visits to a local trouble spot without any apparent long-term solution:

“Not so long ago where I live there were drug dealers two doors down, causing chaos for the residents all around, the police would turn up, kick the door in, then come to us lot saying, ‘have you seen anything?’. We’d ask them what was going on and they’d say, ‘we can’t tell you’. We all knew why they were there. It was so unproductive, how many times do they need to turn up and arrest them.”

The sentiment of being unprotected is further amplified by the frustration with the police’s approach to impactful crimes, such as vehicle theft and personal attacks, which have left residents feeling neglected and unsupported by local authorities.

“My stepdad’s van was nicked by some travellers and we had it on camera and everything and they didn’t want anything to do with it.”

“I broke my ankle in October 2022, somebody had too much to drink, I was just walking home as I’d been to the football and was walking through town and because I had a Liverpool jacket on, he was giving me a load of grief. He pushed me over and his mate has then stamped on my ankle and snapped it, I’m in agony. Fair play, the Street Pastors saw it and the police turned up and then went to me because I had a football top on ‘get up’ and I said, ‘I can’t’ and this police officer just told me to ‘stand up, get up, you’re drunk’ and I said, ‘I’m not’.”

Despite these negative experiences, there were also instances where the police were commended for their swift action, particularly in responding to non-emergency calls more efficiently than in the past.

“I’ve noticed they seem to be answering the emergency calls quicker, not the 999 ones but the 101, they seem to be handling those better. I’ve rang twice in the last 6 to 9 months, before I spent hours trying to get through in previous years so that’s something which has improved.”

While challenges in community-police relations often captured the spotlight, residents did recognise some positive experiences and perceptions regarding local policing. These instances highlight the effectiveness of community policing strategies and the potential for building stronger trust and collaboration between the police and the community.

Some residents shared specific instances where the responsiveness and effectiveness of the local police were particularly commendable. One resident recounted a situation involving personal security that was handled promptly and effectively, demonstrating the police’s commitment to community safety.

“I had an incident with my daughter, she’s 11, a kid at the school, a bit of a psycho, he’d been stalking her, and passed her number and our address out. We rang and they were on it straight away to be fair, the guy that came out was fantastic, he did everything he could. If I had a criticism, not a lot happened after that, he sort of suggested ‘my hands are tied’.”

The presence of PCSOs in non-emergency situations was considered a significant positive aspect noted by residents. These officers are often seen engaging with the community, which enhances visibility and accessibility.

“I would say the community police officers are normally there as well, they are the ones you see out and about on the streets, you don’t see the full police uniform out there.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing are foundational to the effectiveness of policing by consent and the overall safety of the community. The sentiments expressed by the residents of Kettering reflect a complex relationship with local policing, characterised by a mixture of scepticism and cautious optimism. These perceptions shape the community’s engagement and cooperation with police efforts.

The lack of satisfactory responses to crime reports appears to have had a tangible effect on community trust and an influence on reporting crime.

“We literally spoke to them and as far as they were concerned, we didn’t see the van go so it could have gone at any time, so they didn’t want to know.”

“I don’t have much confidence in them at all, I feel like I’ve been let down by them a lot and so have people that I love, so it’s like I don’t have much hope in them. Obviously, I’d still call them in case they’d do something and hopefully they’d surprise me, but I don’t think I’d expect anything.”

“I think a lot of people don’t even call them because they’ve lost that much confidence. Their experience is they don’t turn up or it’s not important.”

Community trust also seems to be influenced by the perception of police priorities, which do not always align with the community’s concerns.

“I suppose there’s a general vibe now, if someone isn’t being stabbed or something really serious, then it’s almost, is there any point in reporting it?”

Residents of Kettering expressed that their perceptions of local policing are sometimes influenced by negative stories about police that circulate in national media. This broader media exposure contributes to a general sense of mistrust or lowered confidence, even in the context of local interactions with police.

“In national media we’re hearing more and more, from Sarah Everard onwards and the Covid policing approach and almost every other week you hear a negative story about the Metropolitan Police. These kinds of things are impacting confidence.”

The discussion among residents indicated that while personal experiences with local police play a crucial role in shaping perceptions, the impact of national media cannot be understated. Stories of police corruption or misconduct elsewhere create a backdrop against which all police actions are judged, potentially overshadowing positive local interactions:

“Northamptonshire has had its fair share of corrupt cops, you read quite a lot. Where they’ve gone in front of the Chief Super and they’ve basically resigned, there’s been a lot of that over the last 12 months.”

“I think when you hear a negative story nationally, and some of it has been terrible, you can then hear something questionable about local police officers; not as serious, but you start to draw a line between the different stories.”

Importance of communication and engagement

To counteract the pervasive negative portrayals, residents suggest that more effective communication from local police about positive outcomes and community engagements could help improve public perceptions. There is a call for more balanced reporting and visibility of positive police work to help build a more comprehensive and accurate picture of what local policing involves:

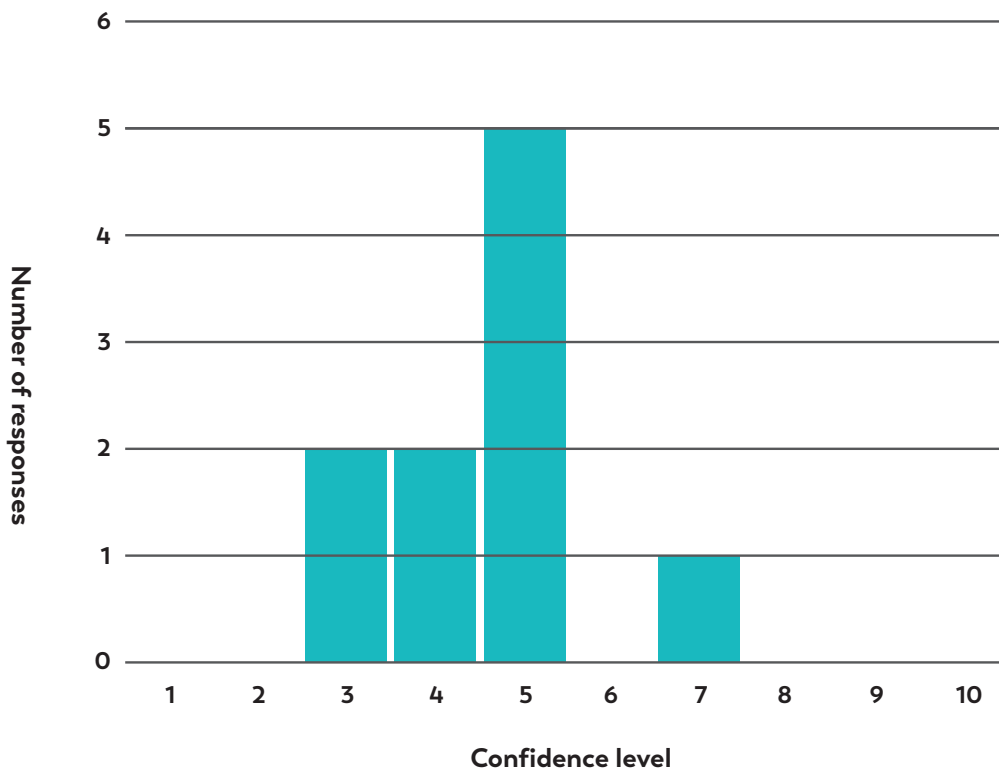
“The communication you hear is all the negative stuff, there isn’t enough positive stuff out there about policing. The negatives are in your face, so you’ve always got that there in the forefront of your mind before you think ‘actually they did do that, and they did do that’ but it’s not out there enough for you to see it.”

“I think that point about hearing something nationally, usually about the Met, then hearing something negative, however small, about Northants Police, and you start to make assumptions. It would help if locally, they put out some responses. I don’t know, condemning some of the negative national stuff, to say ‘we are different.’”

“..Yeah, explain if there is something bad in the Met, say, Northamptonshire Police have these checks and balances in place to make sure that doesn’t happen here.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = ‘Not at all confident’ and 10 = ‘Extremely confident’. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and ‘easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again’.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Police visibility and responsiveness

The group discussion in Kettering provided critical insights into residents’ perceptions of police visibility and responsiveness. The feedback from the participants indicated a broad dissatisfaction with the level of police presence in the area, which many felt was insufficient to ensure public safety and deter crime effectively.

Participants expressed concern over the infrequency of police patrols and the apparent priority given to less urgent matters, which impacts the perceived efficacy of local policing. This sentiment is highlighted by a participant's frustration over police priorities, questioning the allocation of resources to minor infractions rather than more severe crimes:

“I’ve walked down here on a Friday night at 10pm and there’s been three or four police officers inspecting cars, that’s not a productive thing to do at 10pm. That isn’t the type of activity that makes people feel safer.”

The discussion revealed a lack of prompt response to incidents that require immediate police attention, which has contributed to a diminishing trust in local policing capabilities. One participant recounted an incident of rapid police response, which was an ‘exception rather than the rule’.

“We had a break-in literally across the road and you could hear them breaking in and within minutes of me ringing they were there; they were literally there, and they were chasing them down the street. It was brilliant.”

The role of PCSOs was noted positively in some respects, with participants acknowledging their visibility and interaction with the community. However, there were comments about the limitations faced by these officers, which hinders their ability to address issues effectively.

“They explained it to me when I saw a PCSO, he said ‘it’s because we don’t do paperwork’, they have to do paperwork, it’s all they do. He said ‘I want to make a difference so I didn’t want to be a police officer and do all the paperwork, I want to actually make a difference’ and that’s when I stood there and thought ‘I could be a police officer but I’d rather do that’ and my friend left the police force because of that very reason, he couldn’t actually make a difference. The rub is that they don’t carry all of the same powers.”

Emerging and local priorities

Discussions among residents reveal a set of concerns that they feel require attention from local police to improve safety.

Drug-related activities were repeatedly mentioned as a primary concern. The community perceives that these issues are not being addressed effectively, which contributes to ongoing disturbances and crime:

“The drug thing is a big one.”

“I’ve had issues where I worked before were we had people taking drugs outside, homeless people. Again, police would follow up, but their hands were tied, and they’d just go elsewhere. We had syringes left outside; I’d be climbing over them to get out of the office door...”

“I would say drugs as well, drugs are massive, and therefore county lines.”

Petty theft, especially related to drug activities, also emerges as a significant concern. Residents expressed frustration over the perceived lack of serious police action against what are seen as 'minor' crimes, but which have major impacts on the victims:

"...and even the petty thefts because that's linked to the drugs."

Another critical issue highlighted by the community is the handling of anti-social behaviour, particularly by young people, which is seen as increasingly problematic.

"The anti-social behaviour with the additional anxiety of 'if I report this, will anything happen? Is it worth bothering reporting?'"

"I think it's the increase in anti-social behaviour. They seem to be untouchable; their attitude is horrendous."

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

Residents' discussions provided insights into their perspectives on funding, resource allocation, and expectations of local policing effectiveness.

The sentiment towards increased financial support for local policing is mixed, with residents expressing cautious optimism about the potential benefits of increased funding, provided it is used effectively to address pressing community concerns:

"I think if we see a better outcome for the service people wouldn't mind paying [more]. If you're paying for something you want to see a result, so when your shed gets burgled for example and all your garden equipment gets nicked, you want someone to help."

Residents also expressed a desire to see tangible improvements specifically in police presence and responsiveness as a result of any investment. There is a clear expectation that additional resources should lead to visible enhancements in policing.

"Police presence, to actually see them, that is fundamentally what people want."

"I want to see more police on the street. I want that more than quicker responses."

The community's willingness to support further investment is contingent on transparency and evidence of efficiency in funds usage. Residents want assurance that additional funds will directly contribute to improving safety and not be absorbed by administrative costs:

"It's police presence rather than pen pushers."

“In real simple terms I would like to see what more investment gets us. I want to be told, you pay this, you get x, y or z.”

“...even better, I want to be asked what we want for our money.”

There's an expressed need for better communication about how police resources are allocated and utilised, which can significantly influence public support for funding increases.

“They have to let you know if they solved it as well, there's no point just putting it out there that this guy has robbed a shed; keep people updated. ‘Yes, we've found someone, he's been arrested’, whatever the outcome. Don't give names obviously but let people know they've done something.”

“It's a bit like when you said there's 1,500 officers, we don't see that. Has anyone done the math, that's one officer for 24 hours per 2,000 people in Northamptonshire. That's a damn lot of people to deal with in 24 hours. There's 60 thousand people just in Kettering.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The research conversation with residents indicated a generally positive view of the Fire & Rescue Service, contrasting with the mixed feelings towards local policing. However, interactions with residents were often described as observational rather than as service users.

The most direct experience was of the comparison between police engagement within schools and that of Fire & Rescue Services. It was explained that fire and rescue are more 'engagement ready' than local police.

“It sounds bad, but we prime the police before they come and we say ‘this is what we really need you to talk about, this is the level you need to aim it’ because sometimes they either go too far above the children or, they undercook it. A few years back they went straight on to stranger danger, but we're not even teaching stranger danger anymore because it could be anybody that poses a risk, so it's having to direct them. It very different with Fire and Rescue, they know they audience, they lead it, and do it well.”

While the fire and rescue service were praised for their adaptability, this was also a point raised in defence of local police.

“Fire services are very different now from what they used to be, and I think the police could take a lot from that, but I do think them [police] and the NHS get a raw deal with what they have to deal with.”

“I think the police get held up at so many silly things. You see a lot of mental health things and that is a big issue but they’re not mental health nurses, but they seem to deal with a lot of that and it takes them off the street because there’s so much paperwork and other things, safeguarding or whatever else to carry on.”

5.2 Burton Latimer

The group was held online on the 30th January 2024. A total of seven residents from the Burton Latimer area were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	30	Mixed Asian
Male	39	White British
Male	45	White British
Female	54	White British
Female	56	White British
Male	70	White British
Female	70	White British

Feelings of safety

In Burton Latimer, the sense of community safety is closely tied to the responsiveness of police forces and the presence of emergency services. Residents commended the quick response times of police in emergency situations, contrasting with concerns over occasional visibility and presence. The discourse reveals a community that feels relatively safe, attributing this to the effective and swift actions of police when incidents are reported, yet longing for more regular patrolling to deter petty crimes and provide a more consistent sense of security.

“The dealings I’ve kind of had with the police, every time I’ve had to call something in, or an incident has happened...they’ve always been really quick to respond.”

Despite an overall sense of safety, the desire for more visible policing was evident, with participants noting a lack of regular patrols contributing to occasional unease, particularly concerning low-level crimes and antisocial behaviour.

Police visibility and responsiveness

Discussions highlighted a dual perspective on police visibility and responsiveness. On one hand, the community acknowledged rapid police responses to reported incidents, reflecting positively on the effectiveness of local policing in emergencies. On the other hand, there was a recurring desire for increased patrols and on-the-ground police presence to deter criminal activities before they occur, suggesting that while emergency response is valued, proportionate and proactive community policing is seen as an area for enhancement.

“..when I said inadequate mine was relating to the police presence which I guess is the same for everybody. We have had to use the police; our son was getting a bit of bullying at school, and it went beyond bullying and their [police] response was great.”

“1,500 police for the whole of Northamptonshire doesn’t seem an awful lot to me and how does that compare per capita? Because it might be 1,500 now but I’m surrounded by new housing estates going up left, right and centre so the number of police may be going up but per capita it’s probably going down so it’s still not enough.”

While emergency responses were praised, the community expressed a need for more proactive measures, acknowledging the effectiveness of police response despite limited visibility.

“I think although there isn’t many doing patrols, their response is quite good.”

“Even though I don’t see many [police], I work in a hospital, and you do get people that had too much to drink, or drugs or various things and they get totally out of hand. But as I say, the police are really good in response to that.”

This sentiment encapsulates the community’s appreciation for rapid responses to reported incidents but underscores a gap in regular, visible policing presence that could deter potential criminal activities.

Emerging and local priorities

Participants identified traffic management, young people’s gatherings, and homelessness as local concerns, with a significant emphasis on the (perceived) rise of knife and drug crimes among youth, indicating a shift towards more severe safety issues. The conversations underscore a critical need for focused policing on preventative measures, education, and early intervention to address the root causes of such crimes, particularly those related to drug use and knife possession among younger demographics.

“Increasingly in Rothwell and Desborough you’ve got rival drug gangs and definitely from the age of 15 up and I think one of the problems and one of the things that really annoys me is the acceptance of the wide use of cannabis.”

“I feel that the knife crime and drug crime within youths is really important, especially county lines. I was working within colleges within Northamptonshire and the drug crime and knife crime is really, really prominent and I just think more money should be invested in prevention schemes and education as well.”

“I do sometimes get a little bit worried about gangs of teenagers hanging around, I think perhaps if we did have somebody on the beat, perhaps to walk around, I’m not saying they’re causing trouble, but they think they’re being clever in front of their friends, and they can be a bit rude. If you’re walking on your own it’s not particularly nice, perhaps something like that if someone was walking around and just keeping an eye on things really. The other issue we’ve got as well is the homeless, isn’t it? Obviously not where I live but particularly in Northampton it’s bad, I think that’s a priority as well.”

This illustrates the community’s anxiety over drug and knife crime, emphasising the need for targeted police action and preventative strategies to address these emerging issues.

Trust and confidence in local policing

The dialogue around trust and confidence revealed a complex relationship between the community and the police. Positive personal experiences with police response to incidents bolstered confidence among residents. However, there remains a desire for more tangible police presence and community engagement efforts to build deeper trust and address the broader concerns of drug use normalisation and the emerging threat of gang-related activities.

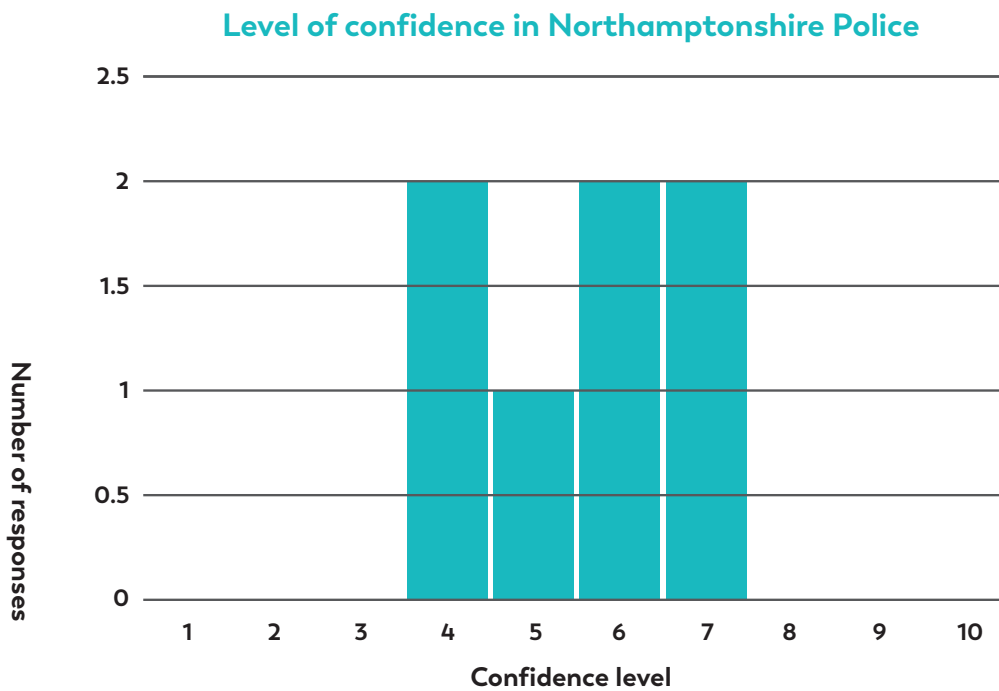
Participants shared both positive and critical views on their interactions with the police, affecting their trust and confidence levels, indicating mixed feelings on police effectiveness and priorities.

“It’s just the normalisation of cannabis, I don’t think there’s any threat to them kids from the police, they just sit at the recreation ground in Burton Latimer, they can sit at the park and smoke it and you can’t really do anything. People walk around smoking it like it’s totally normal, it’s a bit strange really.”

“I had my stepson living with me and we’ve had issues and when he first came over to live with us, the police were brilliant with that but again, it involved a knife being pulled and his response to that. They were fantastic in terms of dealing with the issues but there’s just not enough of them, there’s too much pressure on them...”

This reflects the complex relationship between the community and the police, where positive experiences coexist with concerns over prioritisation and handling of specific crime types, such as drug use.

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = 'Extremely confident'. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.



Investment in local policing (and Precept)

The willingness of residents to support financial investments in policing was conditional, based on clear outcomes such as improved visibility, quicker response times, and effective crime resolution. The conversation indicates a community ready to back enhanced police services, provided there is transparency and accountability in how additional resources are deployed.

The community's willingness to financially support policing was contingent on seeing tangible improvements as well as a perception of the central government's liability in financing local policing.

"I wouldn't mind, I'd be happy to pay the extra...it's spread over 10 months anyway."

“The problem is, we already pay for the police and the government should show the local police force is part of the national police force. One thing that keeps ringing time and time again, is you end up with a lottery and I’d be worried we’d end up funding things more from the council tax when we should have a national initiative, and national standards of policing. I’m all for local authority, and local constabularies but I do feel there needs to be a reasserted national standard and to do that you’ve got to fund it centrally. I just wanted to say although I’d be happy paying for it, it would be really good if the government could match it.”

This sentiment indicates a readiness to invest in local policing, provided there is clarity on how the funds would improve service delivery, visibility, and crime prevention. There was also consideration for an investment in alternative services, with recognition that there is both a wider supply chain as well as local policing which is under resourced.

“I want to see the hollowed-out services that the police must work with, reinvested in. The youth service has been decimated for the last 20-30 years and as a former youth leader, I know it was a great way of accessing young people. Resources have got to be put in because I think most coppers, if not all coppers are decent, otherwise they wouldn’t be turning up for work, but by golly we undermine them by not giving them resources. There has to be a wider understanding of the issue and the police are part of that.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The Fire & Rescue Service was consistently praised for its effectiveness and engagement – ‘Confidence is sky high’, contrasting with the more mixed perceptions of the police.

Contrasting with the nuanced views on policing, the Fire & Rescue Service was overwhelmingly praised for its efficiency, reliability, and engagement with the community. This positive perception underscores the importance of visibility, accessibility, and proactive community relations in building public trust and confidence in emergency services. This stark difference in perception underscores the impact of visibility, reliability, and proactive community engagement on building trust and confidence in emergency services.

5.3 Desborough

The group was held at Desborough Library and Community Hub, in Desborough, on the 13th of February 2024. A total of nine Desborough residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	25	White British
Female	36	White British
Female	39	White British
Female	41	White British
Male	45	White British
Female	47	White British
Male	59	White British
Female	61	White British
Male	68	White British

Feelings of safety & Police visibility and responsiveness

In Desborough, the residents expressed a nuanced view regarding their feelings of safety, reflecting a transition from a previously perceived secure environment to one marked by apprehension and concern. This shift is primarily attributed to changes in local policing presence and responsiveness over the years, which residents perceive have not kept pace with the town's growth and evolving needs.

Residents recalled a time when the visibility of local police fostered a strong sense of security, and a comfortable street presence at night. However, this sentiment has drastically changed. The reduction in local police visibility and the perceived decrease in responsiveness have led to heightened concerns. The lack of immediate police presence or follow-up in response to incidents has left the community feeling vulnerable and necessitated self-reliance. The impact is particularly pronounced among the elderly and families with young children, who feel the absence of a protective community service formerly provided by more robust local policing.

“20 years ago... I moved from Northampton to Desborough because it was getting really bad and I couldn't, believe how safe it was in Desborough. It is the safest thing I did for my kids to move here. I used to leave the door open but now I've got cameras, a dog, notices and I never used to feel unsafe walking the street.”

“I've got a son who's nearly a teenager...I drill into him 'don't walk with your phone out anymore, watch who's about'...that fear, you shouldn't have that growing up somewhere, especially in a small town.”

“Day time if you want to see a police officer or PCSO just go to the school, they talk to the kids. Other than that, it’s very rare you see them.”

“In Desborough I don’t walk out on my own on a Saturday night anymore, I used to quite happily pop to the Co-Op and it didn’t used to bother me. I don’t feel intimidated but there’s that little niggle.”

While the overall sentiment toward local policing in Desborough has been mixed, there were instances where residents shared positive experiences and perceptions during the focus group discussions. These moments of positive interaction, though fewer, highlight instances where local police engagement has effectively addressed community concerns, fostering a sense of security and appreciation among the residents.

Some participants noted specific situations where the police were prompt and effective, particularly in dealing with minor disturbances or providing safety information. These interactions, while small in scale, contributed positively to the residents’ perceptions of local policing efforts.

“I think when you actually speak to them, you find that they are very understanding and sometimes they do follow up, which has been great.”

There were instances where residents felt that the presence of police in community settings, such as schools and local events, had a positive impact. These interactions, particularly with younger members of the community, were seen as steps towards building a friendlier and more approachable image of the police.

“The PCSOs we have in the area are lovely, they do a good job, especially when they come into the schools and talk to the kids.”

These conversations represent the more positive experiences shared by some members of the community, reflecting a contrast to the broader critical views. They suggest that despite the challenges, there are aspects of local policing that are working well, which could be built upon to enhance overall community relations and perceptions.

Police visibility and responsiveness

The community of Desborough voiced significant concerns regarding the visibility and responsiveness of local policing. These issues have been longstanding and appear to have deteriorated over the years. Participants in the focus group discussed a noticeable decline in the frequency and quality of police interactions and responses, which they believe has directly impacted their perception of safety and community well-being.

Historically, Desborough enjoyed a more substantial police presence, with officers regularly seen ‘walking the streets’ and engaging with residents. This visibility not only provided reassurance but also helped in building a rapport between the community and the police. Over time, however, this presence has diminished, leading to feelings of neglect and frustration among the residents. They report a shift from an accessible and proactive force to a reactive one, often perceived as absent until after incidents occur.

“I’ve been here 20 years and when I first came there was a big presence because they were based here and you could see them and it has slowly declined, I’d say over the last 10 years has got progressively worse.”

“When I worked at Co-Op, they [police] were always in there or walking past, it got less and less frequent and now I don’t see them.”

“...I was going to say the same, they used to come into my shop quite regularly, walking about, all the time walking about in two’s.”

Residents also expressed dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of local policing, particularly the lack of follow-up, has eroded trust in the police’s ability to manage and mitigate issues effectively. This sentiment extends to residents feeling that Desborough is doesn’t receive the same equity in policing as neighbouring areas.

“My nan is 92, where she lives, I’ve never seen any police presence there unless they’re telling the parents off for double parking at the school.”

“You don’t ever get a follow up, my neighbour opposite who raised it has heard nothing since.”

“The sad thing is, we’re one of the biggest towns in Northamptonshire but I think they still think of us as a little village but we’re not, we’re a town. I think we’re the 8th largest town in Northamptonshire, there’s Corby, Kettering and they should be treating us the same and they’re not.”

“...I’d say Desborough is the poor relation to Kettering.”

These concerns highlight a critical need for reassessment of local policing strategies in Desborough. The community’s feedback underscores the importance of restoring police visibility and improving responsiveness to rebuild trust and ensure a safer environment.

“I think there’s a lot less police now than there was before and then on a Friday or Saturday night they are in Kettering or Corby; they concentrate on that. So, if you get a call to Desborough and they’re in Kettering, they’re probably dealing with something so the response times are terrible, if they turn up at all.”

Residents have expressed frustration over the apparent ineffectiveness of police actions following reports of crime, where follow-ups are rare, and outcomes remain unclear. This has reduced trust in the capability of local policing to provide security and address criminal activities adequately.

“Last year there was an attempted burglary on one of the streets and the people that did it came through my alley and over my garden and through my gates, I got them all on my Ring camera. I told the person who had the problem, they reported it and told the police, we sent it all and nothing happened.”

“The local shop used to open until 10pm which was convenient, but they close at 9pm now because they got fed up with the abuse that they were getting from young people and travellers coming in, and there was no response from the police. It has literally changed a shop opening hours for an entire town.”

The impact of crime on the community extends beyond the immediate victims. The perception that crimes are not effectively managed or responded to affects the broader community’s sense of safety and contributes to a generalised fear of crime.

“Even when something happens to other people, to neighbours, you worry about what would happen to you, what service would you get.”

“There’s a certain individual down on our road who causes so much trouble. He stole a motorbike, crashed it, stabbings, I heard he threatened a mum and her son. That’s the only time I’ve seen the police because they’ve been chasing him on our road. He’s the only person I know that can stab somebody and get out the next day. We had a council meeting in the library to discuss him, the police attended, and he was sat outside looking through the window, laughing. People are frightened off him.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing within Desborough has significantly deteriorated, as revealed by the focus group discussions. Residents expressed a lack of faith in the effectiveness and reliability of local police, citing various instances where their expectations of engagement were unmet. This erosion of trust stems from experiences of perceived inadequate police response to incidents, perceived neglect of smaller communities like Desborough in favour of larger towns, and a general feeling of being underserved by the police.

Many residents feel that their concerns and reports are often overlooked or not followed up with the urgency they require, leading to a sense of lack of care. This sentiment is exacerbated by what is considered a ‘lack of interest’ or commitment from the police to engage with the community unless it is to address minor infractions, such as parking issues, rather than more severe criminal activities.

“Our house looks over onto the field, and we have reported dangerous driving on motorbikes and things, three or four times the police have come zooming after the quadbikes, there’s a barrier there and they don’t have the key. One of them has actually knocked on my door and asked, ‘do you know who’s the key holder for that?’ ‘No, I don’t, I haven’t got a clue’ ...and that’s happened on quite a few occasions.”

Participants also highlighted a lack of communication and follow-through on reported issues, which feeds into the community’s frustration and lack of trust. This was particularly poignant in the context of a growing town and population and a perception that the demand will increase.

“It’s only going to get worse, there’s thousands of houses coming into this area with no visible police officers or support to the community, unless it’s your double parking at one of the schools then you’ll get slapped with a ticket and a telling off but if someone is actually reporting a crime, a business, they’re not interested or don’t have the manpower.”

Residents also discussed the influence of national media’s influence on trust and confidence in policing which prompted a female resident led discussion and perspective.

“As a female and you hear these stories and you think ‘urgh yeah’, even parking my car down the side here and walking in tonight I was concerned, you do hear these stories and you think ‘would you trust them?’. Although it doesn’t affect my day-to-day life, if I was in a situation and I needed help and was on my own, would I 100% trust the police officer if he was male? I know that’s sexist, but you never hear of a female police officer in the same way, I’m sure they’re not all good but a lot of what you have read recently, even Nick Adderley has been disciplined with whatever has gone on with him. There’s lots of negativity around male officers.”

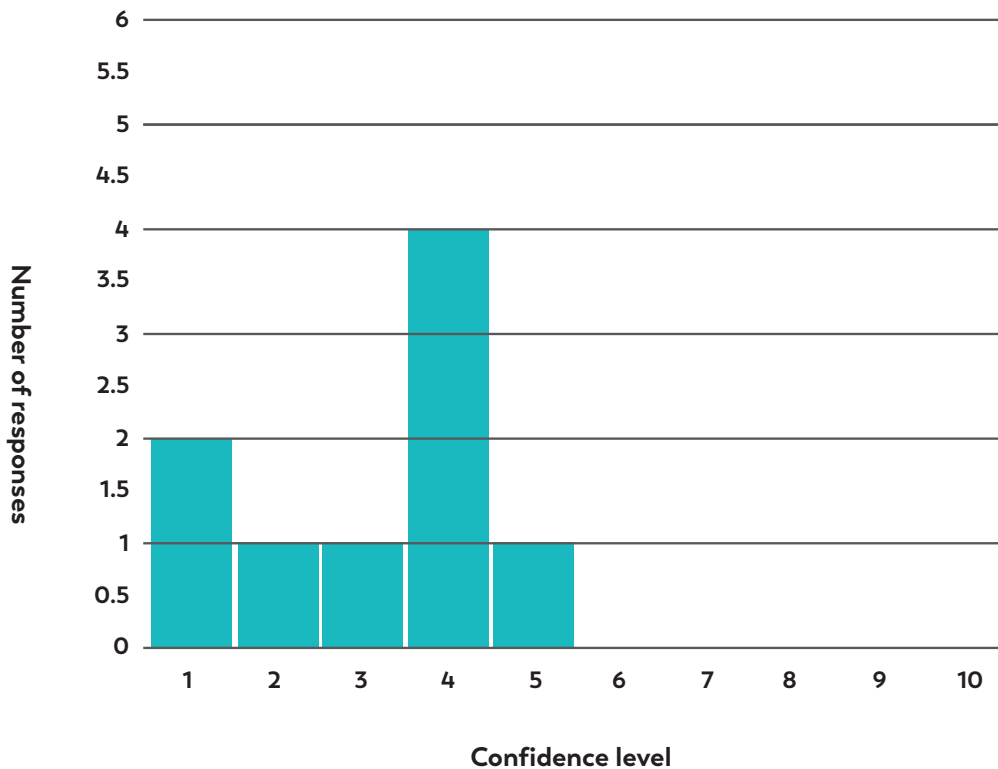
“If a police car pulled me over if I was driving, I would not get out the car however much they asked me to, I wouldn’t get out my car because of what could happen. If it was a lone policeman or two policemen in a car, I would say ‘you follow me home, you follow me, knock me down, whatever, but I’m not getting out my car’”

“...a lot of the time it’s the Met, but they’re still police officers so you band them together as one opinion.”

“10 years ago, if I got pulled over for whatever reason, I’d have happily had my window down and spoke to them, but now, no. It’s not worth the risk. I’d rather have the book thrown at me than take the risk.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



While there was criticism of Northamptonshire Police, there was also some sympathy from residents, acknowledging the scale of the challenge and the societal changes that have affected both the police and other statutory services.

“Is it one of those jobs no one wants to do anymore, because it’s got harder for them. They’re powerless, they’ve got no real powers.”

“Teachers aren’t allowed to teach, police aren’t allowed to police, nurses aren’t allowed to nurse anymore. The police, NHS and the schools, the ones that signed up to do the job can’t do it anymore.”

“I understand budgets have been slashed, everyone’s has and if we think about it, basically this country is broke. We can’t afford to pay for the services we need.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

The focus group discussions highlighted several emerging priorities and crime types in Desborough that are considered to require police attention. These concerns have evolved over time, reflecting shifts in the community's landscape and the challenges that come with it. Participants identified specific types of crimes and nuisances that have become more prevalent, demanding a strategic response to address their impact on community safety and well-being.

One of the most mentioned issues was the problem of 'motorbikes and quad bikes' being used recklessly within the town. This particular nuisance not only disturbs the peace but also poses a significant safety risk to pedestrians, including young children. The frequent sightings and the specific patterns of these activities suggest that they are organised and recurrent, yet the response from local policing is considered insufficient.

"There's two cameras, there's a camera outside the Co-Op and there's a camera as you come in, for two years at 11 o'clock and 4 o'clock within 10 minutes, a motorbike went from the traveller site into Barret Road, up Barnworth Road, onto the estate, went to one particular house and 10 minutes later it's coming back. 11 o'clock and 4 o'clock for about 2 years. It's been reported that many times."

Drug misuse and related littering are also pressing issues, with residents frequently encountering drug paraphernalia in public spaces. This indicates not only the presence of drug use but also a lack of effective cleanup and monitoring that could help mitigate the problem.

"I'll tell you what we found, the nitroxide, the big bottles. Once or twice a year we do a litter pick as villagers and we came along a road and there were big cannisters, loads of those. A mate of mine in the village the other day did Harborough Road and he reckoned he picked up about 30 bags of rubbish and the most common thing was the half bottles of vodka and nitrous oxide bottles."

"...it feels normal now to see the remnants of drug use on the streets."

Property crimes such as break-ins and thefts from garages and garden sheds were also noted as growing concerns, contributing to the residents' feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. The frequency and the brazen nature of these crimes add to the urgency for an increased police presence and surveillance.

"Everyone has got security systems now. Cameras, locks, signage, dogs, you almost need to bolt it down now."

"...and things happen in broad daylight now, not discreetly, car crime, drug use, it happens right in front of people, like they know the chance of being caught is slim."

Desborough residents expressed a strong sentiment in favour of further investment in local policing. During the focus group discussions, it became clear that there is a considerable appetite for increased funding and resources dedicated to enhancing the police presence and responsiveness within the community. This desire stems from the current perceptions of insufficient police coverage and the need for a more robust enforcement approach to address the ongoing and emerging challenges faced by the town.

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

Participants indicated a willingness to support financial measures that would lead to a visible increase in policing activities. It is perhaps indicative of their current low levels of safety that they will bear additional costs if it results in tangible improvements. However, there was also a significant level of scepticism about the effective use of funds, based on past experiences where increases in local taxes or precepts did not evidently translate into better services or outcomes.

“The trouble is, you’re going to hand more money to the police and it’s going to be PCSO’s who the kids know can’t arrest them because they haven’t got the power of arrest.”

Concerns were raised about whether additional funds would indeed lead to an enhanced policing presence or if they would be absorbed by administrative costs without benefiting the community directly. There is a clear demand for transparency in how funds are utilised, with residents expressing a need to see a direct correlation between their financial contributions and improvements in local policing.

“Wasn’t it last year, the hike up for the PCC was a massive amount. As a town we keep a precept and in fact our precept has gone down again this year, it’s the Borough Council and the police that make it go through the roof. It’s not going to make any difference.”

Residents discussed their previous experiences with funding increases, which did not appear to meet their expectations for improvements in local policing. This history contributes to their current cautious approach towards new financial commitments yielding change.

“We’re happy to pay more but the service has got less.”

“The proof is in the pudding, if you put it up and then you see improvement, you don’t mind [paying more] but we’ve seen things go down. We’re paying more but it’s going down, so why should we?”

The focus group’s feedback indicates a conditional support for further investment in local policing—conditional on the assurance that the additional resources will be directly applied to enhancing the visibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness of police services in Desborough. This reflects a broader desire for accountability and results-based management of community resources dedicated to law enforcement.

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

In stark contrast to the sentiments expressed about local policing, the perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service in Desborough are overwhelmingly positive. The residents hold the fire and rescue teams in high regard, often citing their promptness, effectiveness, and the personal commitment of the local firefighters as key reasons for their favourable views. This positive perception is underpinned by personal experiences and observations of the fire service's responsiveness and community engagement, which starkly contrast with their experiences of local policing.

Residents noted the immediate and effective responses of the fire service to emergencies, emphasising the personnel's local knowledge and their dedication to the community. This has built a strong foundation of trust and confidence within the community, something that local policing has struggled to maintain.

“Desborough fire brigade is brilliant. They're local people as well, so they are looking out for their own people, there is a sense of community.”

“I lost my business, a massive fire, I lost everything, but they were there instantly, the fire brigade is fantastic. Absolutely brilliant.”

The community also appreciates the fire service's proactive approach to safety and their visible presence at community events, which enhances the public's sense of security. The comparison between the fire service and the police is often made to illustrate how community-based services can effectively build and maintain public trust.

“...and you always see them, always see them about, always. And obviously these people, they're almost like paramedics now as well which I've had experience with that with my dad. I feel like they are diverse in what they do, not just firefighting anymore.”

The discussions also highlighted how the fire service adapts to the community's needs, such as by adjusting their response strategies to ensure that resources are available for both emergency medical assistance and fire response. This adaptability and commitment to serving the community's needs in a balanced way contribute significantly to their positive reputation.

“Their first response has changed because they used to do first response and send the fire engine, they send a vehicle now because my worry with that was, if you had a fire, they would be committed to a first response issue, but they've now conquered that because they have a separate vehicle they can send out, with two staff.”

The residents of Desborough's high regard for their Fire and Rescue Service were a testament to the impact that effective, responsive, and community-focused services can have on public perception. This positive view underscores a broader expectation of what emergency services can provide when adequately supported and integrated within their communities.

6.0

Corby Groups

6.0 Corby Groups

6.1 Corby (Central)

The group was held at the Hazelwood Neighbourhood Centre, in Corby, on the 18th of January 2024. A total of eight Corby Town residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	22	White British
Female	33	White European
Male	36	White British
Female	40	White British
Female	46	White British
Male	48	White British
Male	58	White British
Female	60	White British

Feelings of safety

In exploring the feelings of safety within the Corby community, a complex picture emerges, influenced significantly by local policing. One expression of concern surrounds the welfare for the community's young people, specifically mentioning, *"I'm more worried about my child growing up here, than I am myself, to be honest because a lot of younger people are getting pulled into selling [drugs], and they're running about stabbing each other."*

The mention of *"younger people...stabbing each other"* is particularly alarming, suggesting not just a spike in youth violence but a deeper erosion of social cohesion described as an *'atmosphere of unease'*. This is compounded by a call from the community for preventative strategies that address both the symptoms and root causes of these safety concerns. Such strategies might include increased youth engagement initiatives, educational opportunities, and efforts to divert young individuals from criminal trajectories – initiatives which are in decline, currently.

"You do see a lot of younger people loitering about and inevitably, getting into trouble. It is a shame but there's nothing for them to do. I don't want to say nothing too bad and dampen any good things that are going on because there is a lot of good things, I'm sure there just isn't enough, not anymore."

Additionally, there was disappointment with the current state of local policing, underscored by a desire for greater police visibility and engagement.

The community's expression of feeling unprotected highlights a significant disconnection between expectations for public safety and the perceived effectiveness of policing efforts.

“My experience is affected by things like Corby police station closing that down, you had a certain feeling of safety, like a baseline, knowing there was a police station nearby, and moving it further afield reduces that feeling.”

The narrative around safety in Corby paints a picture of a community seeking solutions to complex challenges. It calls attention to concerns about youth crime and a broader appetite for strategies that not only mitigate these issues but also foster a sense of security and optimism for the future. The community's plea for a safer environment is a clarion call for concerted efforts to ensure the protection and well-being of all its members, particularly the younger populace.

Police visibility and responsiveness

The discussion about police visibility and responsiveness in Corby reveals a concern over the perceived disconnect between community needs and police presence. A central point of contention is the apparent 'youthfulness' of the police force, which some in the community view as a detriment to the force's effectiveness. Expressing a common sentiment, one individual noted, *“It just seems like young people on a power trip,”* highlighting scepticism toward the police's capability to navigate complex social situations with the necessary professionalism and tact.

This scepticism toward police responsiveness and visibility underscores a broader apprehension within the community about the adequacy of Northamptonshire Polices presence and approach. The criticism of police officers being “young people on a power trip” reflects deeper issues related to the perceived inexperience of the force. This inexperience is seen as impacting the police's ability to manage critical incidents effectively, where a balanced and thoughtful approach is paramount.

Further emphasising the community's desire for a more mature police presence, another comment made was, *“There's a low amount of police, there's only so many, and if they're going to attend a scene...you need the training and experience to be able to respond effectively.”* This statement points to a perceived gap in both the number of officers available and their preparedness to handle the complexities of their role, highlighting a need for comprehensive training to mitigate potentially limited training.

The discussion also touched on the theme of police responsiveness, or rather, the lack thereof, with instances of inadequate responses. *“If there's only X amount of police officers, no wonder the calls are taking 2-3 weeks to come and be investigated an evidenced.”* There was sympathy in this sentiment, reinforcing a perceived lack of resource.

“...it's not their fault, it's because there's not enough of them, it's not good. I think the people [police] I've dealt with have been amazing, I've dealt with ace people and it's really good, but there's no staff so they can't help you.”

“I'm going back a few years, I used to see police out on the street, and you could go over and chat to them and it was a friendly experience, and it instilled that confidence in them. But like I say, I don't see police out there.”

Moreover, the narrative that “*the police force is getting younger and younger*” dovetails with concerns over how this demographic shift affects public confidence in policing. The community’s call for a visible, responsive, and adept police force is as much about numbers as it is about the quality of interactions between officers and the public. There’s an underlying desire for a police presence that is not only more strategically visible but also more attuned to the nuances of community engagement and capable of building trust through consistent, positive interactions.

“We have experienced nuisance neighbours and I’ll tell you for why. On Christmas Eve the neighbour was having a rave, I ended up calling the police at 12:30am because my children couldn’t go to sleep and one of them is 6 and one of them is 12. They said, ‘Sorry, we can’t come out’, so I said ‘right, if I go out and it gets confrontational which it will because she’s a riot’, they said, ‘Yeah, then we’ll come out for that’. I couldn’t take that risk on Christmas Eve, getting taken away from my children because I’ve gone out and had enough of this neighbour. She continuously does it, the music ended up going off at 02:30 and back on at 09:00. What are you supposed to do, be the aggressor and escalate the situation to force a police response. I think it is not just the lack of response, but the lack of understanding shown to a mother of a young family.”

The dialogue from Corby residents paints a picture of a community wanting a police force that is not only physically present but also sufficiently experienced and responsive to their needs. The discussion highlighted a shared concern over the impact of perceived inexperience on the police’s effectiveness, pointing toward a need for enhanced training, mentorship, and a more robust police presence. This feedback offers valuable insights for a force which aims to improve community relations and effectiveness, suggesting that the path forward involves addressing both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of policing.

Emerging and local priorities

In Corby, the dialogue on emerging and local priorities uncovered a community need for policing that not only tackles traditional crimes but also attends to issues significantly impacting the quality of life.

The conversation unveiled a spectrum of concerns that underscore the complexity of policing required in the community. Beyond nuisance neighbours, the discussion broadened to more severe safety issues, including robberies and stabbings. A participant’s statement, “*There’s a lot of robberies. A lot of stabbings,*” explicitly highlights the urgency and severity of crime concerns within the community, pointing towards a pressing need for a multifaceted policing strategy that can adapt to both emergent and persistent concerns.

The prevalence of anti-social behaviour was another critical concern, with instances like “*anti-social behaviour is the biggest issue and that doesn’t seem to be getting dealt with. You see a motorbike riding past with two guys, no helmet, and they don’t give a crap.*”

However, some residents supported the current police response, particularly in relation to motoring offences related to ASB, “*...the police...they’re chasing all the bikes on this estate, I think they respond to that well. If anything, there needs to be a wider response to anti-social behaviour.*” This potentially reflects frustrations with how police resources are allocated and brings into focus the challenge of the force receiving unanimous praise.

“It’s a big ask, and probably too much for just the police, but it’s like, you can’t just focus on one thing, on one crime, because they probably lead on to other, more serious things, if they don’t get addressed. So, I know ASB isn’t as bad as a knife crime, but the way I look at it, if the ASB doesn’t get sorted, then there are people within that which will progress to more serious crimes we are talking about.”

‘Drug dealing’, while not considered emerging was referenced as an ongoing issue within the community and something the group regarded as pervasive, “I mean it’s not new, but it is getting worse. You see people clearly off their face, and that is getting paid for somehow, and it isn’t from people working 9 till 5 jobs, plus the people selling, it’s a whole little economy, probably within most communities, not just Corby.”

“I’m not saying knife crime is only linked to drugs, but there is a relationship, I’m sure. There used to be the guy that did the knife amnesty thing in Corby, it might have been a police thing, but it just seems to have fizzled out. It was alright for a couple of months and people were handing their knives but I don’t see that sort of thing advertised anymore.”

“I think the drug issue is significant. We have more homelessness now in Corby and I think drug use plays a part. There are some very aggressive beggars as well, known to be violent drug users.”

“Oh, the drug thing now, it is in plain sight. People will inject outside of shops, on the steps to people’s houses.”

The discussion about emerging and local priorities in Corby underscores a community concerned with a wide array of concerns, from the disruptive behaviours of nuisance neighbours to the threats posed by robberies and stabbings. The discussion highlighted a collective call for a policing approach that is responsive, anticipatory, and tuned to the unique needs of the community. This nuanced understanding of community priorities suggests a path forward for law enforcement that involves not only addressing high-profile crimes but also engaging pro-actively with issues that affect the daily lives and well-being of residents.

Trust and confidence in local policing

In Corby (Central), the trust and confidence in local policing emerge as pivotal issues, with residents providing a wide range of perspectives that reveal both dissatisfaction and nuanced views on police effectiveness. The variability in confidence levels, with scores from 2 to 10, uncovers a complex landscape of public sentiment towards the police. A participant’s statement, “Whenever I’ve called them whenever I’ve needed them, they’ve been there,” offering a score of 7, contrasts sharply with the overall trend of low scores, indicating that while some residents have had positive interactions, there remains a pervasive scepticism regarding the police’s ability to consistently meet the community’s needs.

The discussion around trust and confidence in local policing also illuminated specific concerns and experiences that shaped these perceptions. A resident explained, “... my daughter was seeing a boy, and this boy bought into it that she was his property, and he came around to our house with an axe. It took 3 days for the police to come out and do anything. I just found that disgusting, and it is that type of thing that removes my trust.”

Another participant highlighted a broader systemic issue affecting their trust in local police, noting, *“I think if we had the station back in Corby, we’d have that [sense of safety].”* This reflects again on the potential impact of a reduction in the police estate, which is seen as integral to fostering a stronger sense of security and trust within the community.

The discussion touched on the impact of personal experiences and word-of-mouth on public perceptions of the police. *“A lot of these low levels of trust are based on personal experience but if it’s not personal experience it’s word of mouth I guess because you tell people about these experiences, they travel and inform other people’s position.”* This insight into how trust and confidence are formed—or eroded—highlights the importance of every police interaction in shaping overall community sentiment and the impact and speed in which community conversation informs the resident position.

The conversation also considered the systemic and national issues impacting local trust levels. Reflecting on national news stories affecting perceptions of the police, a participant remarked, *“I think as a collective it does [affect confidence].”* This acknowledgment of the wider context in which local policing is perceived underscores the complex interplay between national narratives and local experiences in shaping public confidence in local policing.

While there was conversation that the national coverage of policing does affect local trust and confidence, to varying degrees, there was also acknowledgement from residents that these are ‘different police forces’ with ‘different personnel’.

“...you’re finding even the Metropolitan Police have been arrested for crimes. I know that isn’t Northamptonshire Police, which is a good thing, but it does raise some questions about police, generally.”

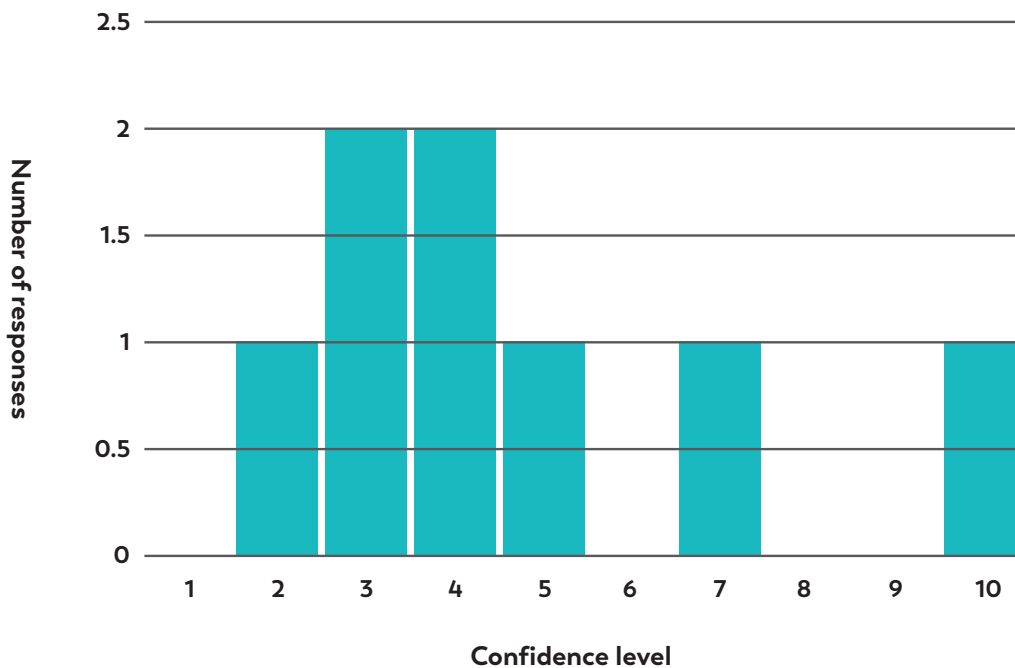
“It’s a tricky one, yes, it’s a different force, but I also see police as one big entity, so in some ways, they are one and the same as well.”

The varied levels of trust and confidence from residents of Corby reveal a community with mixed feelings toward their local police force. Positive personal experiences with the police contrast with broader concerns over responsiveness, visibility, and the influence of national narratives on local perceptions. These reflections underscore the critical work needed to rebuild trust and confidence in the police, suggesting that both systemic improvements and individual interactions play pivotal roles in shaping the community’s relationship with policing, and reinforcing direct experiences have a significant influence on opinions.

“I did get to know a couple of the officers who were working in this area. My son has ADHD, so he’s the adrenaline filled, and a motor biker and he doesn’t think of the dangers. The police were actually quite good, they didn’t just want to punish him, they wanted him to learn, they helped with the referral for some support, helped get medication. He has a good relationship with them now.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The conversation around investment in local policing and the potential increase in council tax to support this initiative prompted a range of opinions. The notion of contributing more financially to enhance policing capabilities was met with both conditional support and scepticism.

The debate over council tax increases for police funding revealed some conflict between a desire for better services against concerns over the efficacy of additional investment. The comment, "I'd be more reluctant to put it up because of the experience so far," encapsulates some resident scepticism, tying willingness to pay more with their experiences with policing.

Other comments expressed conditional support for increased funding, highlighting the importance of transparency and accountability: "If you could see the actual changes being made, you'd say 'this is brilliant!'"

Concerns were also raised about the potential burden of increased taxes on residents, especially given current economic challenges, voicing a common concern about the financial feasibility of higher taxes for households already under strain, "Everyone is struggling to pay the council tax as it is. I can't afford to pay mine now."

Discussion illustrated a community that recognises the need for enhanced policing, and the understanding of the role of investment, but a requirement for more accountability, and clear benefits from any additional financial contributions.

“I think most people would want to support the police, but it’s a tough ask when you think that people don’t have the money they maybe previously had, don’t feel as safe as they used too, and then you add in some poor experiences with the police, it is difficult to sell it.”

“I think council tax will go up, it does every year, that’s one thing, but that is very different from wanting to support the police, and I think that’s what’s missing, the lack of support, they don’t have the buy-in they used to have.”

“It would support the police, I think I do my being a good citizen, but just asking for money, it feels like a simple solution to a very complex problem. Is that the only plan there is, raise taxes?”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The view of the Fire & Rescue Service in Corby reveals a noticeable contrast to the sentiments expressed about local policing, regarded with an almost unanimous degree of appreciation.

There was a perception that ‘a firefighter’s job is very different to a police officers’ but also a consideration that the fire and rescue service role extends beyond their operational duties. This was further explained as a greater level of engagement with the community and a ‘personal connection between the fire service and the community’.

“I wouldn’t know a single police officers name to be fair, but I know a few local firemen.”

“One of our local firefighters has just died of cancer and I think what they’re doing for his funeral it’s just amazing. They are very much part of the community.”

Participants discussed the visible and proactive engagement of the Fire & Rescue Service with the community, noting their involvement in local events and safety initiatives. This engagement is considered to foster a sense of safety and well-being.

“They do the charity drives at the fire station and I live in Weldon, and they had the village fete, and they have a fire truck there the kids can climb in the fire truck, but you don’t see things like that with the police.”

The discussion also touched on the comparative accessibility and visibility of the Fire & Rescue Service, suggesting that their approach to community engagement might serve as a model for other emergency services. “I think they need to go in and do more school talks to the smaller children and make them more aware of what county lines is and things like that,” a participant suggested, indicating a desire for the police to adopt similar engagement strategies to those successfully employed by the Fire & Rescue Service. Such activities not only appear to serve a community relations function but also demystify the service’s role, making it more approachable and integrated within the community’s fabric.

“They just seem a lot more accessible, maybe that is a bit unfair to the police because they do different things, but they seem to be very community orientated, especially with young people.”

“...yes, they are great with kids, at events, at schools, they seem to start that engagement at a really young age.”

The research conversation highlighted a perception that the Fire & Rescue Service is more effectively integrated into the community’s life, both in moments of emergency and in everyday interactions. Residents considered this an ambition Northamptonshire Police should have, adopting a holistic approach to community safety.

6.2 Corby (West)

The group was held at Oakley Vale Community Centre, in Oakley Vale, on the 17th of January 2024. A total of nine Oakley Vale residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	30	White British
Male	33	White British
Male	40	White British
Female	44	White British
Female	47	White British
Female	48	White British
Male	52	Indian
Male	55	White British
Female	61	White British

Feelings of Safety

Residents shared their perspectives on safety and policing in their community and feelings of safety emerged as a pivotal theme, shedding light on the complex interplay between individual experiences with local policing and broader perceptions of safety and security within the Corby area.

The focus group discussions revealed that residents’ feelings of safety were deeply influenced by their direct interactions with the police force. One participant recounted an incident involving their child and a market trader, illustrating the immediate impact of police responsiveness on personal feelings of security. The account underscores how positive police interventions can significantly enhance individuals’ sense of safety and trust in local policing.

“I’ve had an incident with my son before, we were in town and a market trader sort of grabbed hold of him... My son literally turned around to show me something and he thought he was trying to nick something. He literally grabbed him by the throat, which was excessive, the police were really good, really good with my son so there’s that.”

Police visibility in Corby (West) was intrinsically linked with feelings of community safety and conversations frequently circled back to the theme of visibility, or the lack thereof, and its correlation with how safe residents feel. Participants expressed a desire for a more pronounced police presence, believing it to be a deterrent against crime and a factor that would foster a stronger sense of security.

“You see quite a number of police cars but not an awful lot of police [officers]. And the helicopter but you never see a police officer.”

A common perception among residents that, while the infrastructure for policing might be visible, the physical presence of officers in the community was notably absent, and this was often the measure of visibility which residents utilised. This sentiment reflects a broader concern that the effectiveness of policing is not just in its ability to respond to incidents but also in its capacity to prevent them through visible presence and engagement.

The discussions also touched on the dichotomy within perceptions of safety in Corby (West), influenced by media portrayals of policing and crime. Participants noted that media representations often emphasised negative aspects of policing, potentially skewing public perceptions and contributing to feelings of unease. However, personal experiences with the police, particularly when positive, could counteract these narratives and reinforce a sense of safety and trust within the community.

“I think media is the main thing that doesn’t help because you’ll put the TV on, they’ll put the negative side of the police, so everyone is like ‘we’re definitely not going to support them.’”

“All the media can ever do is blame the police about women’s safety, it’s not women’s safety, it’s everyone’s safety, no matter what gender you are, and people have to take a certain amount of responsibility for themselves.”

“I was the manager of the Curry’s in Corby on the retail park, we consistently had PCSOs popping in, saying ‘how you are doing?’ and we built a relationship with them. That aspect of it for me was really good and shaped my view of police, not just the news. But I must add that contact reduced towards the end of my time there.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

The residents of Corby (West) articulated a clear desire for a policing model that blends visibility with effectiveness, where the presence of officers on the streets is matched by their ability to respond swiftly and sensitively to incidents.

The dialogue around police visibility was marked by a sense of longing for a more tangible police presence within the community. Participants reiterated the community sentiment by stating, ‘Yes, you see a lot of cars, but not a lot of uniforms.’ This observation succinctly captures the dichotomy between the mechanical aspects of policing—marked by police cars and helicopters—and the human element, which seems to be conspicuously absent from the community’s daily tableau. The emphasis on visibility underscores a fundamental belief among residents that the ‘mere sight of police officers patrolling the streets’ could act as a potent deterrent against criminal activities, fostering a safer community environment.

“...there used to be PCSO’s. I haven’t seen one for years, I think their presence has got less, I think what they’re expected to do has increased, the mental health they have to deal with which years ago they never had to deal with, it’s a challenge and probably not very attractive.”

“My perception of the police is they’re now a response force, not a preventative measure. You see massive increase in what I perceive as traffic police, zooming about all over the place but the last time I saw a police officer not responding to something specific, was probably 7 or 8 years ago. I don’t think it would be that difficult for that perception to be flipped. I live across from the park where all the kids’ football is played, if you put two coppers on a patrol around there, be seen by that many people, that many kids, I wonder what that would do for perception. That’s maybe 1,000 people seeing police on patrol, but no one is thinking like that, it’s a response force now.”

While visibility forms one pillar of the community’s expectations, the responsiveness of the police force represents another critical measure of their efficacy. The focus group discussions unveiled experiences that highlighted a varying degree of satisfaction with how the police responded to incidents. One participant shared a personal account that praised the police’s action.

“When you do speak to them, the interactions I’ve had have been good. I had to have a police officer come out to my house because there was an issue with my daughter at school with a boy and the police officer was great. He came out, came back later in the evening and he spoke to us again a few weeks later, so he followed things up and it was just overall all around good. I felt like he cared, I felt like he was concerned and wanted to help me nip the issue in the bud and he did.”

However, this positive note was not without its counterpoints. The discussions also veiled references to instances where the police response was perceived as lacking, either in speed or effectiveness. The contrast between the expectation of immediate police action and the reality faced by some community members hints at the complex dynamics that define “responsiveness” in the eyes of the public.

“I’ve had an experience of the police doing anything. My 15 year old daughter about a month ago, I had to call the police out because a 23 year old man was messaging her and trying to groom her and I found out where he was, [I] tried my hardest not to go over there and do something myself, so I called the police, showed the police all the messages and I even told them where he lived and they went up and spoke to him and did nothing. All they did was say to him ‘you shouldn’t be doing that’. They came back and said, ‘there’s nothing we can do’. Even though I’d shown them a weeks’ worth of messages of what he was sending, and they were really inappropriate. It hasn’t continued because she hasn’t got her phone anymore.”

Amidst the reflections on past interactions with the police, there emerged a consensus around the desire for a more proactive approach to policing. The community’s narrative suggests a shift from a reactive model, where police respond to incidents after they occur, to a more preventative strategy that seeks to deter crime through visible and engaged policing practices. This shift is seen as essential not only in addressing the symptoms of crime and anti-social behaviour but also in tackling their root causes.

“Prevention has sort of gone, it’s like something has got to happen now, for something to happen, and that shouldn’t be the case. How many times you look back and think ‘if this or that was put in place, that would have been prevented’. But there’s only so much they can do; the police are restricted an awful lot.”

Emerging and local priorities

The discussions held a complex tapestry of perspectives regarding local policing presence, engagement, and adaptability to the community’s needs and concerns. Through residents’ engagement, a clearer image emerged of the collective sentiment towards policing strategies and their alignment with local priorities.

One participant, reflecting on the perception of the police being ‘stretched,’ stated, “I just feel like there could be more things concentrated on, like ASB, more than certain things that get attention at the moment, if that makes sense.” This captures the community’s viewpoint on the allocation of police resources and the prioritisation of efforts to address local issues effectively.

Concerns about anti-social behaviour were voiced by several participants, underlining the impact of such activities on the community’s quality of life, capturing the community’s frustration with ongoing disruptive behaviours and the perceived lack of adequate police response.

“Anti-social behaviour...they absolutely rip up the grass with the bikes, no helmets on, the dirt bikes, scramblers and they literally just ride around the estate, absolute no care in the world for pedestrians, kids, cars, repercussions, anything,”

The group’s discussion also ventured into solutions and preventive measures, with suggestions focusing on youth engagement and the establishment of centres aimed at offering alternatives and support to local youth, to address root causes of anti-social behaviour and disengagement.

“I think they need to do more youth centres, successful ones as well, not just open one’s willy nilly,”

“There used to be [youth centres], we need to recreate something that used to exist, this isn’t just a policing problem anymore.”

Despite the critical tones, there was an undercurrent of respect for the police’s challenging role, shaped by both positive personal interactions and the broader societal challenges they face. *“I think it’s bigger than local police forces though because nationally you’ve got a problem, there’s no respect for the police anymore,”* reflected a participant, pointing towards a broader societal issue impacting local police-community dynamics.

Trust and confidence in local policing

The discourse on trust and confidence in local policing, highlights the nuanced and multifaceted relationship between residents and local policing. The conversation with participants, reveals an intricate balance of scepticism, hopeful expectations, and personal experiences that shape the community’s trust and confidence in Northamptonshire Police, as well as external factors, like media portrayals.

The conversations touched on the broader implications of police staffing and resource allocation, exploring the adequacy of police numbers relative to the population’s needs. This analytical approach to understanding policing capabilities reflects a desire for reassurance that policing is effectively scaled and deployed to meet local demands, and how this can influence confidence.

“I would ask how many police officers they have per X number of residents.”

“If there were more officers, I would feel confident. I mean, if there were more visible officers, I would feel more confident in them. I would probably trust them more too, now, it feels like a service you can’t really see. Less officers, fewer stations, bad press, some terrible, actually horrific stories about them, and all sort of behind closed doors. If they were more visible, more known, I think I would trust them that bit more.”

The current Northamptonshire officer numbers appeared to do little in the context of increasing trust and confidence and rather opened debate about transparency and communication.

“It feels like electioneering to me. The figure is meaningless without context, and to the ordinary resident, means very little. I certainly don’t feel any more confident based on an arbitrary figure.”

“It needs to be presented in a way which means something, what does 1500 police mean in relation to demand on the service. What does it mean to a homeowner, a parent, an employer etc. The figure on its own gets my back up.”

Further complicating the landscape of trust and confidence are personal experiences with the police, which vary widely among community members. Experiences of police officers engaging on a *‘personal and understanding level’*, are highlighted as crucial moments that significantly influence perceptions of the police, underscoring the importance of individual interactions in building trust and confidence.

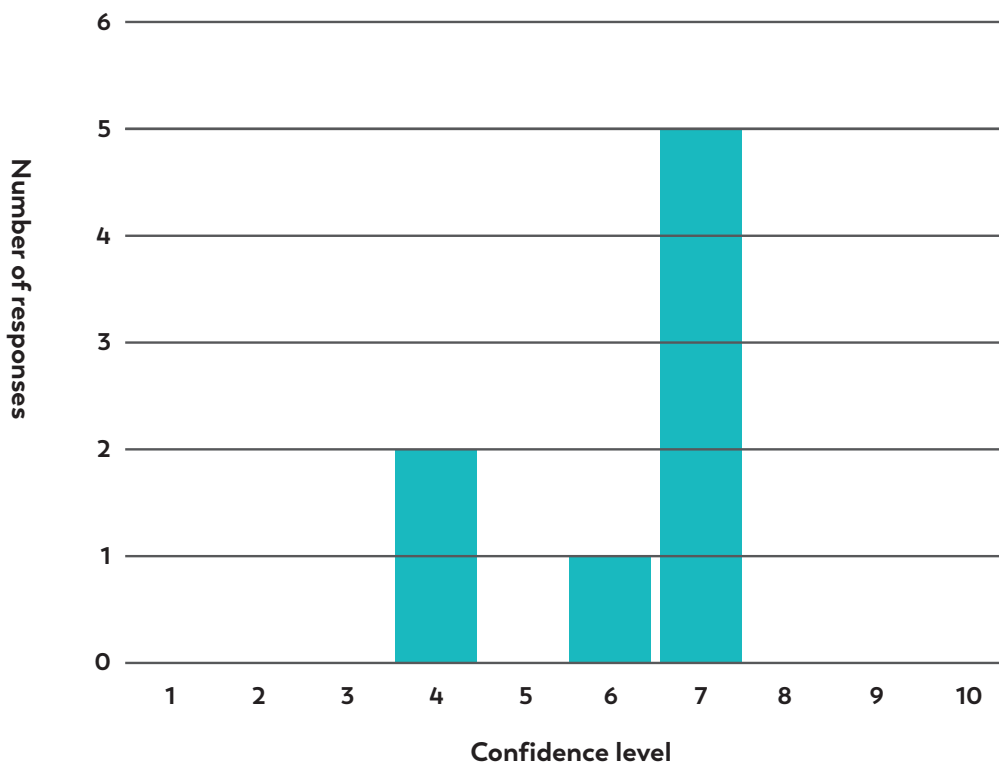
“They came in and actually spoke to our son before they spoke to us and did it on his level. The officer was really nice, really personable and we have got to know them which is nice.”

It was clear that trust and confidence in local policing are deeply intertwined with the community’s daily experiences and observations. From concerns over police visibility and responsiveness to the impact of individual interactions and operational decisions, the community’s trust and confidence are shaped by a complex array of factors. While external factors like national media coverage have not disproportionately influenced perceptions of local police it does have some influence but significantly, direct experiences and contact appear to have a greater impact on trust and confidence.

“I’m not naive, I know you’re going to get people in every organisation, you can’t tell me in any major organisation 100% are squeaky clean, no. What I wish they’d done is further checks or be more stringent or maybe notice things, but my perception of the police and what I’ve always taught my children is if you need anything or you’re lost, find a policeman. They are still people to me that you trust, and I can say to my children ‘that uniform, you trust. If you’re lost or hurt, you go to them. That position is based on my experiences, not what I read.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = ‘Not at all confident’ and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and ‘easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again’.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The research conversations revealed intricate perspectives on the investment in local policing and the associated precept. The conversations touched on the delicate balance between the financial burden placed on residents and the tangible outcomes of such investments in enhancing local policing capabilities.

Participants questioned the allocation of resources, highlighting a critical view of spending priorities if it didn't increase visibility, which was considered a 'high priority.'

“It’s a waste of money to not use it in the proper way. If we don’t see more police, which is clearly what the public want, there is something wrong. If there is a reason the investment doesn’t increase visibility, then there is a communication issue, because residents aren’t aware what the money is being invested in, or don’t agree. There is a disconnect somewhere.”

Amidst discussions on financial contributions, participants expressed conditional support for increased funding, provided it directly contributes to visible improvements in policing: *“I think it depends on what it’s going to be used for, if you said to me ‘you pay the extra £15 a year in your council tax, you would get more frontline police’, yes I will do that.”* This indicates a willingness among some community members to invest more in local policing, albeit with assurances that such investments will lead to noticeable enhancements in service and safety.

The topic of resource allocation extended to the comparison of police visibility versus administrative or ‘behind-the-scenes’ functions. Discussions voiced a common desire for investments to yield visible, community-facing benefits rather than being absorbed by bureaucratic processes.

“I don’t just want to see money disappear. What am I getting for my investment?”

The dialogue also veered into scepticism regarding the stewardship of additional funds by the police force, with some participants articulating a lack of confidence in the force’s ability to spend effectively. Significantly, this was not solely a concern for the policing sector but extended to other public agencies. Balancing the scepticism was conversations highlighting the resident role in seeking information and taking greater responsibility in understanding and influencing local policing governance.

“My confidence is low with all of them, the NHS, local government, national government, police, everyone. I just don’t think they have the ability to spend wisely, either than or they don’t have residents’ best interests in mind.”

“I think we should see more information and it should be much more readily available how they have spent it, then we can make a judgement on someone like the police commissioner who’s an elected official who at the end of the day it’s our responsibility to make sure they’re doing their job by if they’re not, voting them out. But an element of that is down to our own responsibility. As I said, I would like to have a much better understanding of what the police do have and how they do it and how they spend our money because it’s our money, but the only person I can elect or not elect is the police and crime commissioner and I as a person who is interested in all things politics must admit, I’ve never gone looking for that information. It’s got to be out there, so to me, there’s an element of personal responsibility for all of us to care maybe a little bit more about things like electing a commissioner.”

A notable point of discussion was the concept of value for money and the direct impact of policing investments on the community’s sense of safety and the quality of police interactions.

“They want us to part with our money but realistically, we don’t have a choice in it, but they have a choice in how they invest it, and how it lines up with what the public want.”

“...and how it is communicated. I get they [Northamptonshire Police] can’t spoon feed information to residents in infinite different ways to please each and every one of us, but there does have to be some understanding that if they want investment, and moral support, they need to reach us in a way they aren’t currently doing.”

These perspectives reflect a community grappling with the nuances of supporting local policing with the condition for greater clarity, accountability, and evidence of effectiveness in how investments in local policing are managed and realised. The community’s conditional willingness to support increased funding hinges on assurances that such investments will lead to tangible improvements in public safety, police visibility, and the overall efficacy of policing efforts.

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

In stark contrast to the nuanced views on policing, the Fire & Rescue Service was consistently lauded for its efficiency and community involvement. This divergence in perception underlines the critical role that visibility, reliability, and proactive community engagement play in shaping public trust and confidence in emergency services. The difference in public sentiment towards the Fire & Rescue Service versus the police force suggests valuable lessons in community engagement and visibility that could inform policing strategies.

6.3 Gretton

The group was held online on the 6th February 2024. A total of eight residents from the Gretton area were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	31	Mixed Black British
Male	39	White British
Male	49	White British
Female	52	White British
Female	55	White British
Male	58	White British
Female	59	White British
Female	64	White British

Police visibility and responsiveness

Participants expressed a general sense of security in their local areas, though this feeling was tempered by the realities of stretched policing resources and the prioritisation of incidents. The presence, or often the absence, of police in daily life played a significant role in shaping these perceptions. One participant noted the rarity of seeing police patrols, which, while infrequent, contributed to a feeling of minimal local crime and thus a higher sense of security.

“I haven’t had to report anything so I can’t really comment on that, but there’s always the local village newsletter, there’s always the contact for the rural local police and I know where to go if I had a problem or if I needed to go to the parish council or whatever.”

Despite the limited visibility of police, the existence of local police contacts in community newsletters and their perceived availability in times of need were cited as reasons for feeling secure. This sense of security is further reinforced by the community’s minimal exposure to serious crimes, which appears to contribute to a somewhat complacent attitude towards safety measures:

“We had new neighbours and they said, ‘do you mind if we put a camera up?’ and after a few months he said ‘it’s quiet, isn’t it? I’m not sure we needed the camera’ but that gave us a thought of ‘oh, maybe we are too complacent’ but they’ve seen a difference in the village after coming from a different area.”

The focus group discussions also highlighted some positive experiences with local policing, particularly in terms of engagement and responsiveness to community needs. Several participants highlighted specific instances where local police officers played a crucial role in maintaining direct communication with residents and addressing community concerns.

“We always get feedback. I don’t know if you’ve got the same one, we have PC ###. He has been pulled away though the last few months, he’s been pulled away to Corby because they’ve been short, I think so we haven’t really had anyone, but he has always sent his reports in, he’s just acknowledged he’s coming to the council meeting tomorrow night, so he does always come even if he’s off duty.”

This testimony underscores the value placed on personal interactions and the presence of police officers at community meetings, which enhances trust and communication between the police and rural residents. The adaptability of local officers, as illustrated by their efforts to remain engaged with the community despite being stretched across multiple responsibilities, further contributes to positive perceptions.

A weakness noted by the residents was a reduction in the police estate, particularly the closure of police stations, seen as an additional barrier to connecting with the police and reporting crime.

“The lack of a police station is a really big thing and I think when we lost the Corby one, a lot of people went to the big building in Kettering and they’re like ‘you can’t report anything here’ so I think actually, I know we’ve got Corby Cube which is where you can go in, I think it was a big mistake to remove police stations.”

While some participants expressed dissatisfaction with the structural changes in local policing, such as the closure of police stations, there remains a recognition of the efforts made by individual officers to maintain a link with the communities they serve. The balancing act between resource allocation and maintaining a visible presence in rural areas continues to be a central theme in discussions about local policing in Northamptonshire.

“I get closing stations will save money, and maybe even promote a bit of enterprise, but there has to come a point where it costs what it costs, you can’t keep removing resource to save money and dress it up as innovation.”

“Eventually they will stop providing handcuffs and say it is a move towards talking therapy to restrain people. I think if they keep making the job harder, we will lose the few officers that are committed to the job.”

The focus group discussions in Gretton and surrounding rural areas of provided important insights into community perceptions regarding police visibility and responsiveness. These aspects are crucial in shaping customer satisfaction in policing services. The conversations revealed a nuanced picture, where visibility and responsiveness were sometimes seen as lacking, but there were also notable instances where the police effectively engaged with the community.

Visibility of the police, or the perceived lack thereof, was a recurring theme throughout the discussions. Participants often mentioned the infrequency of seeing police officers or patrol cars in their villages, which impacts their sense of safety and the perceived effectiveness of the police. One participant remarked on the rarity of seeing police presence.

“I just don’t have a sense of where they are, what they are doing, I did see a police car driving through the village yesterday which I think is the first one I’ve seen for ages, I suspect they were just driving through.”

The lack of regular police visibility in rural areas is often attributed to limited resources and the broader challenges of policing widespread and less populated areas. Participants expressed understanding but also concern about how this affects overall community safety.

“There’s only probably a small amount of rural crime officers throughout the whole of Northamptonshire, how are they going to cover the whole of Northamptonshire? That’s why I described them as ‘stretched’”

“The actual job they do is very good, but it’s made harder by the lack of officers, lack of resources and that side of things.”

“I also volunteer for Northamptonshire Search and Rescue so I do see the policing through that side of things as well and when I say stretched, it can be quite unnerving to think how few officers there are available at any point in Northamptonshire and it’s that balance of what is a priority at that time.”

Regarding responsiveness, the focus group participants discussed several aspects of how police respond to incidents and community needs. The effectiveness of this response varied significantly by type of incident and the specific circumstances surrounding it. Some community members felt that the response times were ‘adequate’, while others cited delays and a lack of follow-through as major concerns. An example of a positive interaction was shared by a participant who appreciated the quick response to a specific incident.

“It’s hard for me to say anything because I’ve had very little interaction with them. I’ve been here 14 years now and I’ve had my van broken into a couple of times and as always, they give you a crime number for your insurance and that’s probably about it. When it did get broken into the first time, they actually came out which is really unusual, it’s the first time I’d ever seen it actually. From London where I come from, that never happens. So, I was quite pleased by that really.”

“I think it’s quite strange how the expectation has changed now, we can be a victim of crime, but not expect the police to attend. It’s a funny thing.”

“If you were ill, you might not expect to see a consultant, but there is a sort of triage system, you can go to a doctor, go to a walk-in centre, even make a private appointment online, it’s not the same with crime and policing, it’s like the system hasn’t kept up with need, it has just been ground down.”

In contrast, another participant highlighted the inefficiency of the response process, especially when dealing with non-emergency situations that still require police attention.

“The communication method of trying to get someone out and for what isn’t an immediate crime but one which needs someone to go to is quite poor. So, I think they certainly need to look at their 101 mechanisms, you report it online and think ‘that’s going to be picked up probably’ and my perception is it’s going to be picked up the next day, but not immediately, so that’s why I described them as ‘fair.’”

The overall sentiment from the focus group suggests that while there are instances of effective policing, the general experience of police visibility and responsiveness in rural Northamptonshire could be improved. There was a sense of a moderate service but a fledgling view that it had not evolved to comprehensively respond to need.

“It is still very traditional, you ring, you get a response depending on what the incident is. You move it online; it hasn’t had much traction. 101 is congested and not well thought of. It just feels a little bit stuck.”

Similarly, the ongoing or follow-up process was criticised as inconsistent with residents describing an inequality throughout the journey which can have a positive initial response, with a deteriorating follow-up process, which for residents is equally important.

“We had a theft from the farm, and they responded reasonably well, the rural crime police were communicating, and someone had a look at the various sites to make sure our things weren’t there. But then they were supposed to come out and visit and they didn’t. The communication method of trying to get someone out for what isn’t an immediate crime but one which needs attendance is quite poor.”

Emerging and local priorities

During the focus group discussions in rural Gretton, community members expressed their concerns about various emerging priorities and crime types that are affecting their sense of security and trust in local policing efforts. These concerns are pivotal in understanding the changing landscape of rural crime and the corresponding needs for police attention and resources.

The participants identified specific types of crime that have increasingly become a concern for the community, highlighting the need for targeted police attention. One of the major issues raised was the prevalence of fly-tipping and theft, which participants felt were not adequately addressed by local police due to resource constraints. The impact of these crimes on the community is significant, prompting calls for greater police presence and action.

“Fly-tipping and theft I would say, I’m on East Carlton parish council so we have our beat bobby coming in who gives us updates. I think there’s a lot of community engagement but it’s not quite where it needs to be in terms of dealing with these things.”

“I think the fly-tipping and I guess the petty sort of stuff, the thefts from garden sheds like you say, it’s difficult for the people who it’s happened to of course, we’ve all had things happen but actually in the grand scheme of things, I think you can understand why it’s not given a priority.”

Another participant elaborated on the challenges posed by motorbike nuisance, which was identified as a specific and persistent problem emanating from nearby urban areas.

“I think we’ve had a bit of motorbike nuisance coming from Corby which I think they do report, they’re quite on top of it. They’ve cleared 100 and something motorbikes off the streets over the last year and it has definitely reduced the problem.”

In discussing the types of crime, participants noted a shift towards more petty crimes, such as thefts from garden sheds, which, while minor, significantly affect the victims’ sense of security. The focus group underscored the need for police to adapt their strategies to these seemingly lesser but impactful crimes.

“I think just theft we hear about, if someone has been broken into you just want that to be followed up but I know it’s not always a priority for them, is it when it’s just a garden shed type theft?”

“I understand they are possibly minor crimes, but they still affect people, and for me, it’s more about how this progresses to something more serious. First, it’s a shed, then it’s your home, then it’s you.”

The discussion also touched on the issue of vehicle crimes and the frustration with the perceived lack of police response to these incidents. One participant shared his repeated experiences with vehicle crime, underscoring the personal and financial toll it takes.

“One of my pet hates is vehicle crime because I’ve been broken into probably 11 times over the years, I’ve had 5 to £6,000 worth of tools at a time which are not easy to replace and normally if I’m going to be completely honest, it’s not massive amounts of people doing it, it’s normally one gang in each town and if they just fingerprinted it once, it would stop but they don’t, they never do.”

The conversations indicated a desire for the police to adjust their priorities to more effectively address the types of crimes that are becoming prevalent in rural areas. Community members expressed a need for improved communication and responsiveness from the police, suggesting that these adjustments could lead to better crime prevention and enhanced feelings of safety among rural residents.

Trust and confidence in local policing

The research conversations in Gretton highlighted varied perspectives on trust and confidence in local policing, which are critical indicators of community relations with the police force. Participants shared their experiences and perceptions, which illuminate the complex nature of trust and the factors that influence confidence in policing effectiveness.

Community members expressed mixed feelings about their trust in the local police, often shaped by personal experiences with crime response, police visibility, and the perceived effectiveness of police actions. While some residents felt reassured by their interactions with the police, others pointed to experiences that left them wanting better service and communication. One participant noted the influence of good communication on their confidence in the police.

“If I report something on 101 or online, it would be good to get a response to acknowledge ‘this is your auto crime number, but you only get a response within working hours and that’s only Monday to Friday 09:00-17:00 so it might take quite long to respond’”

Some participants felt that the police were effective in handling immediate and visible threats but were less adept at dealing with ongoing or less urgent concerns.

“I’ve probably got more faith than the media would say I should have, there’s an awful lot of media bashing and putting fear into people because of the way in which certain outlets, BBC, Sky sort of egg things up and put out worst case scenarios.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The Gretton group provided valuable insights into the community’s willingness to support local policing through increased financial contributions via the precept. Participants discussed their perspectives on funding for local policing, emphasising the importance of seeing tangible results from their investment.

Many residents expressed a readiness to support increases in the precept if it would lead to improvements in police visibility, responsiveness, and overall effectiveness. There was a consensus that additional funding was necessary to address the challenges faced by local police, particularly in terms of resources and the ability to maintain a consistent presence in rural areas. However, this willingness was conditional upon clear accountability and evidence of effective use of the funds.

“I’ve no problem with increasing the contribution, I don’t see any issue with that. Concerning the recruitment of the PCSO’s, a lot of them have been internally recruited from PCSOs to full officers, which is a sound use of investment. Putting them back into the communities they know with greater powers puts a visible and familiar presence on the streets again. That should be a pathway they develop, recruit PCSOs with a view to them developing.”

This quote reflects a specific expectation that increased funding should directly result in greater police presence and capability, such as through the reinstatement or enhancement of the PCSO roles that have been reduced or restructured.

Participants highlighted the need for transparency and accountability in how additional funds would be managed and utilised. There was a keen awareness of past inefficiencies and a desire for assurance that new resources would not be squandered.

“It’s alright charging more money but it all comes down to how well that money is managed and that’s exactly the same with any other public service, we do keep throwing money at all these services and you have to question how well that money is being spent, hence this discussion.”

“I don’t think this is just a police challenge, it’s a public sector challenge, does the money flow down to operational grass roots, where it is needed? If it doesn’t, I am less inclined to support it.”

“I think it is interesting, we naturally look at the confidence we have in officers and perhaps have less scrutiny on those holding budgets, which is possibly where some of the problems lay.”

The quote illustrates the critical view residents hold regarding the management of funds, indicating that any increase in the precept must be justified by demonstrable improvements in service delivery.

The discussions also revealed a nuanced view of trust in local governance and policing, shaped by both personal experiences and broader perceptions of institutional performance. While there was some optimism about the potential for improvements with increased funding, there was also a cautious approach to fully trusting that the funds would be used as intended.

“I agree with the point about this is just bigger than policing. It feels like as a country, we are inviting challenges without the means to manage it. I would support investment in policing, but my caveat is it needs to be better joined up. The same scrutiny should be placed on health, government, the CPS, fire and rescue and youth services. This is not just a police issue; everything should be held to a higher standard.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

During the group conversations, participants also shared their perceptions of the Fire & Rescue Service, alongside their views on local policing. The conversations revealed a generally positive outlook towards the Fire & Rescue Service, with participants citing specific instances of effective response and professionalism.

Participants expressed high regard for the capabilities and efficiency of the Fire & Rescue Service. Their experiences with the service were characterised by prompt responses and effective handling of emergencies, which significantly contributed to a positive perception.

“I had a couple of incidents with fire and rescue, one was a fire on a car and the response was so quick and efficient, really, really good. They also randomly rescued a goat twice, it got its head stuck but the response each time was amazing, and it was professional, it was quick, and it was the communication, I think. I know the goat thing sounds odd, but I had the same standard of response to the trapped goat as I did the fire.”

“I think there’s a bit of a difference with fire to the police from the perspective that they are all trained to a better standard, there’s a very big differentiation in the police. Some of them don’t have a clue what’s going on and they’re just waiting for the end of their shift, through to very, very well-trained officers. With fire they all appear and come across as very trained in what they do, with little separation between them.”

This quote highlights the appreciation for the swift and professional actions of the Fire & Rescue teams during critical incidents, which not only resolved the immediate crises but also demonstrated their readiness and effectiveness.

The discussion often compared the Fire & Rescue Service favourably against local policing, especially in terms of response times and visible presence during emergencies. Residents noted that unlike their experiences with local policing, interactions with the Fire and Rescue Service left them feeling more secure and attended to.

“The comparison then to the fire service response is, you know they’re going to be there quick when you call them, the police, you’ve got no idea.”

“I think it is difficult to compare to the two, they are very different beasts, there is a lot more diversity in what the police have to respond too.”

“...I take that point, but what I would say is, the fire and rescue response is consistent, the police response isn’t. I would be interested to see call-out figures for each, in relation to their capacity or staff numbers, and measure it that way.”

This sentiment underscores a perceived discrepancy in the immediacy and reliability of responses between the two services, with the Fire & Rescue Service seen as more dependable in times of need.

Trust in the Fire & Rescue Service was notably strong among the participants, fostered by direct, positive interactions that built confidence in the service’s ability to handle emergencies effectively. This trust contrasts with the more mixed feelings expressed about local policing and raises questions about increasing the synergy between the two services.

“Anyone who deals with fire and rescue or the police or anyone in emergency services, they deal with the real extremes, horrible scenes they go to, so they have to be very tight nit and very together as an organisation. I’ve had some friends who have tried to be retained fire fighters and the restriction on them when they’re on call to be retained, it’s very limiting, you really must be committed to the role.”

“Do we end up with a single emergency service, multi-trained police, fire and rescue and paramedics? Is that the ultimate outcome, they don’t try and learn from but basically morph into one group? Fire fighters than can arrest, paramedics that can respond to fires?”

“I think in other sectors you have shared resources, co-located services, that is how you find efficiencies, may be that is the move for the public sector or at least the emergency services.”

7.0

Wellingborough Groups

7.0 Wellingborough Groups

7.1 Public Perception

The group was held at Wellingborough Cricket Club in Wellingborough on the 8th February 2024. A total of eight Wellingborough (Hatton Park area) residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	19	White British
Female	23	Indian
Male	25	White British
Female	30	Mixed White and Black Caribbean
Female	40	White British
Male	53	White British
Male	55	White British
Female	63	White British

When the group first started to consider how they felt about local policing and Northamptonshire Police as a whole it was clear most of the group had previous experience of the service, mainly as a victim or witness of a crime. There was mixed feedback in terms of their experience with many positives around the manner and attitude of officers and staff involved.

“Over the phone the woman was quite rude considering it was an emergency, she wasn’t really taking it as an emergency and then when the police finally got to me, they weren’t really asking if I was alright or anything like that, they wanted to get it done. Then when court and stuff was going through, I was getting lied to and stuff like that, it just wasn’t really making sense anything they were saying.”

“I felt there was good procedure and I felt it was followed up quite well. I think they dealt with it very well, they haven’t caught him but once again, the communication, different people have said very different things. But I felt that process was very different to what I kind of feel I experience just living in Wellingborough and how safe I feel. So, I felt they were reassuring, they called me, I had a follow up call, I had the forensics out, I really didn’t expect that, then I had another follow-up call, and someone brought me a leaflet. They were really, really on it and I had ‘you can go for this counselling’ or whatever was on this leaflet.”

“In my case they did follow a process. It didn’t actually reassure me particularly that they were going to catch any criminals and that would be ultimately what the goal would be. Although I got leaflets, and they did a follow up call and everything and that was all great and they attended. The forensic girl was amazing, she was like ‘I’ve taken a glass sample and if you can take some off his clothes in the next 2 hours, we’ve got him’ and the other guy rolled his eyes at her literally. I loved her enthusiasm, she was like ‘yeah we’ve got a picture of him, they’re going to circulate it’ which I think they did, but there was still this overriding unless they stumbled across them, therefore it doesn’t give you high confidence does it? So yes, the procedure was there, yes, I’ve been followed up, yes I’ve been dealt with very well as a customer in that kind of sense and I’ve been dealt with for any trauma, that was good and they’ve dealt with me very, very well but I didn’t feel like they were going to go and solve it particularly. If something had fallen in their lap, if anyone had recognised that picture, that was basically as much as they were going off.”

“Yeah, the lady who took statements and stuff with my case, she listened, and she cared about your emotional wellbeing. I think she was good.”

Feelings of safety

Most attendees said that they did feel safe in their local area and much of this was attributed to familiarity, however there was a general concern about Wellingborough town centre, with very few suggesting they felt safe at any time in the centre itself. This was even more so amongst female residents.

“I’ve lived here 26 years and I’ve never had any issues and I lived in the town for 22 of them and I live on the Queens Way but now I won’t even go into the town centre unless I have to.”

“The drugs, it’s a pandemic in Wellingborough, I have never seen anything like it, and I was a social worker in the Caribbean where it’s corrupt as hell, I’ve never seen so much drug use in my life. I’ve had the mayor at my house because I’ve people taking crack and heroin outside my backdoor, this is ridiculous, and I honestly don’t know what the police can possibly do.”

“I wouldn’t say I’ve ever felt unsafe in Wellingborough or had a reason to, but it is getting worst, and you can feel it, I’ve started to see drug use a bit, people taking drugs, not smoking weed because people have different views on that but actually taking drugs.”

“I would say it’s changed. I’d say on Hatton Park Road we’ve had various individual assaults on houses that haven’t happened in the past, racial attacks, cars damaged, we had a drugs den on the corner of the street that took 8 months to evict them. There were chaps in the street without any shoes on, there was some chap collapsed from been high on drugs the other night, that’s not the street I grew up in so I would say it’s a big difference.”

“The actual town centre I would say it’s really changed in the last 10 years. I think 10 years ago I probably would have let my daughter go shopping, I wouldn’t now. There’s been various events, the other day just walking out of town there’s a man hiding behind a tree as I’m walking with my kids, you have no idea, in that split second, you’re like ‘is he taking a wee? Is he going to stab us?’”

“I stopped the other day in traffic, and I could see people were outside their cars, so I got out thinking there’d been an accident and went dashing along, left my kids in the car and saw two women in the street with a man who looked like he’d collapsed. He was just completely off his face on drugs and was in the middle of the street, middle of the day and in that split second I looked at him and was like ‘okay, he’s either completely unhinged, in which case we could be at risk because he could be schizophrenic and do anything because he’s not here right now, or he’s off his face on drugs, I just don’t want to go to town anymore.”

“People are more paranoid at Lightroom because it’s dark, you’re never going to remove all of that because it’s just a sign of the times but it’s quite bad during the day now.”

Emerging and local priorities

The issues highlighted around feelings of safety and the town centre inevitably led to the majority of the group identifying this as an issue that should be a local policing priority and that the drug dealing and drug taking should be at the forefront of their thinking as this is what concerns local residents the most within the group.

“The intimidating groups of people with their hoods up and their hats on. I’ll cross the street if I see them in town, I’ve seen them smash windows in the middle of town, there’s just no one around to stop them, this really needs sorting out.”

“In Wellingborough it’s quite clear the drugs and the alcohol are quite bad, is there any way to join those so there’s some training around drug use and drug users and there is a gang kind of mentality here. I wouldn’t necessarily say they’re gangs but they’re still antagonising, it’s still intimidating, and they don’t have any respect for anybody.”

“One of the things Wellingborough has got that I guess is launching all over the country are all these Voi scooters, they’re on the pavements, they’re in everyone’s way, they’re really dangerous, there’s no police to stop them. Why aren’t the police telling those people to get off the paths and if you don’t have any police presence and in Wellingborough, I don’t know about elsewhere, but I imagine it’s similar elsewhere, it’s mainly drug dealers on those. Drug dealers managing to get their drugs around Wellingborough quite quickly, scooters dumped all over where you like, often in places where you know there’s just been a drug deal, like at the end of our road.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

Attendees did feel that visibility needed to be increased, especially in the town centre to help tackle the issues mentioned above and that more presence would help residents feel safer, there was a degree of defeatism within the group, however, with several that said additional policing is not the answer or would never be enough.

“I don’t think I ever see foot patrols apart from the odd PCSO, it would certainly not be a bad thing but not sure it is the answer.”

“I’ve not seen a copper in 20 or 30 years.”

“I saw a police presence once when there was a small outdoor farm they put outside, but I would assume there’d be a lot more police presence in town because I don’t know if they’re planed clothes maybe but it’s necessary, it’s like Armageddon now, it’s ridiculous, you would need hundreds of police.”

“On a Friday and Saturday night you see the police cars parked up as you drive through town sometimes. There is more of a presence on a Friday and Saturday night, there always has been in Wellingborough. I wouldn’t let my daughter walk around town in general, I don’t think Wellingborough town is safe enough for a 13-year-old girl to walk around.”

“You go back in the day however many years and you’d see foot patrols and, in those days, people were scared of police officers, but I think even if there was more of a presence, I don’t think it would make much difference because the empowerment they have, the youths nowadays don’t care. Police officers are obviously restricted to what they can say or can’t say, or they’ll try and sue them for manhandling them or something and I don’t think they’re scared. I don’t think it will make one iota of a difference to be honest with the sort of youths you’re talking about.”

Attendees were surprised to hear that the force currently had the highest number of officers on record at over 1,500 and said that this was not represented in Wellingborough.

“Is that per person, for the population? The population in Wellingborough 20 years ago is nowhere near what it is now, so 20 years ago we could have X amount of officers and now we could have Y amount of officers which is more but there’s more people in Wellingborough, Wellingborough is growing left, right and centre with all the new estates and that. So is it per person or is it just a statistic of there’s more police officers.”

“Certainly not in Wellingborough.”

“Well, where are they all then because they are in Wellingborough very often.”

There were generally high levels of empathy for Northamptonshire Police and the perceived challenges they faced in terms of levels of funding and resources against in contrast to the increasing challenges the force faced in Wellingborough and other parts of the county. The group highlighted the need for other partners to work more effectively to ensure the issues around drug and alcohol subside and the area feel safer and that this was a wider issue than just policing.

“It’s more holistic, you can’t look at it and go ‘there’s more drug use, the police aren’t doing their jobs properly’. People turn to these things when maybe they’re not in a good state and I think that’s a reflection of social care not been there, proper education and things like that. I think education is quite good but is there enough support for young people and people with mental health problems or are they more likely to go ‘I’m having a really bad time; I’ll do some drugs.’”

“They’ve taken a lot of funding out of mental health services; I do think that has made a huge effect because if you look at the people the council are moving and they’re just moving them around different flats because they make themselves intentionally homeless and take drugs in it. I was literally living opposite a working prostitute who was also a drug user, it’s madness.”

“It just feels like in Wellingborough that’s where all the bad stuff happens but it’s not just a police responsibility.”

“It’s so holistic, we do think the drugs and alcohol social groups, they should get together and work with the police, so should the schools and I don’t know if there are any youth clubs, to kind of target the town area. We can justify why it’s like this and whatever, I don’t know how it’s just been policed.”

“I think I’ve been on the other side of it, I’ve grown up like that, I’ve been in and out of care my entire life, drug use was a big problem within the family, within me. So, with social workers and stuff like that, I’ve never really had a bad experience of social workers, but I don’t think police and social workers really communicate as much as they should. It’s like having all those issues and having all of those drug problems and having people look down on you like that, I think it’s hard to talk to the police and social workers and they’re not communicating.”

“But it was looking at funding as well, so everywhere has been cut back, cut back, cut back so when you have that, you don’t have enough resources.”

“And that’s the thing, ultimately we know that there is an issue with the police and funding and it’s a very stressful job, how are they supposed to be able to do a good job when they have their hands tied behind their backs constantly.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Most agreed that national media did have an impact on how residents feel about their local police force and that national media, especially news reports did affect confidence and trust, most agreed it was to ignore and even though the two should be separated most agreed the constant negative headlines does ultimately “make you think twice”.

“I’ve personally not had any dealings thankfully with the police so it’s difficult to comment on that, but I will say you see in the news, on the telly, in the papers all of the police officer that have done something wrong, it’s brought to everyone’s attention and then a lot of people will tar all the forces with that same brush. In The Met you have problems and there’s bad apples everywhere, but it shouldn’t be tarnishing the whole establishment with just those.”

“It doesn’t affect me because I see it differently, but I’d say there’s a high percentage of people that would tarnish everyone with that brush.”

“I think the nation has just a general lack of trust and confidence in all core roles at the moment, even down to teachers. It’s horrible what happened, and we do think ‘oh gosh’ but we know they’re overworked, and we all know now what life is like, nothing is that simple, it’s a scapegoat system or whatever. I don’t think any of us have real trust or confidence, if there was a riot that kicked off tomorrow or tonight in Wellingborough town centre would you feel safe and confident?”

Confidence in local policing was low with an average of 4 out of 10 with no one scoring their overall confidence in local policing higher than a 5. This was mainly driven by the levels of crime already discussed in this section of the report Confidence tended to be higher from those that had experience of the service, however this was diluted through concern around increasing local issues and the perceived lack of resources.

“I’d probably say 4, I’ve been thinking as we’ve been talking about all the problems locally and how hard it is to stop it all, I hear about a lot of breaks in locally as well.”

“I’d probably say a 5 from experience, even though they were friendly, we didn’t get an outcome or hear anything back.”

“I’d say 4 because I’ve not experienced anything but I’m aware that a lot of other people have experienced issues.”

“I’d say a 4 or 5, what can the police do? The poverty line is so bad in Northamptonshire I believe, I’m still fresh off the boat I guess, it’s been a year and it’s a big job, I don’t know what you do. I definitely think all those agencies should be working with the police.”

“I think it might have changed to a 7, it’s just check-ups afterwards and actually spending the time.”

“It’s a 4 because Wellingborough is what it is, it’s a poverty-stricken town.”

“Probably, as much confidence you can have in someone trying to manage a problem that’s too big for them.”

“But that’s because you’re a married mother in Hatton Park Road, I’m a Caribbean girl in Wellingborough town so when I call them, they don’t bloody come and when they do come, they don’t help.”

Information and the power of social media in particular in terms of keeping residents informed was considered with many attendees already able to cite articles and platforms that they regularly read and hear about local policing which perhaps did not directly affect their confidence it did seem to drive a more positive perception of the force and performance.

“I do see a lot about them on social media in general.”

“Facebook, I see a lot of it on Facebook and I think that shapes your opinion a lot. I think with the last question in mind, if I’d had lots of positive experiences, I still think looking at it on Facebook when they put out an appeal for somebody a month after that would have been in anyone’s mind and stuff, you look at it. The news and Facebook.”

“There are two I think, you’ve got Wellingborough News and Info and you’ve got Spotted Wellingborough. You’ll always get similar in each where it’s like ‘this bin has been set on fire overnight.’”

“I think the Facebook page for the missing children is a brilliant way of communicating.”

“I think we all look at social media, I think that’s a good way to reach us. I don’t think emails would be that affective now.”

There was little awareness of Northamptonshire Talking within the group and whilst no-one was signed up to it, several said it sounded like an effective source of information and others argued that emails are less effective than social media.

“I think it’s a bit outdated to do email alerts, I just don’t think that’s how people would consume information really.”

“I was told about it though; I’d never even heard about it but that was one of the fliers. I think I was been told because my burglary was about to be put on it, then they said ‘you can sign up to all these different places as well’ and maybe I went down a dark route in my head because they said ‘you can sign up even if you don’t live in that area, so that you could sign up for your mum and things’ and I thought ‘if you were a burglar, you’d sign up to all of these and see what information is out there.’”

“I like the idea of it, almost an electronic newsletter that you can delete once read and I guess you always have the option to drop out or forward in if you think its relevant to anyone you know.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

Whilst there was no real push back on an increase in council tax to maintain current levels and further develop the workforce, attendees did want to see a difference locally and that there must be a level of output that resonates with residents. There were several attendees that said they had not seen any change despite continual increase in their council tax year on year and this in itself must change to justify an increase.

“I don’t think that’s a lot of money, £13 a year. It pays a police officer for one hour of time maybe.”

“I think it’s a return in investment, if you’re asked to pay more and you can see a visible difference to community policing you think ‘that was money well spent’. If you’re paying more money and nothing changes, you think ‘well, you’re taking an extra £50 off me a year and I’m not seeing any difference.’”

“More policing and more security cameras. I know people talk about big brother, but I think a lot more cameras.”

“If the investment shows something. As you said, if we’re seeing no improvement in any area than why are we having to pay?”

“I think in the town personally it would be targeted response to what you see on the streets and specific areas and the way I would like to feel communicated in the sense of how I felt my money was going further, would be to actually feel safer. That’s how I want to feel, that my money is being used properly is to reassure me I am in a safer place and that would be targeting the areas I know people congregate, therefore they know people congregate and whether that’s a daily ‘we know people congregate here, we need to keep them moving on.’”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

A couple of attendees had experience of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service both of which spoke very positively of the interaction and there was a general positive perception of the service from all other attendees.

“It was lovely, I got my beautiful council flat, went into the bathroom and got locked in and the fire brigade came, and they were lovely, attractive, lovely men.”

“I bet everyone’s confidence is slightly different as well, if you went around and got your scores for fire, I bet they’d be quite different.”

“The fire brigade risk their lives but so do police, especially now. We all have respect for them, we’re probably the last generation left that has respect for them.”

“The fireman when they came that day, I said, ‘I’m so sorry’ and they said ‘don’t worry, we’ve had no jobs’. They were bored. I just thought it’s kind of reassuring to think there’s all these firemen there waiting.”

7.2 Earls Barton and surrounding areas

The group was held at virtually, on the 13th of February 2024. A total of eight residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	22	White British
Female	28	White European
Female	35	White British
Male	40	Indian
Female	43	White British
Female	54	White British
Male	61	White British
Male	68	White British

The community’s perception of safety in Earls Barton and its surrounding areas has been shaped significantly by past experiences and interactions with local policing. The opinion expressed by residents highlighted a generally positive atmosphere, influenced by the proactive engagement and responsiveness of local police officers.

Residents have reported a heightened sense of security, attributing this to the visible presence of police in the area. This presence is not only reassuring but has been described as a 'deterrent' against potential crime.

"I always see a patrol car in the evenings, which makes me feel a lot safer when I am out in an evening, walking my dog."

"I think if people have any bad intentions, and they see police patrolling they are going to think twice, that is a large part of the value of them being seen."

Feelings of safety

The approachability and helpfulness of the officers have been pivotal in fostering a cooperative relationship between the community and the police. There was also reference to the sense of community in the area and an indication of neighbourliness which also contributes to a sense of safety.

"I think the officers are really approachable. Last month, I had a concern about a suspicious car near my house, and they were here to check on it within ten minutes."

"I feel safe in Earls Barton just because of environment. I feel privileged to live here, I live in nice part of the village, I feel perfectly safe, I don't necessarily give credit to the police for that, it's the social environment, too."

Residents reiterated the concept of a vigilant community which served as a vehicle to self-police and promote feelings of safety.

"I feel very safe in Mears Ashby, I think it's more to do with the people and the environment, the village is quite small, and everyone knows each other, and I feel safe there."

"I generally feel quite safe, but I think that's down to the individual and the community I am in. You see incidents happening or that have happened, my concern would be, 'where do you go with it and who would you call?'; no one seems to have any confidence that somebody will respond in terms of authority, which probably motivates people to be more vigilant. I'd call it a thin blue line with limited resource because people aren't seeing the police around."

The research conversation revealed that residents, not unlike in other areas of Northamptonshire, often used other, nearby places as a reference point for feelings of safety. Consulting Earls Barton and surrounding areas, that reference was typically referred to as Wellingborough.

"I go to Wellingborough quite a lot, I think that's a worse area and you tend to see more things there, kids hanging around the car park, year 7, year 8 kids just hanging around and causing mischief. It's not a case they need prosecuting but if there was some sort of presence to disperse them perhaps."

“We don’t have any major problems with drugs or anything like that which is great, but when we go to Wellingborough for food shopping for example, I don’t feel very safe there.”

The positive experiences of policing extended beyond reactive measures to include community outreach programs that have been well-received by the residents. These programs have not only informed the community about safety measures but also established a platform for dialogue, which has been beneficial for both the police and the community.

“Our local police ran a safety workshop at the community centre, and it was packed. It’s great to see them involved like that, engaging the community and being out in front of things.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

The aspect of police visibility and responsiveness has emerged as a significant factor in shaping the community’s perception and interaction with local policing in Earls Barton and surrounding areas. Residents have expressed appreciation for the consistent presence of police, which they associate with a swift response to incidents and inquiries.

The visibility of police patrols and the frequency of their rounds in the neighbourhood have been noted as reassuring to the community, underscoring a preventive approach to crime.

“I see the police patrol at least twice a day around the main park, it definitely makes you feel like someone is always watching out for us.”

“I think I see them fairly regularly. What I would say is, it is always in a car, rarely, if ever, on foot.”

In terms of responsiveness, the local police have been commended for their quick action in times of need, demonstrating a commitment to maintaining safety and addressing community concerns promptly.

“When we reported some vandalism near the local shop, the police were here almost immediately. They took it very seriously, which is how it felt to us.”

Additionally, the engagement of police with residents during routine patrols or at community events has also been positively received, as it promotes an environment of open communication and cooperation.

“During the festival last summer, the police were on hand not just for security but also to interact with people, showing they’re part of the community.”

“I think they are good at attending local events, them and the fire brigade.”

Overall, the effectiveness of local policing in Earls Barton and surrounding areas is greatly enhanced by their visibility and responsiveness.

Importance of communication and engagement

Communication was also considered positive, generally, more so when it was focus on general engagement rather than in response to a specific incident.

Residents appreciated the clarity and frequency of communication from the police, which keeps them informed about safety issues and ongoing initiatives within the community. Regular updates via community meetings, newsletters, and social media have been particularly well-received.

“The monthly newsletter from the station is really informative; it lets us know what’s happening and what to look out for.”

“I like the sort of heads-up; it gives the community something to focus on rather than just being generally nose-y neighbours. It feels a bit more collaborative with some guidance.”

Furthermore, the accessibility and openness of communication channels, allowing residents to easily report concerns and receive feedback, have been essential in building a trusting relationship.

“I can easily call or even email our local officer about anything that seems off. They always get back to me quickly.”

“It’s reassuring to know that they’re just a phone call away and that they actually listen to our concerns.”

Overall, effective communication practices have significantly contributed to enhancing the relationship between the police and the community, fostering a safer and more engaged environment.

Emerging and local priorities

The changing landscape of crime and community concerns in Earls Barton and its surrounding areas highlighted several emerging priorities that local policing is adapting to address. The residents have noted shifts in both the nature of incidents and the focal points of local policing efforts.

Recent conversations with the community indicated a growing concern over digital crimes, such as online fraud and identity theft, which are becoming increasingly prevalent, and residents considered they are perhaps naive to the changing nature of risk.

“There’s a lot of talk about protecting yourself online. A neighbour recently fell victim to an email scam.”

“I think people still protect themselves and their property, they are less aware of how to protect their digital life – is that the right word for it?”

Issues related to drug-related activities have been identified as a priority. The community has expressed particular concern about the rise in drug use and its associated impacts on local young people and safety although do not identify this exclusively as a police concern.

“We’ve started noticing more drug activity in the area, which is worrying. We think it is do with the younger people. It’s something that’s come up in the last year or so.”

“I was very surprised a few weeks ago during mid-afternoon walk, I was approached by a teenager asking if I had any drugs on me. I’m a guy in my 60’s, I thought it was very strange, but on the recreation ground, the rec, there’s a shelter there and very frequently there are younger people smoking cannabis and no one turns a hair really. I’m not saying it’s a den of iniquity, I just think it’s not a habit that I would want young people in Earls Barton to be pursuing without challenge or question.”

“It’s more a social issue than a crime issue, it’s not hard drugs or dealing, I’m just concerned for their welfare. Thinking back to previous areas I’ve lived and contacted the police, I’m not sure the police are best placed to respond to the issues of social welfare.”

The need for heightened measures against property crimes, including burglaries and vehicle thefts, was also emphasised by residents, reflecting a demand for increased police vigilance and preventive strategies.

“Burglaries have been on the rise around here. Just last week, there was another break-in a few streets over.”

“I think burglaries are the things I hear most about. I probably that and drug crime, but I think I am getting a little desensitised to drug stuff, it is becoming normal, but I do sit up and take notice of burglaries.”

These shifts necessitate a responsive adaptation in local policing strategies to address the evolving crime patterns and safeguard community well-being. It was also an opportunity to test awareness of the mandated response to all burglaries.

“I didn’t know that happened. I suppose the ones [burglaries] I am aware of did get a police response, but I wasn’t aware that this might not have happened in the past.”

“Initiatives like that would be good to know, even if it doesn’t stop it happening, just a mail drop across the villages when things like that come in to play would be useful.”

“You would think if residents were told about that sort of thing, burglars would also hear about it, so it would be soft sort of deterrent.”

“...I think there are a lot of things that don’t get communicated enough, things aligned to resident rights, if that’s not too strong. I learnt about the Victim Code and what you should have if you are a victim of crime, everyone should know about it.”

Overall, the identification of these emerging crime types and priorities underscores the need for continuous engagement between the community and police to address and mitigate these challenges effectively.

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing are pivotal elements in the relationship between the community and local policing. In Earls Barton and surrounding areas, these aspects are strongly influenced by residents’ direct experiences and perceptions of police effectiveness, accountability, and engagement.

Community trust has been positively impacted by the perceived integrity and professionalism of local officers. Residents commend the police for their principled approach and consistent adherence to ethical standards.

“You can tell they really care about doing the right thing, which makes you trust them more.”

Confidence in the police is further bolstered by their active participation in community life. Residents appreciate when officers go beyond traditional duties to engage with the community on a personal level.

“It’s nice to see officers at school events and local gatherings, showing that they are part of the community.”

The effectiveness of police responses to incidents also plays a critical role in shaping public trust. When residents see timely and appropriate actions being taken, their confidence in the police’s ability to manage safety increases.

“The quick response when we had a break-in really restored my faith in our local police.”

The influence of national media on trust and confidence in local policing cannot be understated, as it significantly shapes public perceptions and attitudes. However, Earls Barton residents considered the national press, which is often negative, as a separate entity to their local police service.

“You see all these stories about police problems elsewhere, and it could make you second guess our own cops, even though they’ve been fine here.”

“I read the stories of police officers sharing pictures, mistreating women and things, but I don’t immediately see Northamptonshire Police through that lens, these are separate police forces, elsewhere.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The willingness of residents in Earls Barton and surrounding areas to financially support local policing through increased investment and the policing precept reflects a perspective on community safety and local policing efficacy. Understanding this willingness is crucial in gauging the level of community investment in maintaining and enhancing local police services.

Residents recognised the direct link between their financial contributions through the precept and the level of policing services they receive. Many expressed a readiness to support increases in the precept if it results in tangible improvements in policing effectiveness and community safety.

“If paying a bit more means more patrols and quicker responses, I think it’s worth it.”

However, this willingness was contingent upon clear communication from police authorities regarding how funds are utilised and the expected outcomes of increased financial investment. Transparency in budget allocation and outcomes is key to maintaining and increasing resident support.

“I don’t mind paying more, but I want to know exactly what it’s going for and how it will affect our community.”

“...same, I am happy to pay more, probably more than is recommended, but I want to be informed what it gets and why.”

The dialogue between the community and police about fiscal matters and the tangible benefits derived from increased funding highlights a proactive approach to community policing. Residents are generally supportive, provided they perceive their contributions as effectively enhancing local policing capabilities.

“It’s all about seeing results. If we can see the difference, then it’s easier to justify paying more.”

“It’s a funny one, in some respects I pay for other services, and I am not completely clear what I get for it. You could say council tax and I equate it to bin collections, but the council tax is more than just that.”

“The problem I have with that is, streets are clean, roads are generally okay, water is on, electricity is on, I see positive results for my payments. Within policing it isn’t as obvious. We are all generally happy, but things are worse now than they used to be. I’d still pay more; I just think it needs to be a bit more transactional.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The perception of the Fire & Rescue Service among residents of Earls Barton and its surrounding areas is overwhelmingly positive, reflecting an appreciation for their effectiveness. This positive view is supported by the residents' personal experiences and observations of the fire service's responsiveness and competence.

Residents have noted the swift response times and visibility of the fire and rescue service during incidents, which significantly contributes to their sense of security and safety in the community.

“They arrived so quickly when the fire broke out at the old mill; their speed was literally lifesaving.”

“I am quite close to the fire service as my brother-in-law is one of them, he joined 5 years ago and he’s very happy. I think there’s a difference between the police force and fire fighters in the sense I can see my brother-in-law out every day he’s on shift so that’s fantastic and I would like to see that as well in the police.”

The professionalism and preparedness of the fire service personnel are frequently highlighted by the community. These qualities are seen as vital to the effectiveness of the service provided.

“Every time we’ve needed them, they’ve been nothing but professional and well-prepared.”

The ongoing engagement of the fire and rescue service with the community through educational programs and safety workshops has helped to foster a strong bond between the service and the residents. These interactions also enhance community safety awareness.

“The fire safety workshop they did at the school was fantastic. The kids learned a lot, and so did I.”

While the perception of Fire & Rescue was explicitly positive, there was not a significant variation in how Earls Barton residents saw them, versus how they saw Northamptonshire Police.

7.3 Wellingborough

The group was held at the Castle Theatre in Wellingborough the 11th January 2024. A total of nine Wellingborough residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	24	White British
Male	27	White British
Female	29	White British
Female	46	White British
Female	47	White British
Female	48	White British
Male	51	White British
Male	62	Black African
Female	63	White British

Police visibility and responsiveness

Attendee's initial thoughts on Northamptonshire Police were mixed, however attendees unprompted, used words such as 'invisible', 'remote', 'overstretched', 'a 'rarity', 'too young' and 'underfunded'.

"We're seeing a lot more younger police in the force which could sometimes be to the detriment as they haven't had as much training as the senior staff. I know a lot of the coppers you see on the street now you think 'bloody hell, I'm 5-6 years older than them."

"It's a sympathetic overstretch. In my work we see a lot of anti-social behaviour, there's so much going on that you don't see that they have to deal with, it just doesn't get recognised a lot of it. I think they do seem invisible a lot of the time because you don't see, they're not on the beat walking around like they used to be when I was young, but they are out there doing a lot of other things. I work in homelessness so I work with people with addiction and mental health problems and the amount of work they have to do just in violent residents, which you wouldn't see if you didn't live in those areas. The county lines and everything they have to deal with, the drugs around the area is massive."

“Underfunded, I’m a safeguarding social worker in child protection and I see a lot of the time where perhaps we need the police to help us on a particular thing, but they just don’t come out because they don’t have the resources. We’ve seen on the news the amount of police officers has gone down and the population is going up, we’ve got lots of new estates and police officer numbers are going down. So obviously more people, cases are going to go up.”

A lack of visibility around Wellingborough was an issue for the majority of the group, almost all agreed that they would like to see more uniformed officers and patrol cars as many said that crime and disorder in and around the town was getting worse.

“It’s a deterrent and it would make me feel safer.”

“Is that down to local police stations getting shut down and replaced with hubs for miles and miles and miles. If you had some officers on the street, it would make people feel a lot better and safer.”

“Presence, you don’t see anybody, it’s not just about being on the street, you don’t see anything. I don’t use social media an awful lot, but I never see anything from the police on social media. To me, I don’t know that they’re there, I don’t know they exist.”

“Wellingborough is extending massively, I’m worried that Wellingborough is going to become quite a big town and if they don’t increase the number of officers.”

When the group were informed of the current number of officers working for Northamptonshire Police, there was instant scepticism based on the fact they felt they saw very few police officers in their area.

“But how many boots are actually on the floor?”

“The thing is, obviously the population of Northamptonshire has gone up, how does that? You know, 1,500 for a million people, it might have been 1,400 for half a million before.”

“And they’re not all working at the same time.”

“It’s almost like ‘look, we’ve got the most police officers we’ve ever had’ and they sell it that way.”

“And it’s retaining them because they got rid of all the older ones.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

There was a perception that Northamptonshire Police and UK policing in general is lacking experience and that most of local officers “look too young”, this was mentioned from attendees of all ages, and it did to some extent affect confidence.

“I’m gobsmacked at how young the police are these days; they all look younger than me and I’m only 23.”

“The growth of the youngsters as well, if you’ve got all these youngsters coming through, are they going to be confident enough to go out on the streets at night by themselves or with someone else? I think you need more senior officers which is hard because if senior officers are leaving, the best way to get them back in is to promote youth, but there’s going to be a process of getting them to that stage.”

“They are all so young, you think ‘what are they going to be able to do if at all kicks off?’ I think as well, the salary for an entry level police officer is not very good compared to what other jobs you can get. So, it’s almost like why would someone who is 35, got 2 kids want to train to be a police officer when the entry salary is probably nowhere near what they’re getting at a particular job? There’s got to be an incentive.”

There were a number of examples cited by attendees in terms of positive community engagement that they were aware of or had been involved in and highlighted the impact that these experiences have on local residents.

“They do. They do in the secondary schools, junior schools, and infant schools. They come out and do the butterfly project about stranger danger and they bring the dogs out, it’s really good.”

“I find their PCSO’s are really good. They come out and sit, they come out to the homeless shelters and sit with our guys and try and build a relationship with them. They’re dressed in their gear, but they sit and try and build a relationship, try and give them a positive experience with the police, whereas the people I work with haven’t had that before. Sometimes the fault of their own but sometimes now. They work really well with our guys, and I find they’re really positive in our community, the problem is they don’t have the rights that actual police do so they come in and do sort of the scut work and then end up having to go back and check and they can’t do anything in particular but I find them really positive.”

“I think they do a lot more than what we see and that’s the problem, and people don’t talk about it. If you go to the kids’ schools and talk to them, most of them are going to go home and go ‘what did you do at school today?’ ‘I don’t know, I can’t remember’ so you don’t hear about it, it’s not something they talk about. I think they do a lot in the community with the schools, and I work a lot with churches and things like that and they do, I think they come out and do stuff like that.”

Taking everything into account, confidence in local policing was quite low, with half the group giving a score of 5/10, a third gave a score of 7/10 and one attendee gave a score of 8/10. Positively the higher scores were generally based on personal experience of the service whereas the lower scores tended to be based on perception and concerns around police response if they were ever called upon.

“Mixed opinions really based on my personal opinion; I haven’t really had any altercations with the police. It goes back to the points like feet on the floor, you see that there’s not many police there so you think in your head ‘response times and stuff like that, if I need to call them will they be there in an adequate time?’ and things like that. I don’t want to mark them too harshly because there are times when they are doing well, so that’s probably why I went a 5, just bang on in the middle.”

“I think sometimes they’re doing the best they can, but they might not be able to get to us if we were burgled for example.”

“The resources, I’ve lived 10 years in Milton Keynes, 6 years in Wellingborough, 4 years in Rushton, compare the 3 areas and my main concern is response time. I see a lot of police presence on the road, I’ve had a few breakdowns and they’ve got there within 5 minutes. If they had enough officers and police on the ground, it would be higher, but right now with the balance of my experiences it’s a 5.”

“I’d like to think if I needed somebody, they would be there but I’m not so sure they would be. If someone is breaking into my home and I dial 999, again it’s who they’ve got available and I appreciate that but to me, it is a worry. With living on my own, I would need someone to come out and someone to come quickly, I don’t feel confident that would happen and, in that situation, what do I do?”

“8/10, My experience, I’ve had a few incidents with my children that have been attacked and they were there extremely quickly and handled everything very well. Breaking down on the roadside on a motorway, I was there on my own and they came very, very quickly the traffic officers. So, it’s just my experience really, I’ve always been very lucky.”

It was clear that both word of mouth, national media and social media all influenced perceptions of how well Northamptonshire Police are performing, how they behave and how ultimately it does affect their confidence in local policing.

“There’s always tittle tattle about bad experience that always corrupts your thought. I’ve heard lots and lots of stories, whether they’re true or not.”

“The local spotted group, spotted in Rushton and Wellingborough and it’s every flipping day. ‘I am someone kicked my dog; I phoned the police, and they didn’t come out until Wednesday afternoon’. What the hell do you expect them to do? A wingmirror, someone coming home, had a few beers or a group of kids kicked off a few wingmirrors off, you can’t really get a response on a Saturday night for that. If you had the manpower, you could, but I wouldn’t be prioritising that.”

“You hear about people that have been burgled and the police can’t come and make a crime number for 2-3 days and you think what?”

“The whole Sarah Everard and Wayne Couzens story, it can’t help but make you doubt the police.”

“Yes, through Covid and the whole thing is though, they’re doing what they’ve been politically told to do.”

“Yeah, like getting the police officers to arrest people that are out breaking lockdown or whatever, it doesn’t help the image. One police force spied on people with drones, you watch that on the news and think ‘what are the police doing?’”

“You also have to consider that 15-20 years ago there was no social media, so you didn’t get to hear about anything, whereas now newspapers, radio, internet, just everything. Someone said earlier you only hear the bad things, you don’t hear the 10 good things, you hear the 1 bad thing. I think that’s got something to do with the perception side of it as well.”

“I think as well if you turn on the morning news, you’re not going to hear 10 things that the police have done really well, you’re only going to hear about the one thing where they’ve made a bad error. You’re not going to hear of the 100’s of things they do, you just hear the bad things because that’s entertainment in the news.”

There were also a couple of attendees that gave examples of the positive impact social media can have on opinion and confidence.

“County lines and the drugs side of things, there’s a few areas in Wellingborough that aren’t the nicest I would say. It seems to be that they are cracking down on that and on another positive, how they’re promoting themselves on social media. If you’re on Facebook or Twitter you will see the work, they are doing.”

“I do hear a lot of positive stories through Facebook and X about what they are doing locally and how many arrests they make etc.”

Attendees also discussed the impact CPS decision making has on individuals’ perception of Northamptonshire Police and most agreed the police are often failed when the CPS issue punishment that many feel is not enough for the crime committed.

“I think they’re let down a lot by the CPS, they work and do arrest people. They’re completely, constantly after the same people doing the same thing and they’re not getting convicted, they’re just getting remanded until trial and then released and then they go back out and do the same thing again because there’s no rehabilitation kind of in between. If the same people are doing the same things over and over again, you’ve got that pattern of behaviour and you’ve permanently got these people out there committing these crimes.”

“Yes. Because they think they’re not doing their job because they’re not getting sent to prison but it’s not the police’s job to send people to prison. They arrest them, they do the work, they put it to the CPS, and they don’t convict, it’s not down to the police.”

Feelings of safety

Feelings of safety were low amongst all attendees both within the town centre and certain surrounding areas. Crime levels, gangs and drugs and drug dealing were all key components to these feelings of not being safe at night for all and at day for some.

“I’d say there’s three main areas off the town which are council flats, so the more poverty hit areas, Kings Way, Queens Way and Hemmingwell.”

“I wouldn’t feel safe walking around here or the town centre at any time of day or night.”

“I’d walk around town in the day but the night-time I’d definitely try and avoid it or the areas already mentioned.”

“Hemmingwell has a terrible reputation I do understand. Its very security based though, isn’t it?”

“Yes, they do look out for each other there a lot, even the drug dealers look after the people that live there and families that have been there a long time.”

“Gangs are a big problem and that it makes me wary about living here and going into town, it can be really intimidating.”

“It all stems from drugs at the end of the day.”

“Perhaps as a male we have sort of different things to women, but I agree, I wouldn’t go walking around perhaps a few estates on my own.”

“If I’ve dropped my car off for an MOT up the road in town and I’ve walked down to work and I’m talking 8am, I’ve felt almost threatened because of men drinking beer at 8:30am and they’re getting rowdy on my walk to work, and I should imagine they’re there on most days.”

“We lived in Northampton, and we were renting, and we needed a bigger place and wanted to buy our own place, so we looked around and thought Wellingborough is just straight down the road so no problem. We’re not ones for going to the town centre in the evening and my 4 kids are 18, 14, 10 and 5 and my 18-year-old has not yet been out in Wellingborough on his own. I don’t know whether I’m partially, I won’t say to blame but because of the reputation of the town, what goes on and what you hear and so on, I love my kids and I don’t want them to put in any situations.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

Whilst there was a strong understanding of the challenges facing policing financially, the majority of the group begrudged any additional funding emanating from an increase in Council Tax. Most agreed the police needed the additional funding, however, the struggles facing the average household was enough to suggest there was little support for any increase.

“If you could present figures to me that shows it’s static or reducing then there’s my money. If you’re taking my money and figures are going up, then I will reluctantly give it to you.”

“There’s so much poverty at the moment, we run 4 food banks in the county and the food banks used to run off purely donations back in the day, we now buy the food in. Within 9 months of last year, it’s 90% higher than the year before on the number of food parcels we’re giving out and 48% of those are families and families have to live in bigger properties that have higher council tax bands, and they can’t afford it.”

“I don’t know is the honest answer but if you can’t afford food and you’re coming saying ‘I can’t feed my family’ and we’re giving out fuel vouchers to help with fuel costs as well, the cost of living is so high at the minute, there’s so many families in poverty. If you can’t afford the basics, you can’t afford to pay anymore.”

“The council tax is also for other things like potholes, collecting the bins and stuff like that. They’ve got to justify it in my opinion for us to want to pay more, I get it with the policing but there’s a lot of other things, the cost of living is too high, and wages aren’t going up. Food is going up, council tax is going up, bills are going up, more people are going to have to use food banks.”

“I’d want to pay for a better service but it’s being able to afford to pay and that’s the difference. Every now and then if you could pop something in, that would probably be something I’d be interested in but to just go ‘you’ve got to pay this on top of what it already is already’ and then everyone else putting more on, I don’t want to open my council tax letter and go ‘it’s an extra £10 a month’ but equally if I’ve got that spare bit of money that month, then I would be happy to do so if I meant I could help them out.”

There was a lack of trust in how any additional money would be spent and how decisions are made generally. There was low awareness and negative feedback about the current commissioner.

“One thing that hasn’t been mentioned yet, it’s Stephen Mold, isn’t it? Based on the allegations of what he’s done, I wouldn’t trust him with the money, he’d probably give a job to his missus again or whatever. I’d be less willing to give money to the police if he’s in charge of it, especially Nick Adderley as well and the scandal with him. Because of those two figures I’d be less willing to give the police money.”

“I would suggest someone independent runs the police finances rather than the police themselves, I know it means another layer or more costs to do it, but I just think as long as they were independent then that would be a good idea.”

“Maybe the last thing is, I wouldn’t know who the police and crime and fire commissioner is, the only reason I know is because of the scandal. Maybe the next person who is elected, maybe just be more visible. I reckon if you stood out in Wellingborough town centre and asked, ‘who is the police and crime commissioner?’ you’re not going to get anyone who knows other than the people who have read the stories.”

Emerging and local priorities

The priorities and areas of concern for the groups were very much focussed on drugs, violent crime, including knife crime, CSE and burglary.

“For me it would be the exploitation of young children. I’m shocked at some of the ages of the children that are involved in criminal activity, it can be as young as 12 and I think from working with the local authority, I know that’s a big problem in Wellingborough and Rushton.”

“Burglary or robbery, I think robbery if I was out on the street and got robbed, I probably wouldn’t have as much confidence in the police to come and respond straight away and get my stuff back. If there’s a big crackdown on robbery and people getting their stuff back, it would put a lot more trust in the police, I think. The same with burglary, if you’re feeling safe in your home, that would put a lot more trust in the police as well.”

“I understand there’s stabbings going on and that takes priority but it’s those lesser crimes which still affect people in really negative ways. If someone gets robbed, they could get PTSD from that for the rest of their life. Not to claim lesser crimes but burglary and robberies should be a priority.”

“Drugs mainly, it’s really increased. Massively, especially over the last year.”

“I agree with everybody but picking one for me, the worst nightmare is knife crime. I see it in the Evening Telegraph, child exploitation I think a lot of it does come from drugs but it’s all too easy to flip out that knife in their pocket, one stab, gone, life gone and I could be completely wrong and I probably am but I just feel now on a weekend night in Wellingborough town, that quite a few of the youngsters will be carrying knives on them for protection.”

“It’s quite interesting you say that actually because I know a problem in Wellingborough and Rushton in particular is child exploitation and getting the young people to run drugs. That’s probably more of a problem in Wellingborough and Rushton than it is in other areas of the local authority.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

When asked about Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service all were very positive about the service despite never engaging with it. The group agreed that the service had the advantage of not fighting bad press and headlines compared to the police service.

“I don’t know, maybe it’s to do with the news around the police, you never hear any bad stories about fire and rescue. There was that one story about the chief commissioner doing some dodgy stuff but that’s the first bad headline I’ve ever seen for the fire and rescue service.”

“Obviously with Sarah Everard and then we had the protests, the police are at the forefront and the media is always negative. There’s not really any negative stories about the fire and rescue apart from recently.”

8.0

East Northamptonshire Groups

8.0 East Northamptonshire Groups

8.1 Oundle

The group was held online on the 14th December 2023. A total of ten Oundle residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	24	White British
Male	29	White European
Male	39	White British
Female	44	White British
Female	46	White British
Female	50	White British
Female	54	White British
Female	59	White British
Male	63	White British
Male	67	White British

Feelings of safety

Every respondent said they felt safe in and around Oundle during the day and at night.

“I never go out at night anyway and I feel quite safe in the daytime.”

“I’ll be completely honest, if I realise, I’ve left my car unlocked, half the time I can’t be bothered to go out and lock it.”

“I feel so safe here, we get very little crime generally.”

“For me it’s mostly the demographics and it’s an older average demographic I would say than Northampton and most people around here are quite respectful. Because we’re not a major conurbation and because it’s a smaller town people know each other, it’s less likely to see anonymous people or unknown people around and if we do see people around, very quickly things like Facebook, you get people on there going ‘I’ve seen this, I’ve seen that, keep a look out’. I think that makes it different.”

The group highlighted feeling of safety through comparisons with other areas of the county in particular Wellingborough and Northampton were naturally mentioned in the conversation. Perceptions and experience of these towns were very negative, strengthening the feeling of safety in Oundle.

“I get to travel around Northamptonshire and Northampton in particular, out of Wellingborough, Northampton, and Kettering, absolutely terrifies me, day or night. It’s a relief to get back to Oundle.”

“The intimidations, the gangs, the knowledge that goes around. I have several friends who live there (Northampton) as well who are desperate to get out of there. They are fed up of the intimidating gangs, the actual knife crime is becoming quite horrifically high, day and night. Thefts, drug addicts are becoming more present, just in the street and paraphernalia and the dangers for kids, it’s so much safer here.”

“I feel very safe in Oundle. I work in Wellingborough, and I don’t feel safe when I’d leave my shift at 10pm, Northampton was the worst, just everybody that was hanging around where I worked outside, there was no way of clearing those people so that our service users could get into the building safely or staff could get in and out the building. We’d make sure the staff would walk to the car together because we felt that unsafe, were I can walk around Oundle at night, and I feel safe where I’ve moved to.”

“I’m openly gay, I would not feel safe walking around Northampton or Wellingborough in case people said anything to me or decided to get violent, I feel very safe in Oundle, and I have lived here a while now and I love it.”

Emerging and local priorities

Few mentioned any local crime issues they were particularly concerned about, and whilst a couple of attendees mentioned concerns around car theft, all other had no real issues.

“For me it’s car crimes that I hear about most and that would probably worry me, yet I also get that my car will be safe, at least what’s inside it but I can’t guarantee that someone won’t key it or steal the catalytic converter or exhaust whilst I’m asleep. I think everything else gets responded to quite quickly.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

There was also little concern around a lack of visibility or a need for a uniformed presence, most felt safe and didn’t feel more policing was needed in Oundle. Most said they were satisfied with the current levels of policing.

“I feel we see plenty of police in Oundle in comparison to the crime rate we have, and I actually saw the blues and twos tonight on my way home from work and the lady on the horse. It’s quite lovely, I don’t know how far she’d respond but it’s nice to see, but I think they do a really good job of keeping a sense of community.”

“I think we see them from time to time and that is enough, it is more important that they are able to respond if we need them than seeing them on the streets.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Confidence in Northamptonshire Police was higher in Oundle than in many other areas and when asked to give a score out of 10 most attendees gave a 7 or more and like other areas this was mainly based on personal experience and to a lesser extent what they had heard from other people.

“Having had no dealings and not really hearing a lot about them, by that I’d presume they’re not awful because you’d hear about it and friends that have needed them have always spoke positively about the experience. They’re not brilliant so you’d give them a 7 because you don’t hear anything negative.”

“I was thinking I’d give them an 8 because I’ve dealt a lot with them at work. I think it’s quite nice that they go visit the schools because my daughter said, ‘oh that’s PC such and such’ and she said, ‘oh mummy I’m going to say hello’ and I like that. Otherwise, I think children are often scared of the police and it was nice that they seemed to have a presence and that was in Raunds, and I thought that was really good that the police get out to schools. They are working hard and just because they’re not in the rural areas, they are very much helping other areas.”

“About an 8, borderline 9, I think for Oundle for the rural section and even Corby which I used to be, they were there when I needed them, and they seem to be doing a good job from what I hear.”

“I’d give 7 out of 10 and the reason I give 7 is because I’m influenced by two things. One, I have no recent knowledge on how police respond to emergencies other than seeing fast police cars going through Oundle, so I can’t comment on that, and I haven’t any views. What I can say though, is that I’m confident they are trying really hard, we see a lot on Oundle, not just blue lights but the PCSO in Oundle does walk around the streets, he turns up to festivals and at the recent Christmas market, there was a beat bus there. The beat bus goes to the food festival, the Christmas market, it goes to other things as well, the local officer although his grammar isn’t great, he sends out frequent messages saying, ‘look out for this, look out for that’. We had one this morning from the PCSO I think in Rushton giving 8 tips on how to not get done at Christmas, so I think that’s good. I follow Nick Adderley who is the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire on Twitter, I think he’s excellent, I think he’s made a real difference to Northamptonshire over the 5/6 years he’s been in post.”

“At one time I would have given them a 6 but after all the problems my daughter had with the drug people, I would now give them a 7 because I was intrigued by the way the police worked. Actually, my daughters neighbour kept calling the police about all of what was going on in the street and they actually got plain clothed police officers to go into my daughters’ neighbours house at different times to keep an eye on what was happening, and I found it really intriguing and I thought they were very, very clever in the way they did it. Then they eventually arranged and overnight raid on two houses in the street and they got them, they got everything, and they got it all sorted out, they all got arrested and it all worked out okay now. It’s very quiet down there now. As I say, I’d give them a higher number because I think sometimes, we don’t really understand what the police do behind the scenes, I think there’s a lot that they do and because we don’t have any dealings with them, we don’t know about. I think at the end of the day they’re very clever, most of them.”

The power and influence of both national and local media were discussed in terms of how confident residents feel about their local police force and for most of this group, it was clear that if anything, they were quite sceptical of the media and how they portrayed policing in general.

“It makes no difference how I feel, you can’t believe half the stuff you read in the papers.”

“I tend to try not to let media impact how I feel about things to be honest. You’re too likely to be lead in different ways.”

“I do think people are influenced by media and the national media in particular and as you’ve said, there’s some bad examples of the police letting communities down or investigations going badly and that inevitably in my view does influence how people feel about the police. Is that fair for Northamptonshire Police? I have no idea and that’s probably because I personally don’t get any sense of how good or bad they are, but I won’t be swayed by the media generally.”

One attendee did say that they felt it was hard to not be influenced by national media.

“I think as much as I would like to admit that I’m not influenced by the media, I do think media especially around the police at the moment is all very negative. Everything in the national media seems to be negative all the time for the police, so I think that probably would kind of shape my confidence in them a little bit, but if I kind of thought about it anymore than that, I would see that’s unfair to judge a local police force based on The Met and stuff happening in London. I think it’s still enough to wobble my trust in them a little bit.”

Importance of communication and engagement

There was general consensus that Northamptonshire Police “could be better at getting information out to the community”, social media and more traditional methods were mentioned and whilst preferences varied there was a general desire for more information, and all agreed that this would improve confidence as scores tended to be lower when individuals felt they knew nothing about Northamptonshire Police.

“They may be putting information out there that people like me are missing that’s seeing they’re brilliant or they’re not, but I’m not aware of that and until I can see something that says ‘we’re actually good, bad, whatever’, it’s really difficult to put a score on that. So how do you address that? Maybe they’ve got to do a better job at actually telling people locally how good they are.”

“The information is there for us, and I remember from the doctors’ surgeries and the library, they used to have little posters up not that long ago, just ‘if you do see one of our PCSO’s, stop and chat’. I think here they do an awful lot considering the size of Oundle, they have quite a good presence, but more information is always a good thing.”

“Whilst everyone was kind of going through their own scores, I just had a look on Facebook and Instagram and Northamptonshire Police and as I said, I’ve never really had to deal with the police, I don’t know anything about what they do but if you do have a look on their social media pages, there is a lot there and it’s obvious they are fairly busy. It’s obvious from the social media pages of Northamptonshire Police they are very busy and there are posts pretty much every day.”

“Today they’ve posted, they posted a couple of days ago so there’s a lot happening and actually, I was going to say, as I started looking at Facebook there was not very much there in terms of imparting knowledge about what they’re doing and kind of handy campaigns like you have in London with See it, Say it, Sorted. But actually, they do have quite a lot on their Instagram page, so I would say just by looking at that, my confidence in them has kind of increased from not knowing anything about them to probably a 7 or 8.”

“I think maybe the police need to put out more group get togethers, if people are interested put it out on social media, put a leaflet through people’s door and say on such and such a day there’s going to be somewhere where you can come and talk to them or they’ll give you some stats and figures so that you can actually see how they’re performing. So other than that, I’m not quite sure how we’d find out without digging into some background to actually find out how their performance is monitored and what it’s monitored against. Is it monitored just against a national level, is it against similar police forces of the same size? I really don’t know.”

“To be honest there’s no silver bullet, you’ve got to use various media to hit various people. TV is a very compelling way of putting information out but so is the internet and such like and the information that comes through from PCSO’s. Apart from listening to the news, we get the updates that other people get from PCSO’s and that’s one way of informing people of what’s happening locally.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The majority of the group fully supported an increase in council tax generated funding to ensure the force could not only maintain its current service levels but to also ensure the development of the workforce could be implemented. Most said they would be willing to pay the higher amount of £15 and trusted the force to spend the money effectively.

“If I’m paying another £10 a year to have my local community better policed, it’s 80p a month, £1.20 a month and I’m very happy to invest that in the police. If my car gets broken into and I have to go through my insurance, it will go up more than £15. I’ve got a policeman here making sure that doesn’t happen, but if crime goes up in my area, my costs will increase, so £10 investment is nothing.”

“Keeping in pace with inflation or actually setting higher targets and then measuring themselves against those targets and having more visibility about how good or bad they are, and I think that’s the missing bit for me, but I do like the idea of development and improving the workforce.”

“I know everybody is really struggling with cost of living etc. but I think * made a really good case there. I was just going to say I’m happy if the police maintains where we are, I would support the £15.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

Perceptions of the Fire & Rescue Service locally were very positive, with many recalling seeing a community presence and whilst no-one had any direct experience with the service in terms of an emergency, all agreed it seemed they were working well when required with Northamptonshire Police and were perhaps seen more positively because of the different service they provided.

“I was just going to say they were out last night in force with the Santa sleigh going around Oundle. I haven’t had any direct experience with them in the last 12 months but when someone went missing there was a huge police presence and that was quite a good, combined force. Quite often when we get a problem it’s normally at Christmas and its people falling in the river or such life accidents and the combined police and fire services in terms of search and rescues have always been great in the years I’ve lived here. We’ve had 3 incidents that I can remember, I was friends with one of the gentlemen that fell in the river and then there was a lady walking her dog and each time, there’s been a united front and I’ve felt like they’re out there doing as much as they can with what they’ve got and probably a bit more really.”

“I just think the call on the fire service is different to the call on the police service. They’re called out to you could say, real emergencies, house on fire, a road accident, somebody drowning in a river or something like that, so they tend to respond instantly nearly every time, I guess. So, there’s a perception that they’re always there, the service they provide is 100% and it’s almost unfair to compare them with the police who as well as dealing with those emergencies as well alongside the fire service, are dealing with all this routine stuff. So, the volume of demands on the police for me is different to the fire service and it’s almost unfair to compare the two.”

“I feel they do work well together but you’re right and actually, it’s probably police officers and ambulance that are first on the scene at a lot of road traffic accidents which is also the police. You say about car related incidents but accidents and emergencies, the police are called on for that as well and then there’s the paperwork, the time, it is two very different services.”

“But then if you think about the ambulance service for example, that’s had a lot of poor media about the response rates for the ambulance service, you don’t hear that about the fire service though.”

8.2 Thrapston

The group was held online on the 31st January 2024. A total of nine Thrapston residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	30	White British
Female	33	White British
Female	35	White British
Female	37	White British
Male	37	White British
Female	41	White British
Female	42	White British
Male	44	White British
Male	55	White British

Despite a quarter of the group members initially describing Northamptonshire Police as 'reactive' and one using the word 'stretched', positive associations were more frequently mentioned and included 'friendly', 'committed', 'approachable' and 'available'. This did lead to a general agreement that the police generally are under resourced and face too much demand and that there much empathy for the police in this respect.

“More reactive policing, reacting to something rather than been proactive and stopping it happening in the first place.”

“All the police officers that I've dealt with have been really friendly and they've been wanting to do their best. I used to work in a school, and we worked quite closely with the local police with children who were kind of going down the path of gangs and violence and they were very proactive and engaging with trying to be a preventative factor and trying to engage with these children before they became a threat to them.”

“I have needed the police twice recently and both times they have been so friendly and approachable and caring.”

Feelings of safety

The vast majority of attendees said that they felt very safe in Thrapston, and many enjoyed living in the area for that very reason. However, there were several local residents who mentioned that more recently an element of ASB and drug taking and dealing locally had made them start to feel less safe.

“Would I feel comfortable walking around the village on my own further from my house? Potentially, but I wouldn't feel comfortable going down to like the sailing club away from a residential area, I wouldn't feel comfortable walking there on my own in the dark, I have just started to see and hear about trouble and drugs that make me more cautious.”

“It's happened a few times were I've been walking my dog up and around that particular recreational field, I think at the time there were a lot of incidents of dog thefts and with those sorts of people sat there, there have definitely been times, especially before he was castrated as well, there were times I thought 'are they going to come over and try and nab my dog?'. There is definitely something that was going through my mind walking up around there, knowing there were people taking drugs, drug dealing, sat in their cars, it does make you feel less safe.”

As mentioned in a few other more rural groups, whilst most felt safe in their local area, the conversation naturally turned to areas where they felt less safe, and this tended to be town centres nearer Thrapston. Namely Wellingborough and Northampton, Kettering was mentioned to a lesser extent.

“Northampton, I feel really unsafe in Northampton in the middle of the day, I hate it, I will avoid going on my own because it’s horrible. It feels like there’s people everywhere who are looking, again I used to work with people who were living on the streets who had issues with substance misuse and things, so again, I’ve got a bit of a view that probably with that knowledge, equally I know when people are desperate no matter how good of a person they are, there are lengths they will go to that isn’t in their character normally and I think in Northampton town centre, there are definitely people who are very desperate and in that moment would not necessarily be adverse to mugging you or anything, so I think Northampton town centre definitely.”

“I would definitely say, I don’t go there very often but definitely Wellingborough town centre. The few occasions I have been there, I do feel very uncomfortable, I try not to go there too often.”

“It’s just I know the crime rate is very high In Northampton, I don’t know, I don’t like to judge people, but you see a lot of people around and they’re kind of hanging around the streets. I just feel quite uncomfortable been around there, I think it’s quite a rundown town so I think that also makes it feel more, I can’t describe it.”

Emerging and local priorities

Higher feelings of safety subsequently resulted in fewer priorities mentioned by attendees in terms of local issues and areas of concern. Dangerous and reckless driving was the main concern raised within the group. Drug use and drug taking was also mentioned by several attendees and linked into the point earlier around from those that did feel slightly unsafe at times.

“I think there’s two areas of concern, but I think if you look at how many crashes there have been in the local area recently that have been quite nasty, some have been fatal, I think actually a little bit more presence on the road. I see the police cars driving by to incidents but not necessarily proactive in kind of promoting safer driving. I think speeding is one thing, but erratic driving, people using phones, I constantly see people on phones, I constantly see people doing really dangerous manoeuvres and so I think that side of it.”

“The driving in the villages is awful and maybe that’s because there’s lots of little country roads, there’s very easy places to drive and you don’t pass another car in the evening, but the driving is just scary sometimes, people use the lanes as a racetrack.”

“Linked with that is drug use, I’ve got a recreation ground next to me where I live where there is regular drug use most days, the other day one of my neighbours went and cleared up 20-30 cans of gas that had been used around the carpark. It got really bad during lockdown, we were reporting it to the police and there wasn’t much presence, at the time, again it was a case of priorities. They are now much more present in response to the other incidents. Off the back of that is drug driving, they’re all driving up, racing up the road on a very narrow residential street, a lot of us have kids. I think probably drug use and road safety.”

“I actually walk my dog around the rec near to where she lives and the drug use and quite blatant drug dealing is really bad around there, particularly on my road as well where I live, there are a lot of people using drugs and anti-social behaviour as well. It’s pretty bad around here, people drive in on their trail bikes or their cars up and down the road, I’ve got a little baby, I’ve got a dog and two cats, it’s just, one day something is going to happen if it hasn’t already, and I’ve just not realised.”

There was a strong emphasis on the idea of the local police working closely with schools and colleges in the area to ingrain and develop a level of respect and understanding between the force and young people. A key driver was the group said that the crime and disorder locally was predominantly carried out by younger people and therefore preventative community engagement was considered important.

“Going into schools and capturing kids early is definitely the way forwards. Once people get to that stage where they’re doing it, it’s difficult to turn them away from that kind of behaviour, so I definitely think trying to get kids early and get them respecting the police.”

“It would be good to get into the schools, I think that would be great and even when there’s little summer fêtes and stuff, a police presence then, it’s not to be scared of the police, for them to be approachable that children and families need and to be a part of the community.”

“I’ve got a 3 and a half year old, no matter what we say to her she has picked up from probably pre-school and stuff, she’s scared of the police, the police are bad people to her and it doesn’t seem to matter what we say, we sort of say to her ‘the police aren’t bad people, they’re there to look after us and they’re there to get the bad people’, that’s how we sort of explain it to a three and a half year old. That’s why going into schools early and talking to kids is so important.”

“I think they should be certainly engaging with young people and others who are falling off the rails, you had David Camerons troubled families project to try and stop, a mixture of help people and try to deter people to stop them falling in the path of criminality because I think very few people cause the most of the grief in today’s society, we need to do more locally with children and teenagers.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

Police visibility and presence were not considered an issue locally and there was an understanding that even though the force did have record numbers of officers, the need to deploy in any significant number locally was low and that the bigger towns in the County should rightly receive higher officer numbers in terms of patrols and general presence.

“I’ve not looked into the numbers too much, but I think from what you were saying just now about how many are actually in Northamptonshire as a whole and how many kind of are our beck and call, I think they’re doing a pretty good job. And we don’t really need them so much around here, I am happy not seeing a police presence as it tells me something is wrong.”

“I think Northamptonshire is a relatively peaceful place, I mean obviously Thrapston doesn’t have the problems of Corby or Wellingborough so it’s predicable that Thrapston has less police resources than other towns which are perhaps worse off for a variety of reasons, but if you look around the country and you either experience or read about the problems they have, the riots and the disorder, we haven’t had that in Northamptonshire thankfully, so I think the police have got to have done something right.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Confidence in Policing was high across all local residents within the group with most giving a score of 7 or more out of 10. The area itself was mentioned as there was less need for policing general and personal experience also played a key part in the higher levels of confidence.

“Irrespective of what confidence you have in policing, Thrapston is fairly small, I don’t see an awful lot of crime and I don’t see an awful lot of presence, so it’s very difficult to gage what confidence I’d have if it came down to it, but it would be pretty high like an 8 because I think they do a good job.”

“I’ll go with the fact that no news is good news, so I’ll go an 8. I feel safe, we’re in quite a sleepy town so my expectations aren’t very high. To sum it up I’ve seen more air ambulances in Thrapston than police vans, I’ve seen two air ambulances and one police car in one day. I’ll stick with my guns with an 8.”

“I think it’s different in terms of the officers themselves and in terms of the police as an institution. I think my confidence in the officers is high, so the officers I’ve had interactions with, the majority have been people who have been in the force to do good and want to help. I also feel like if at the field on my road, if there was a big incident with a real risk of harm to life, I feel like there would be a response quickly and effectively.”

“In relation to Northamptonshire I’d give them a 7, just because any interactions I have had with them have been good.”

Importance of communication and engagement

The group discussed the importance of local news and information sources in terms of overall confidence in policing, in particular social media, most followed Northamptonshire Police on Facebook and rated their presence on this platform.

“It’s generally social media, the likes of Facebook and such and I follow them are they are informative, but they could do more, especially locally.”

“I don’t think you hear an awful lot of negative, but I mentioned earlier about some of the recent accidents on the 605, you pick that up on social media on the Facebook groups and everything else.”

“Yeah, again I think social media is the main thing, I do follow their Facebook page and on the local Facebook pages people are talking about things. I’d say social media is a big part of that.”

“I think they do; they often do a day in the life of a response cop or a day in the life of a particular role which I think is quite a positive thing they’re doing. They could possibly make more of it. Good news stories are always nice to see on there.”

One resident in the group was signed up to Northamptonshire Talking and valued the information source, however, was only really interested in news on Thrapston.

“To be totally honest, I just delete them. If they’re not directly within the village, I’m not overly, if they’re in my village great, I’ll read it but otherwise I just delete it which is probably wrong. For people who are very hot on wanting to know exactly what crimes happen when, brilliant but for me, I just want if there’s something that means I need to be extra cautious I’ll read it.”

Several within the group agreed that national media did impact both confidence and trust in local policing.

“Yeah, course it does, when you’ve got officers, you’re supposed to trust in the police so when you get corrupt officers and officers that are then committing awful crimes, of course that’s going to affect how you feel about them. You kind of need to remember it is very much the minority in the large number of officers across the whole country, but obviously those things do get highlighted. Obviously, it’s going to impact, you kind of think ‘how are they getting the job in the first place?’ and ‘how are they then getting to the point they’re able to do what they’re doing?’. It’s a tough one.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

There was a mixed reaction to a potential increase in the precept for local policing with around half in favour and half against any increase citing the cost-of-living crisis many are facing and the argument that they see little change in their area year on year, and an admission that they know the money will be put into other areas rather than the Thrapston area.

“I would happily pay £15 a year, I think our services are underfunded, I’ve had a conversation once about how our council tax or one of the payments we make is broken down about the fire service and they get something like 50p a month or something ridiculously stupid out of me. I appreciate I’m in a slightly better position that potentially a lot of people. The cost of living crisis isn’t putting pressure on me, but tax and paying for what we have, I’m a firm believer I should be paying it, I’m in a position to pay it, I earn enough money to pay it so yeah, if it is definitely going to be used and it’s not going to be absorbed to keep things afloat, I’m all for paying another £15.”

“Oh god, no. It’s the same, if I give the government more money do I think they’re lining their pockets? Probably somewhere along the line but if I then say, ‘no I don’t want to give you anything’, am I actually cutting my nose off to spite my face? It’s always going to be a difficult one. If there is a plan and you just said those four brackets, if the plan is for the £15 and something comes of it and we don’t hear down the line that we’ve cut our officers by 10% or our response times has increased by 10%, as long as those statistics don’t come from it, then I’m more than happy to sacrifice £1.30 a month, whatever it is.”

“I’m on a bit of a different end of the spectrum to X because the cost of living crisis is definitely affecting us, I’m sort of living out of my savings each month at the moment so £1.30 whilst it might not be a lot to some people and I totally respect that and it’s brilliant, that’s £1.30 that I haven’t got at the moment. I would dig into my savings to pay that but at the moment, personally I haven’t seen more officers affectively on the ground so I would want to see proof the money is going to be used affectively for that to be deemed worthwhile for me.”

“I’m just going to agree with that point really because I do feel, I don’t feel there’s been any difference in the last 5-10-15-however long I can remember for, I genuinely don’t feel like it ever makes any difference to us personally and I think the problem is when you live in a county where there is a big split between rural and towns and villages and that sort of thing, I feel like the money probably ends up going to places that probably need it the most, but that doesn’t personally affect me. At the moment we’ll pay whatever council tax we’re told to pay, but I wouldn’t feel that my money was making any difference whatsoever to me personally, which is then hard.”

“I also think in Northamptonshire Police I would believe that the extra money would go into Kettering and go into Northampton and Corby, the areas where there’s the biggest problem. I don’t blame them for that but bearing in mind I live in a nice village near Thrapston, maybe it’s selfish of me but I don’t particularly want to pay for services to be improved there so I say no.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

Opinion and confidence in the Fire & Rescue Service was high and whilst none had any direct experience with the service, perceptions based on a general presence and word of mouth ensured a positive conversation about the service.

“I feel like I’d be a 10, I genuinely feel for them I’d be a 10. I think maybe from, I feel like recently I’ve seen quite a lot of fire and rescue cars and things on the roads going past, lights on and everything. I understand all the services bar the specific ambulance service, but like the fire and rescue and I know the police, they’re all trained to do emergency response in similar ways. Advanced life support and that sort of thing, I feel like if I had a genuine serious emergency, I feel like I would have confidence that they would respond very immediately, I don’t know why I feel like that.”

“I’ve just had a thought that actually, within the last couple of years there have been quite a few fires on local farms. One of my friends owns a farm and a bit of land in the village and has had at least two incidents of arson on his land, I think last year was the most recent and the fire response was fantastic. Again, there was another fire a short while ago in another village and again, the fire response was really good. It was * that made the point about the local nearest station being Wellingborough, we have Raunds and Thrapston either side of us, they’re a couple of minutes, so whether it is literally the fact that they are so local they can come and respond, but when I have been made aware of incidents that have happened, it’s not personal to me but I’m aware of them locally, they have been very efficient, very effective and very supportive. It’s because of them that the land has survived, and his business has survived.”

8.3 Rushden

The group was held at Rushden Hall, in Rushden, Northampton on the 7th of February 2024. A total of nine Rushden residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	74	White British
Female	52	White British
Female	21	White British
Female	53	White British
Female	56	White British
Male	19	White British
Male	39	White British
Male	25	Indian
Female	49	White British

The sentiments from the Rushden focus group reflect a community that desires a more consistent and effective policing presence, which they believe would enhance their overall safety and quality of life. While there are commendable aspects of police engagement, notably in emergency situations, there is a clear call for improvement in regular patrols, follow-ups on incidents, and handling of youth-related crimes. Additionally, the high regard for the Fire & Rescue Service sets a benchmark that the local police might aspire to meet in terms of community engagement and responsiveness.

Feelings of safety

Residents of Rushden voiced complex and varied feelings regarding their feelings of safety, which appear to fluctuate significantly based on their recent interactions with local policing. The efficacy and timeliness of police responses play a pivotal role in shaping the community's perception of security.

“There’s been times where I’ve needed them, and they’ve been on point and there’s been times recently where I’ve needed them, and they’ve not been on point. It can be inconsistent.”

These inconsistent experiences contribute to an overall sense of uncertainty and vulnerability among the residents. For instance, another participant detailed a specific incident involving a threat to their child, where the initial police response was prompt and seemingly diligent, yet follow-up communications were absent, leading to significant distress.

“About 12 days ago, an incident involved my son, who is 13, nearly 14. Another child threatened him with stabbing over a trivial matter involving a girl. The police came out to see us the following Saturday, and we provided them with names, witnesses, and all the details they required. The child in question and his family were already known to the police.

The officer promised to update us by the following day, Sunday, or at the latest by Wednesday when he was next on duty. Now, ten days later, we’ve still not received any update.

“...this is when people start taking things into their own hands which can obviously cause a lot more repercussions.”

“The police are quite effective in their public engagements; for instance, I’ve seen them interact positively at schools, speaking to both children and adults. However, we’ve encountered problems outside of school, such as parking issues and thefts of bicycles and other items, where the follow-up has been lacking.”

“...recently one of my housemates was threatened with a knife right outside our house, a big machete kind of knife. He went to the police because obviously he was scared and he said to them ‘look, I’ve been threatened with a knife outside my house’ and the police took the man in, and he did have a knife on him. All they did was confiscate it off him and just chuck him back out onto the streets. Tell me, who’s going to stop him getting another knife for him to come back? And he knows where my housemate lives as well so that’s an instant risk to him all the time, all he thinks is ‘he knows where I live, and he’s just going to come back with a knife. Who’s to stop him whilst I’m asleep just smashing my windows and doing me whilst I sleep?’”

“It made me feel a bit uneasy because I felt like who is supposed to be protecting us in that situation if you can’t tell someone about that and they can’t do much about it, then what can we do? I’ve said before, sometimes people will choose to take it into their own hands.”

Such experiences erode the community’s trust in the police’s ability to consistently safeguard their well-being, making them feel neglected and inadequately protected in their own environment. This is further exacerbated by perceptions of decreasing police visibility in their communities, as noted by other focus group participants, who criticised the apparent reduction in routine patrols which previously contributed to a stronger sense of safety.

“The High St on the weekend is the worst place to be at night, you should have a couple of police cars parked up or patrolling. When you have to walk home through alleyways, there’s always groups of lads in alleyways with masks on and there’s no cameras and it’s pitch black, you couldn’t know who it is or to find out who it is. If someone was patrolling the High St or policing down the High St, it wouldn’t hurt and would make people feel a lot safer.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

While Rushden's residents recall instances of effective policing, the inconsistency in police responsiveness and visibility has led to a fragile sense of safety. This fluctuating security landscape invites a call for more reliable and consistent policing practices to restore and maintain the community's confidence in their local police force.

"I just personally don't feel very safe going out, I do go down to the pub for a drink but when I found out there was knife crime there and somebody got stabbed, and they don't have security, I don't feel very safe, because then you have to think you relying on a police response, and I don't want to have to rely on that."

"I don't think the town feels as safe anymore. I worry about my son, he's getting to that age and I'm dreading it, absolutely dreading it. He respects other people, but I think you can just be in the wrong place at the wrong time and one of those kids that's out thinking they can do what they like because the police can't get them is going to stab someone."

"It's always been quite bad around here [Rushden], it was mostly bad in Wellingborough before. It wasn't a problem here until more recently."

Although residents offered constructive criticism in relation to feelings of safety, there were examples of initiatives and activities which were valued within the community. Engagement with young people through schools was notably praised.

"They do go into the schools, and I know that from my foster girl, I had a policewoman knock on my door last year, I totally forgot but it frightened the life out of me. I fostered this girl for quite a few years, and I thought 'oh god, what has she done now?'. As it turns out, it was to do with photo sharing and whether my foster girl had got this photo that someone had sent. I had to check her phone and they were really good, they spoke to her about photo sharing and what you shouldn't do on the internet and that it's out there for life, they were really good these two police women, they sat with her for quite a while talking it all through with her and how bad it is and all of this, not that she took that much notice because she still does it herself, but hats off to them."

"We've also had them in the school to talk about what the police do or the cars, the dogs, things like that because it was more of an infant primary school. So, it's more aimed at the youngsters which is a good thing, but the Site Supervisor actually said to me 'if that had been a crime, they wouldn't have turned up'"

The visibility of police in Rushden and their responsiveness to incidents represent foundational concerns among the community members. Residents consistently emphasise that a visible and proactive police presence is not just reassuring but essential for deterring crime and promoting a sense of communal safety. The community's perception of a decline in routine police patrols was succinctly expressed by a participant who noted, "They used to drive around but you don't see them anymore." This statement reflects a broader sentiment that the reduction in visible policing has left residents feeling more exposed to potential criminal activities.

The community's concerns extend beyond visibility to the effectiveness of police responses to critical incidents. Instances where the police response was initially prompt but lacked what residents considered a robust outcome have particularly undermined trust. For example, one account involved a threat of violence against a child, where the police's failure to communicate after the initial contact significantly impacted the family's sense of security.

"...recently one of my housemates was threatened with a knife right outside our house, a big machete kind of knife. He went to the police because obviously he was scared and he said to them 'look, I've been threatened with a knife outside my house' and the police instantly brought the man in, and he did have a knife on him. All they did was confiscate it off him and just chuck him back out onto the streets. Tell me, who's going to stop him getting another knife for him to come back? And he knows where my housemate lives as well so that's an instant risk to him all the time, all he thinks is 'he knows where I live, and he's just going to come back with a knife. Who's to stop him whilst I'm asleep just smashing my windows and doing me whilst I sleep?'"

"It made me feel a bit uneasy because I felt like who is supposed to be protecting us in that situation if you can't tell someone about that and they can't do much about it, then what can we do? I've said before, sometimes people will choose to take it into their own hands."

This lack of satisfactory outcome after serious incidents contributes to a perception that the police may not be fully committed to the safety of the residents, exacerbating feelings of vulnerability and frustration within the community.

The discussions around police responsiveness also touched upon the broader implications of inadequate service. Residents expressed a deeper concern that not addressing minor incidents promptly could escalate these into more serious issues, thereby increasing the overall community risk and potential costs of policing. The perceived disconnect between police actions and community expectations highlights a critical gap in the local policing strategy that residents feel urgently needs addressing.

"I know it's petty crime but there's a lot more of it locally now, and things escalate. There's been stabbings and stealing from cars, stealing from vans."

"...like your son has been threatened with a knife, if they don't stop it there, then all these kids are going to go around with knives because they don't feel safe, so then you're just creating a bigger problem by not addressing the initial incidents."

While the community of Rushden values the role of their local police, there is a strong call for improvements in both the visibility of officers on routine patrols and the thoroughness of their engagement with the public, especially following reports of serious threats or crimes. Enhancing these aspects of local policing is seen as vital for rebuilding trust and ensuring the safety and security of the Rushden community.

“We saw someone had tried to get into the car, they’d opened the boot and put it down again and waited to see if we came out and then they took the golf clubs that were in the back. When I rang up the police they answered straight away, gave me a crime number but then they said they wouldn’t come out even though I’ve got CCTV.”

“Yeah, they’re probably aware of it but I think from my point of view I think it stems down to funding, staff, and priorities. When you said about them not coming out for any reason, it’s probably because they haven’t got the staff to come out, they’ve probably got something that’s 3% more important than yours, so they’re going to deal with that.”

“Just a positive about the police, someone was apparently walking through the park with a shotgun. As I’m walking home, I got absolutely swatted by about 7 cars, guns in my face, I’ve never seen that many police in Rushden. Obviously, I didn’t like it, but I appreciate it, I did feel safe. They were all undercover, all I could see was lasers everywhere, but I’ve never felt safer in Rushden knowing there were that many police.”

Emerging and local priorities

The focus group discussion in Rushden brought to the forefront a range of emerging concerns that have significantly impacted the community, with a particular emphasis on young people related violence including knife crime and drug-related offending. These topics were not just areas of concern but are seen as urgent trends that require immediate and sustained intervention from local policing and community support services.

“A couple of years ago we were burgled twice and the first time we weren’t there, we were away and a neighbour saw somebody in the house, thought it was my son and then realised he was too tall. He was standing with the door open waiting for others who were searching the house to run out and when they ran out because he called out to them, the first two ran off but the guy who was holding the door and the other one coming down the stairs had knives. He tried to apprehend them, they dropped some of the stuff they took but when he tried to pick up stuff out of the drive, they drove at him.”

One resident’s comment encapsulated the urgency felt by the community: *“Knife crime...it’s a massive problem here, a huge problem in fact, and a lot of it is to do with drug activity.”* This statement highlights the pervasive nature of these issues, suggesting that they are not isolated incidents but part of a larger systemic problem affecting the area.

“Drugs and knife crime, it’s a massive problem here. I had my double pushchair nicked from outside my house and someone was trying to sell it for £10 to get some drugs. It’s not a sophisticated crime is it, but probably needs a sophisticated solution.”

The community points to the need for targeted actions against the normalisation of drug use and the perceived casual carrying of weapons among young. These behaviours have reportedly led to an atmosphere where young people feel increasingly unsafe and unprotected.

“I wouldn’t just say it’s just knives either, I’d say weapons in general because when I used to go to the pub, people used to have police cosh’s because you can fold them up really small and they hurt like hell apparently. Because they’re so easy to carry because they’re so small, people put them in pockets, man bags, purses, everywhere. Even little rings with knuckle dusters on them. There needs to be a big push to stamp it out, a really big effort to make people think twice.”

“I’m only 21 so I used to go clubbing and to the pubs and near enough every weekend you’d see drink spiking. They barely check your bags when you go it and that’s how people just take what they want inside. Northampton is a major place where spiking is happening and it’s all over Facebook, you see people that have been in hospital because they’ve been spiked, even by the staff and then it happens the next weekend and every weekend after that and clearly nothing is done about it. It needs a focussed campaign to stop it.”

“I agree, I went out with my friend the other weekend and she ended up ill and the first thought that came into everyone’s head was ‘has she been spiked?’ and it’s just sad and you’re so scared when you go out, you’ve got to make sure you walk past people, holding your bags, covering your drinks.”

In addition to direct policing interventions, there was a call for more comprehensive support systems for young people, including mentoring programs, after-school activities, and spaces where they can engage positively within their community. These programs are seen as vital in offering ‘alternatives to the streets’, some considered to be in decline, as well as reducing the allure of criminal activities.

“There’s a group of children that are going around Rushden that are literally attacking people. I get that we want the police to respond, but there has to be something to stop it happening in the first place, parenting, schools, youth groups. It can’t just be allowed to start then becoming a police problem.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing in Rushden is notably influenced by the direct experiences of residents with police officers, particularly regarding the adequacy and consistency of responses to reported incidents. The community’s perception of local policing effectiveness plays a crucial role in shaping their overall trust, with many expressing dissatisfaction due to perceived gaps between initial police responses and subsequent follow-up actions.

An example shared by a resident illustrates this concern: “*They got there really quickly, and he seemed really keen at the time but then nothing afterwards.*” This account underscores a recurring frustration within the community where police show promptness and concern at the outset of an incident but fail to maintain communication or congruence as situations develop. Such experiences leave residents questioning the police’s commitment to resolving issues, which is detrimental to building lasting trust and appetites to report crime.

“They’d have got a ten out of ten from me, based on their initial response; at the time he was bang on, he said everything I wanted to hear, he to do was going to do this, he was going that but, in the end, he was a car salesman that just told me what I wanted to hear at the time. It turned out I bought a banger.”

“...if something similar happened again I just wouldn’t bother [reporting] ...I understand there’s a lot of things that are out of your hands, but I always think be honest. If they’d have just said to me ‘we can’t do anything about it’, just tell me that, don’t shy away from it. But they didn’t.”

The inconsistency in police responsiveness contributes to a broader sentiment of unpredictability in how safety concerns are managed. When residents cannot reliably predict how their concerns will be addressed, it breeds anxiety and diminishes the sense of security that effective local policing is supposed to provide. Residents considered that race may be a contributing factor to how incidents are responded to, although no reference was made to Northamptonshire Police, specifically, it was in relation to police, generally.

“I’d say there’s a slight element of distrust and you never know what’s going on behind the scenes in the police force. I study sociology and one of the things you learn with policing is that its culture is engrained. Racism is engrained in our police force. I don’t know if you guys can tell but I don’t trust the police due to stuff I’ve had with racism, times when people have been racist to me, and I wouldn’t report or times I’ve been racially profiled.”

“I worked with a guy when I was at Bedfordshire prison, a mixed-race guy and he used to get stopped. He was in uniform, and he used to get stopped by the police two or three times a month and he’d be in uniform, they’d stop him and go ‘oh’. That creates that distrust because it raises the question, ‘why are you stopping me?’”

Residents have suggested the need for better communication from the police. Knowing the status of their reports or having a clear point of contact within the police department who handles follow-ups could significantly enhance trust. Transparency about the limitations and challenges faced by local police in wider communications might also help align community expectations with the realities of policing.

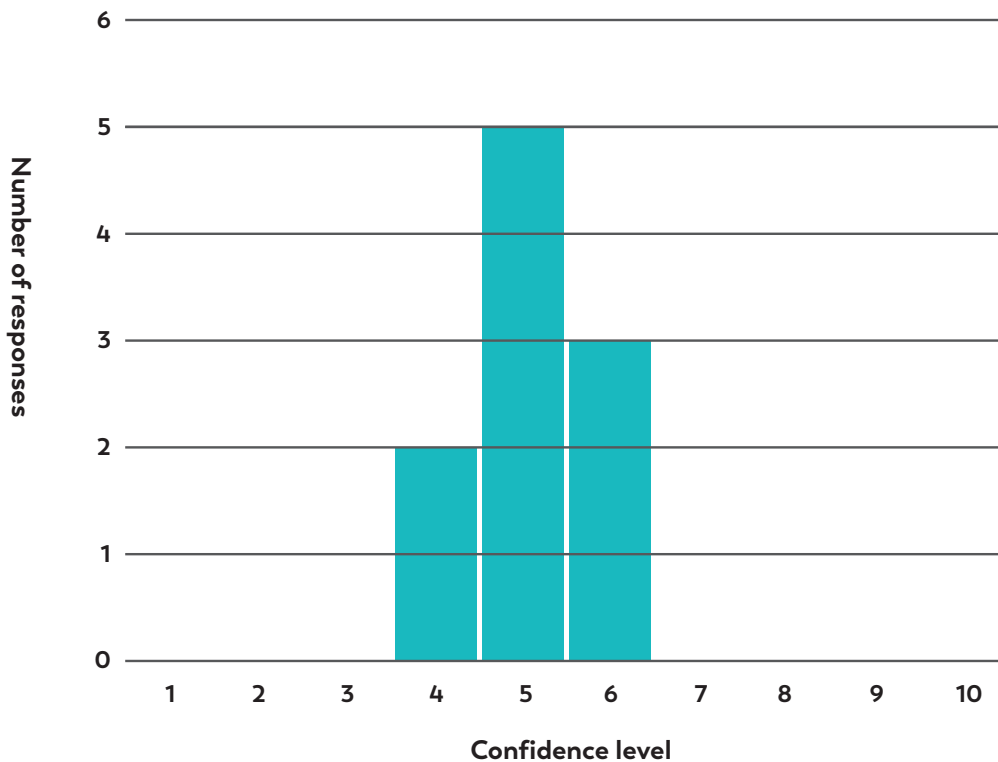
“To inform us what’s going on ...you need to let people know ‘this has happened, this is what we’re doing, watch out’ and make people aware.”

“I get emails from Northamptonshire Police, but they are very, very ad-hoc, with lots of spelling mistakes. We used to get quite a few alerts and if everyone was on this community and it was working properly, I think that would be another [positive] thing because the police are seen to be proactive. I’ve not had one for quite a long time.”

“I find it hard to believe they can’t do something where you’ve got as East Northamptonshire app with crime updates so if something happens, I know. The football transfer deadline day, I knew who was getting signed within a minute. Is it going to be that expensive for a particular police service to give crime updates in your area? You log on and you decide what you want to hear about, I don’t care if people have been committed but I do care if there’s a guy with a machete in my town, rather than having to log into Facebook because if I turn my notifications on for Facebook, I’m going to know it’s some guy who I went to school with when I was 3 is having a birthday, I don’t care, I don’t speak to him anymore.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = ‘Not at all confident’ and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and ‘easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again’.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

In Rushden, there is a palpable willingness among residents to financially support improvements in local policing, provided that such investments yield visible and measurable outcomes. The community's support is not unconditional but is closely tied to the expectation of enhanced police services, which include better visibility, and quicker response times. This conditional approach to funding reflects a pragmatic perspective within the community, focusing on the value received from their contributions.

A participant captured this sentiment effectively, stating, *"I think people would want to pay it but then you'd want to see more of them [police]."* This comment highlights a critical condition for community support: the visible presence of police as a direct result of increased funding. Residents were clearly expressing that their willingness to pay more via the precept is dependent on seeing a direct improvement in policing services.

The demand for tangible results stems from past experiences where increases in funding did not evidently translate into improved services from a resident perspective. Residents expect that additional funds will not only maintain the current level of service but lead to noticeable enhancements that directly impact their daily lives and safety.

The research conversation indicated a desire for transparency and accountability in how funds are allocated and used by the local police. Participants expressed concerns about past expenditures that did not seem to improve police effectiveness or community relations. As such, there is a strong call for clear communication from police leadership about how additional funds will be used, including specific initiatives and programs planned, and how these will address the community's current safety concerns.

"I see council tax as an insurance premium, my insurance premium for my car might go up or my home insurance or whatever, my council tax is just an insurance premium. I pay for fire and police so if I have a fire they're going to come and put the fire out, if I need the police, they're going to come out so it's difficult to judge whether that premium is worth it until I've had to use it."

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

In stark contrast to the often mixed and critical views of local policing, the Fire & Rescue Service in Rushden is held in high regard by the community, praised for its responsiveness, and active community engagement. This positive perception is rooted deeply in the residents' experiences and observations of the Fire & Rescue Service's performance during emergencies, which they see as markedly reliable and effective.

"Yeah, because the fire service is a response unit, all they seem to do is respond in an emergency."

"You see them at community events, you see their vehicles, generally, they are more visible."

The commendation for the Fire & Rescue Service extends beyond their emergency response capabilities. Residents also highlight the service's proactive stance in community engagement and their consistent visibility and sense of localism.

“..we’ve got a local fire station so you kind of feel a little bit safer knowing you’ve got something local.”

“I know a few of the fireman or I have done over the years. We know them whereas the police we don’t, the fireman are local but the police, I wouldn’t know who they were.”

“I just feel they are more accessible; you sort of know where you stand with them and what they do.”

9.0

Daventry Groups

9.0 Daventry Groups

9.1 Daventry

The group was held at the Daventry Leisure Centre in Northampton on the 15th February 2024. A total of nine Daventry residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	24	Bangladeshi
Female	26	White British
Male	38	White British
Male	44	White European
Female	48	White British
Male	48	White British
Female	52	White British
Female	53	White British
Female	54	Bangladeshi

Emerging and local priorities

Emerging priorities for residents of Daventry, as discussed during the focus group, centre predominantly around addressing anti-social behaviour, drug dealing, and ensuring a visible police presence in key areas. These issues were repeatedly mentioned as top concerns impacting the community's sense of safety and well-being. Residents expressed a desire for more proactive policing strategies, such as increased patrolling of 'known problem areas' and better engagement with the community to deter crime effectively. The frequent sightings of drug deals and the nuisances caused by electric scooters and motorcycles were highlighted as needing 'urgent attention'.

A participant emphasised the local sentiment, noting, "I think in general, as people say, it's not massive crimes, but I just think drug dealing, that's the big one in Daventry." This reflects a keen awareness among residents of the specific issues that they believe should be prioritised to enhance community safety and trust in local policing.

"...the only thing I have spotted more recently, there seems to be a lot of kids on not just e-scooters but mopeds and quad-bikes. There's been a few times when I've been out with some of my nieces and nephews, and we've had to pull them to the side, so they don't get hit. I don't really know what you can do about that because by the time you've called a police officer, they'll be long gone..."

“...where I live, nuisance motorcycles, electric ones, they’re haring around, drug dealing, going back and forth. My kids are getting to an age where I want them to be able to go out on their own and I want them to be able to walk to town and me not worry about that, and I can’t. They’re the priorities for me.”

“Last autumn on our estate I saw camera footage on two neighbours’ cameras. There were guys with some kind of scanner through the windows, trying to clone car keys. The rumour was they’re coming from Birmingham and with the motorway network that there is around Daventry with the M1, M6, the railway centre, they can be in another country in 3 hours. I live on my own and I’ve got no family so I’m just cautious.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

A common theme was the perceived inaction by police, particularly PCSOs, who are often seen but rarely intervene effectively. There were examples of resident frustration over reporting anti-social behaviour multiple times without any apparent action.

“They’re not interested when you report it, as many times as you report it, as many times as you’ve got a photograph of the person riding the bike, nothing comes of it. They recognise the offender and the PCOS’ say ‘Oh, I know who that is’, and I think ‘go on then, do something.’”

“I’ve got a restraining order, I had a stalker for 3 years, the police did nothing at all. I’ve only got as far as I have got because I ended up having the Suzy Lamplugh Trust support me. It got to the point we were prepared to prosecute the police because of them just not doing anything. It eventually went to court.”

Feelings of safety

Residents expressed varying levels of safety across different areas of the town, influenced significantly by the presence of drug dealing and anti-social behaviour. The town centre was perceived as ‘relatively safe’, especially during organised events which provided a sense of community and increased the visibility of PCSOs particularly. However, safety concerns were heightened on less populated routes and during the night-time economy due to inadequate lighting and the frequent sight of electric scooters and motorcycles, often associated with drug-related activities. This unease was compounded by the reported inefficacy of local police in addressing these issues, leaving residents to question the security of their immediate environments.

“It’s the route between where I live and the town that’s the bit that affects me, that’s where I don’t feel as safe as I would like.”

“I’m retired, walk with a walking stick, not that I’m disabled but I walk with one for my own bloody personal safety. I’ve seen them on these electric scooters whizzing around and they’ve got black jeans on, black hoodies, helmets on, you couldn’t see them. I’ve been notified to keep my eye open because there’s been one or two assaults, and attempted rapes so I’m just very cautious.”

“...having lived in bigger cities, I’ve been to places before and been really terrified so walking down the streets and Daventry doesn’t compare to that, not to downplay anyone else’s experiences. I’d say the town centre, again, you don’t ever see police there, but I’ve never felt unsafe, it doesn’t really have anyone in it if you go there after a certain time of night.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing in Daventry were markedly varied, influenced by several factors including the effectiveness of police response to local issues and the impact of national media on perceptions of policing integrity. Residents expressed a blend of cynicism and conditional trust, noting that while they recognised the challenges faced by the police, such as ‘underfunding’ and ‘limited resources’, these factors did not fully excuse perceived inactions or ineffectiveness.

Direct experiences with local policing, such as the lack of follow-up on reports and a minimal visible police presence played a significant role in shaping trust levels. One resident poignantly captured the sentiment of the community, “Just on the question of trust, I would trust them but I’m not sure I’d trust them to do anything about what I was telling them.” This statement reflects a broader concern that while the police might be trusted as an institution, there is considerable doubt about their capacity to effectively address individual and community concerns.

“Where I live is a known drug dealing area, but you never see anybody. Why don’t the police drive around known hotspots?”

Residents did reflect on a small number of experiences of effective follow-up, which did influence satisfaction levels positively.

“My van was broken in to, all my tools were taken. Afterwards, I was actually quite impressed, I phoned the police straight away, there was nothing they could do really, I don’t know what I was expecting. The next morning, I was at work anyway, but my housemate said they’d come out and looked round the area and stuff and put leaflets through everyone’s doors, but I don’t know what I was expecting really. The tools have still gone.”

The influence of national media on local policing perceptions in Daventry was notably significant, particularly concerning the distrust engendered by high-profile cases of police misconduct reported in the media. Incidents specifically involving the London Metropolitan Police, such as the Sarah Everard murder, were specifically mentioned as having a profound impact on local trust levels. Such coverage has led to a heightened sense of apprehension and scepticism towards the police, influencing how residents—especially younger ones—view and interact with local policing.

“I’m not going to London mum I’m never going to London because I can’t trust the police there, they’re all rapists by the sounds of it.”

“Do I trust the police? It’s a good question. I do, because they’re the police, but you do hear things.”

“You’re always going to get a few bad apples, they can’t all be bad and if you can’t trust the policeman, who can you trust?”

“I always say to my kids, ‘if it’s making you the news, it’s unusual!’”

Effective communication between the local police and the residents of Daventry emerged as a crucial element in shaping public trust and confidence in policing. Participants noted that when police communication was prompt and responsive, it significantly enhanced their perception of the police’s effectiveness and approachability. For instance, the ability to receive immediate feedback or updates on reported issues was highly valued and contributed to a sense of being heard and respected by the force. Conversely, a lack of follow-up on reports or perceived dismissiveness was criticised and seen as diminishing trust.

“If you report something regardless of if something happens afterwards or not, I think you have to have feedback.”

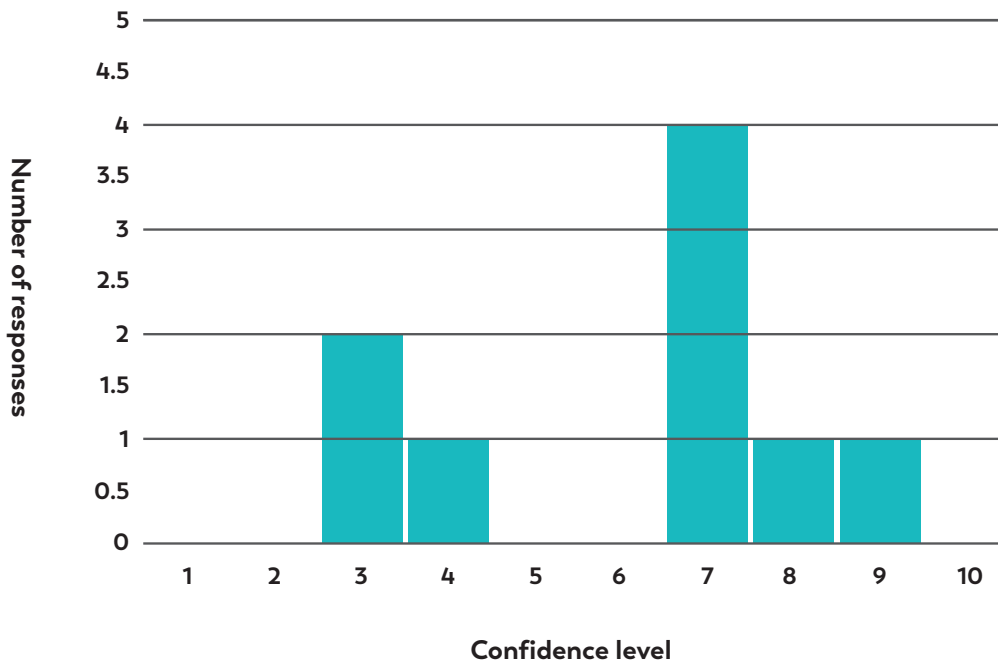
Residents linked communication, particularly follow-up with trust and confidence, but of equal importance was the promise of a response or follow-up, which didn’t happen. This was considered something corrosive of public confidence.

“...if you say you’re going to do something, do it. They were very clear ‘we’ll ring you before 9am next Monday’ and they didn’t. It is simple, just do what you say you’re going to do, or don’t say it.”

“They wanted to do a victim impact assessment with me. They said what’s involved and she said, ‘think about it and we’ll call back on Monday’. Monday has never come but in the meantime, they’ve managed to ring me twice to survey me and ask how impressed I was with their service.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = 'Extremely confident'. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The attitude towards investment in local policing in Daventry was characterised by calls for greater transparency and effectiveness. Participants expressed concerns over the allocation and visibility of police resources, questioning whether the investments announced were adequate or effectively deployed. The prospect of additional funding via a precept did little to assuage doubts, with residents querying how these funds would be used and their impact 'on the ground'. This sentiment reflects a broader mistrust in the management of resources.

"I think the Commissioner said an extra £3 million could be made available. It doesn't actually sound like that much when you work out how many people that is to police."

"Like a lot of public sector agencies, whether it be the councils, the NHS, they're all bust and haven't got any money. There's also too much bureaucracy, too much red tape and not enough efficiency with the money they do have."

"There is too much pushing paper about and not enough getting the bloody job sorted out. I would like to see in simple terms what extra investment would achieve, but also, what waste is there, and how it is being addressed. I presume there is a lot of waste."

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

In contrast to the concerns expressed about local policing, the perceptions and experiences related to the Fire & Rescue Service in Daventry were overwhelmingly positive. Residents reported minimal direct interactions with the service, yet the perceived effectiveness and professionalism displayed during emergencies fostered a strong sense of reliability and trust within the community.

“The outcome is generally more successful; they go to a fire and the fire goes out and everybody is happy, or you get rescued from a car so that’s a positive.”

“I’ve never heard a bad word about the fire service here, when there’s an emergency, round here from what I’ve seen, they’re pretty hot.”

The service’s visibility and responsiveness during critical situations were particularly appreciated, contributing to a general sentiment of safety and support. There was also some mitigation to explain the different perspectives of local fire and rescue and local policing. This suggested the higher satisfaction was more heavily skewed towards perception, and satisfaction was linked to more definite outcomes.

“I think that’s possibly why everyone has a more positive attitude of a fire service, it’s that they haven’t had dealings with them, so it is based on what we think and what we see.”

“...there’s a resolution with fire and rescue and their work and with a lot of crime there isn’t a resolution.”

“I think that is why the communication is so important, if police followed-up, it would be more like a resolution. Even if it wasn’t the outcome you wanted, just knowing what happened. But yes, I agree, I instinctively feel more positive about the fire service.”

9.2 Rural Woodford Halse, Long Buckby, Moulton, Brixworth, Byfield etc.

The group was held online on the 20th February 2024. A total of seven residents from the Rural Woodford Halse, Long Buckby, Moulton, Brixworth and Byfield areas were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	28	White British
Female	33	White British
Female	46	Black Caribbean
Male	47	White British
Male	50	White British
Male	50	White British
Female	53	White British

Emerging and local priorities

Attendees agreed that living in such rural areas there was little in terms of priorities that felt important enough to raise in terms of police action. Half the group did mention an increase in drug related incidents and one resident raised concerns around speeding and reckless driving through the villages.

“The most controversial thing in the village is there’s some drug deals that happen in a park and there’s never any police around for that and it’s so obvious so there’s that, but I don’t know if anyone has called the police for that.”

“A bit of both, we’re guessing it’s that because it’s random cars that pull up and there’s the smell of weed and stuff so we’re just guessing. We’ve never gone down there ourselves to see what we can buy. You can definitely smell it, that much is clear.”

“Like the others have said, we definitely get people doing drugs, there’s been issues at the local pub, and you know those little canisters that people sniff? We had a problem about a year ago where they were absolutely everywhere on the verges and I think now people are moving, I don’t know anything about drugs but like the big bottle things and you see those tossed out of cars etc. So, we’ve got that in the village but in terms of like the next village, Duston, I know that they’ve had issues, especially at Co-Op with shoplifters.”

“Drugs is becoming more prevalent, I see in the laybys and the parks sometimes, it does need stamping out before it gets any worse.”

***“I would just like to mention we’ve got a massive problem with speeding in the village, so we’ve got the A428 that goes through the village, so we used to have a working speed camera and it no longer works. We have got one of the speed monitors so I regularly walk the dog and you can see traffic going about.*”**

“We have had a car going into a house just at the bottom of our road, young kids in the house, someone was speeding and lost control and smashed into the wall, obviously it’s really frightening. It’s not just the young male drivers that are speeding, it’s parents with kids rushing to get them to school, its old ladies speeding, it’s everyone.”

A couple of attendees were also concerned with the crime in Northampton and argued that this should be the top of any police priorities.

“I think there is a lot of drug activity going on, I see a lot of it and my kids don’t go out actually but they’re very active, we’re out football training every evening so they don’t have time to be walking the streets, but I’d be very concerned if they were walking the streets. I wouldn’t allow it because of the drug activity I do see around surrounding areas. I think it’s already been said, you don’t see as many police around, you see lots of youths around who are hanging around. Again, we heard lots of things about vandalism carrying on, there’s lots of homeless people in Northampton, it did look like an advert for Go Outdoors in the town centre, tents everywhere. When we moved up from Devon which was 20 odd years ago into Northampton and it was really nice then, it’s really deteriorated since that point, so over the last 20 years it’s really gone down.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

The majority of the group agreed that it would benefit the rural community if they did see more uniformed police visibility through the villages, many said that the idea of having a local officer or presence that they can get to know and engage with would enhance the relationship with the force and offer reassurance. That said all were understanding enough to admit crime is very low across all the villages and other areas are more in need of a police presence.

“I think it would be nice just to be able to, I’m not saying we need to know their name or anything but just a familiar face. I’ve got 4 boys, and it would be nice for them to say ‘I know that police officer’ but they’ve got literally no connection to any police because we don’t know any police. And if we do hear a police siren it’s because they’re tending to something, there’s been no connection, like a positive police. I think when you see the police you know they’re going to a crime so there’s no time to really engage with them, that sort of thing so I think it would be nice to see a police officer around.”

“Like everyone else has said, you don’t really see the police much unless they’re doing something, it would be nice, especially in the village or around to see them wandering around just as it used to be kind of thing. Also, for maybe younger kids to know there people around, the police are just wandering, whereas at the minute they probably feel they can do something because they’re always doing something else so they’re not just going to be around that corner so to speak. But I understand they are under pressure, and we are probably not their priority.”

“I just think obviously I live in a village; I’d pretty much agree with most of the comments everybody has said tonight, particularly around, I think I said earlier, we don’t see a lot of police here. I can’t think the last time I saw somebody and again also, I wouldn’t know who to contact. There’s certainly no visibility, no person, no police presence at all, but having said that, it feels a fairly small and fairly safe village to be honest.”

“I shouldn’t say it but I kind of feel I could leave my car unlocked at night and it would still be there tomorrow probably because there doesn’t seem to be a lot of incidents in the area and that’s probably why we don’t see too many police, it’s probably low-level.”

Feelings of safety

Feelings of safety were high across all residents with many that said they feel very safe all of the time in their particular village.

“It is pretty easy going here to be honest with you, if you hit me with the statistics I’d probably be shocked but I personally feel very safe and every time I see a police car or anything like that, everybody automatically goes ‘what happened there?’, it’s almost like it’s a very rare thing and it must be something quite big for a police presence to be in the village”

“In Welford village I feel really safe, pretty much no crime goes on at all of it does it doesn’t spill out and cause lots of trouble.”

“I think it’s okay, Woodford is quite special probably in a good way, I originally come from Devon and Woodford is more Devon like than Devon. They’d probably be out here with pitchforks if they needed to but that’s a compliment to the village because there’s Facebook groups and if anything happens, it’s around the village within 2 seconds. I think that’s quite a good thing, I don’t think we have that much crime in the village from what I see from the local news website and things, it’s a little bit of petty crime now and then and they say the village is a safe village considering the size.”

When the group were discussing how safe they felt, many naturally spoke about Northampton and how unsafe they felt in the town centre and how this was getting worse, many worried about their own safety or that of their children. Intimidated gangs, homelessness, knife crime and drug related activity were all mentioned as drivers to feeling so unsafe.

“It’s certain places, I avoid those places now, but they can feel a little bit rough, and you don’t know if people are carrying knives or anything. I take the view you’ve got to cause a bit of trouble, you’ve got to do something to them for something to happen to you but just you never know who is out so you’ve got to be a bit cautious and I feel like if there was a little bit more of a police presence maybe that would help, so that it’s the police helping deal with issues as opposed to bouncers having to police it maybe. A lot of places do where you scan your ID on the way in, so I suppose that helps get the repeated offenders away.”

“I feel like it is when you walk into Northampton town they’re just there. Again, they are homeless but a lot of them are under the influence of either drugs or alcohol and I don’t remember Northampton been like that. Before you wouldn’t see as many homeless people as you do now, I’m not saying every homeless person is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, but it creates that sort of assumption that they are from the way they’re behaving, just their outward being and how high they can be as well and stuff.”

“What I would say is maybe if I went onto a night out in Northampton town, it doesn’t feel safe there, so going on the Welly Rd into the centre of town and that’s also linked to you never see police people there or there’s maybe a few there around All Saints and the centre but not really on the route into town. I would say there needs to be more presence probably on the Friday and Saturday night. I don’t go out much now but when I do go out, I never see police officers.”

“In terms of Northampton there is no way I would go out and meet friends in Northampton. I go to London to work occasionally and if the train station carpark is full then I don’t know, I would just feel so unsafe going further afield to walk to the car when it’s dark. It’s really quite awful. Just people hanging about, I know it sounds, in the shadows and a lot of men in groups can be really intimidating.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Overall confidence in Northamptonshire police was fairly high and most felt there was little doubt that serious crime is currently dealt with effectively. The main area the group has less confidence in terms of local policing and the service delivery was around response times and there was a perception that because of the rurality and the lack of crime generally in their respective villages, the response to crime being reported may be affected.

“I think it depends on what you want them for really. I don’t think I would be majorly confident if there was a semi-serious incident that the police would arrive in a decent time in the village, I don’t think I’d be confident in that, just going on what I know has happened to people that I know in other places.”

“I’m not confident because I just think that particularly because we live in a rural area that we would have a lower priority.”

“I feel like Northampton Police would just kind of give you essentially a crime number and then just kind of not come really. I witnessed a crash locally and for that one it seemed like they couldn’t really be bothered to come out for it, so if I had an issue, unless it really, really needed me to call the police, I just don’t think I would, just because I don’t have the confidence that they’d sort it. Obviously, it depends on the severity but let’s say it was low-level vandalism, I wouldn’t even call the police about my car now or if it was my property. If it was an assault then I would but the more low-level stuff which you maybe think the police should care about, I wouldn’t have confidence on them to sort it.”

Previous experience of Northamptonshire Police in terms of any local incidents were fairly limited, however there were numerous examples of attendees who recalled being directly affected by a crime locally or aware of crimes being committed in their area and whilst the response to the events were considered very good, communication and keeping people informed (be it the victim or the local community) was the main criticism of Northamptonshire Police in terms of this service delivery.

“We reported a problem with a local individual, and they were very, very quick to attend and it finally blew up in the end whereby we’re not quite sure what happened but essentially, we had 3 police cars out here, the wagon, the whole lot. They had him pinned down on our driveway, lots of screaming, lots of shouting, very frightened child.

This guy was totally off his head and totally drunk, left most of his stomach on the back of our drive, they carted him off putting him back in the police van and carted him away, didn’t knock on our door, didn’t tell us anything, just left. I walked round to make sure the property was okay, found goodness knows what on our drive and thought ‘if I’d just let my dog or my daughter just run round, she would have been straight in it’. Years ago, they would have knocked on the door and said, ‘have you a bag, water, some disinfectant, we’re really sorry but everything is okay now’. At that point you think to yourself ‘really? That’s not on’, so I did phone 111 and said, ‘this is what’s happened, is there a reason for this?’ and they gave me a call back and said, ‘we’re going to send a guy, he’s got some water and he’ll come and check’ and the guy who came out was absolutely brilliant. Just sometimes it doesn’t work, all they had to do was, they’d done a brilliant job with this guy, difficult circumstances, all they had to do was tap on the door and say ‘you might just want to go out there and rinse that all away if you’ve got a child’ but no. It was very frightening, my daughter was 8 at the time, in total tears, it was just after the guy in America who said he couldn’t breathe, and they were on top of him, so you can imagine what was going on, bins were going flying.”

“I reported a burglary and that was the first time I had any sort of connection with the police to be honest, so I was hoping that obviously we would have found out a bit more information whether the people got prosecuted, it would have been nice to have some closure. Did these people get arrested or what happened to these people? I don’t even know if they’ve done it again or got away with it, I have no idea and it was a bit like ‘here’s your crime number’ and every time I rang, the police officer was on holiday or away from their desk so in the end I thought ‘you know what, I’m not going to bother anymore’. It was too much stress on myself plus my kids as well, it was like 4am, the kids were totally distressed over it as well, a massive bang. That was my only connection with the police.”

“We had a weird situation happened, I think it was halfway through last year, a house got broken into at like 9am and it was summertime, so it was really light and there were 3 guys in balaclavas, and they had a knife and they threatened, I think the mum and the son had gone out, but the dad was still there. We know the mum, so this is why we know all this, the police didn’t tell us anything, so it just reminded me about the whole feedback thing. Not that I guess we were owed any feedback having not gone through it, but it would have been nice to know something because the road was all blocked off. Everyone was fine but it was weird because the police came really quickly, and they blocked off the road and they had all the tape up and everything and then it was just gone really quickly but nothing had been said. So, if we didn’t know that family, we wouldn’t have any idea of what was going on and that felt really unsettling to not know. I know they did feedback to the family about the situation, and they did catch them, they were driving to Manchester, so they told them that, but it was a really weird thing that there weren’t any notices up or anything.”

One attendee did recall a recent incident whereby as a witness she had been kept fully informed and was very positive about her overall experience.

“I had a relatively minor incident last year with a drunk driver who ran into the back of me, it was outside the college in Northampton and the guy basically fell out the car when we stopped. He was paralytic and it just happened to be that the police drove by at the time, and they arrested him and took his car away and it’s a pretty minor thing.

I had some damage to the car and that sort of stuff, but I guess because we were a victim or whatever they did regularly write to me to let me know how it’s proceeding. I guess maybe they’re going to call me as a witness, it could have been that as a reason rather than it was a nice thing to do to let me know. It was actually more worrying what they wrote to me because I think once they took him away, they said he was carrying various weapons and knives, and I had my 13 year old daughter with me in the car.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

Residents were asked if they had any previous experience of Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service and one attendee gave really positive feedback about the experience they had received and several members of the group talked about how reassuring it was to have a local fire station, which in turn increased their confidence in how safe they feel and how it should equate to a better response from the service if ever called upon.

“It was outside 18 months but probably in the last 4 years. We had a BBQ, we’d never had one before, lit it and it just went up, massive, massive flames, caught the tree alight. We called the fire brigade, and two vehicles came out and it was a long, long way for them to get the hose down to where the fire was but honestly, they were so, so quick and you couldn’t fault them. Completely different view of the fire service to the police, they were just so professional, and you just felt so safe straight away. They were so responsive; I think it was maybe less than 5 minutes and they just sent out I think it was two full fire brigade trucks and one little van and they were just really professional and really reassuring.”

“Not past experience but it’s a little bit relevant. In the village where we are we do have a small fire station; I know it’s extremely well thought of in the village and we all feel quite safe because it’s there. So that’s kind of the one thing we wouldn’t want to lose.”

“I do feel safer and have more confidence knowing we have a station nearby.”

9.3 Crick

The group was held at the Crick Village Hall in Northampton on the 21st February 2024. A total of nine Crick residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	60	White British
Female	66	White British
Male	61	White British
Male	49	White British
Female	41	White British
Female	38	White British
Male	50	White British
Female	56	White British
Male	21	White British

The focus group discussions in Crick reveal a degree of concern about feelings of safety, and local policing. While the concern was not considered significant, residents considered the deterioration in feelings of safety and police visibility was ‘*trending downwards*’.

“I’ve got young kids as well, they’re not old enough to be out but a concern is the levels of anti-social behaviour around the village which I think is increasing, you see the occasional report about it and drunk teenagers. Some level of police presence maybe to stop that getting any worse, I don’t know how often they may circle back around the village or what presence there is in an evening or weekend because I’m at home with young kids.”

Police visibility and responsiveness

There is a need for enhanced police visibility and responsiveness, along with better communication and transparency regarding funding and operations. Addressing these issues is essential to enhancing community trust and improving the feelings of safety of Crick residents.

“A cash point got pulled out by someone, they stole a local tractor, rammed the cash point, and lifted it out and they had all the time in the world to do that. It took them half an hour and people are like ‘what’s going on?’ and they were just laughing in the village on a tractor. There was no obvious police response, not a quick one anyway.”

While the overall sentiment regarding local policing in Crick leans towards a need for improvement, there were some noted positive interactions, particularly with PCSOs who have a consistent presence in the community. These officers are recognised for their familiarity with the locals and for providing a level of reassurance through their visibility and engagement, particularly in schools and during community events.

PCSOs are valued for their consistent presence and engagement with the community, especially in schools and during local events. Residents acknowledge the benefits of having ‘*approachable*’ and known figures in their neighbourhood, which enhances the community policing effort.

“...he’s had quite a lot of involvement with the school as well he’s in there quite a lot.”

“They responded the next day after the cars had been stolen and there was a break-in at the end of the road, and it was PCSO’s that came to check to see if the residents were okay and alert the rest of the neighbours and they asked for doorbell footage.”

While the PCSOs are appreciated for their community role, there is a sense of frustration regarding their limited powers and the perceived inadequacy of their response to more serious crimes. This sentiment reflects a broader concern about the overall effectiveness of local policing strategies.

“It’s just a carpark for the PCSO there’s an office probably behind it but there’s no physical public presence at all and that’s a town.”

“The only thing with the car thefts is, we’ve only ever had a PCSO respond, and no police officers attended. We had some guys come and knock on the door and put us on a register so when crimes were in the area you got a text.”

The community now has a reliance on their PCSOs in terms of crime prevention and response. While their engagement activities are well-received, there is a desire for PCSOs to have more impact on actual policing and crime resolution.

“We’ve put a request in for the PCSOs to police the festival in the village. It’s such a busy event more than 10,000 people come. We put a request in for these big events and we just don’t get an answer, so we now have to employ our own private security on a weekend because there’s alcohol and that all comes out of the profits which goes to the village the village community charities.”

The experiences and opinions regarding PCSOs in Crick reveal a community that values their presence and efforts but is simultaneously aware of their limitations. There is a clear appreciation for the role of PCSOs in fostering a safer and more engaged community, yet there is also a call for enhancements that allow them to contribute more effectively to crime prevention and response.

Feelings of safety

The feelings of safety among Crick residents are bolstered by visible police patrols, though there is a call for more engagement. Concerns about crime related to the village’s proximity to the M1 are significant, with residents highlighting the need for a more robust police presence to deter crime effectively.

“You can never have enough police presence they don’t need to actually get out the car and do anything but to see a car drive round.”

“Emerging issues are we’re very close to the M1 there’s increased crime where people are dropping off it’s a quick getaway so by the time the police show up, they’re 60 miles away.”

“Car racing on public roads nearby is increasing. It’s very frequent on a Saturday evening. I would say frequent enough for them [Northamptonshire Police] to attend randomly but that never seems to happen, and you can hear them from most houses they’re racing up and down the bypass.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Confidence in local policing is compromised by inconsistent and often delayed responses. The physical absence of officers at the local police station and lack of proactive communication further diminishes the community’s trust in their ability to maintain safety.

“Daventry Police station is completely unmanned and never open, it looks filthy on the outside and looks like nobody attends there. It’s just a carpark for the PCSO. There’s an office probably behind it but there’s no physical public presence at all and that’s a town.”

“There’s a homeless chap in residence in the main doorway at the moment and good luck to him, it’s nice and dry and relatively out of the wind. On the other hand, it’s a bit of an odd site when it’s the main door into the station, all his gear is there, and he goes off shopping or whatever he does, and he goes back at night. It strikes me as very peculiar at times.”

“I experienced a huge amount of harassment in 2019 in the village, both me and my husband, it’s been going on since then. I was advised by my solicitor and a barrister to phone the police to report everything that had happened to me and how I felt, you’re not allowed, it’s against the law to harass people ...later I spoke to an officer who’s a sergeant from the main police station somewhere in Northampton and I was close to tears. I’ve had to have counselling because of it, and the harassment has continued, and I’ve not been able to do anything about it and that police officer was surly, didn’t believe me, told me it wasn’t harassment, but my solicitor and barrister told me it was harassment. I got a really surly police officer, it added to the upset really. It was like he wanted to dismiss it and get it off his desk.”

National media stories also play a role in shaping the community’s trust in police. High-profile cases and negative media coverage of police misconduct elsewhere appear to impact local perceptions, contributing to a general sense of distrust towards the police.

“In terms of the police I think the whole thing with Sarah Everard and officers I’ve met in person not through their jobs, but I’ve got divorcee friends who went out with police officers I’ve got no confidence.”

“When we had meetings, and we had the PCSO’s come out. He was very clear how women should look after ourselves and how we need to ring 999 if a police officer comes near us and get their badge number, obviously with the case of Sarah Everard and things. He was very insistent that we need to take care of ourselves as women.”

Importance of communication and engagement

There is a clear desire for better communication from the police to the community, which might help rebuild trust and support additional investment. Participants expressed the need for more transparency and regular updates on police activities and initiatives, including effective outcomes.

“Communication to let us know where investment is going and what it’s been used for.”

“Maybe what we don’t have is enough reporting of good announcements in the police, success stories. When we see something in the national news, it’s always derogatory, ‘the police have done this or not done this’ or ‘the police haven’t turned up’ but you never hear about the good stories.”

“They’re human and I feel like you were saying if something good happens nobody celebrates that. A police officer saves a child from a burning house nobody talks about that it’s expected.”

The trust and confidence in local policing in Crick are markedly low, influenced by both direct experiences with local policing and the wider national discourse surrounding police behaviour. The community calls for more visible policing, faster response times, and improved communication to help restore trust and ensure a safer environment.

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The discussion around investment in local policing was marked by scepticism regarding the efficacy of funding increases, with a call for transparency in how these resources are utilised to improve policing.

“The commissioner would argue that the increase in council tax over the last 2 or 3 years has gone towards rural policing, but I would say there isn’t any difference in the service provided.”

“We’re one of the largest counties, are we the third largest county in the country? It’s about 70/80mils across the county. I’d like to see that as a percentage of the population.”

“What they [Northamptonshire Police] are developing, it’s very vague. If it was saying it was going to be another 100 police officers, spread across rural areas than that’s a commitment but it’s too vague. If you’re a business, you have a budget, you’re accountable for the spend, you lay out your forwarding year what you’re going to spend it on, weekly, monthly, why don’t they?”

Finance and investment were considered against the pronounced theme of local PCSOs indicating that while Crick residents were appreciative of the resource, they felt it may be the product of a ‘quirk in the local geography’ rather than a default position.

“Can I just say something about our PCSO? I think we have two of them, I’m not sure but they are partially funded by the parish council which obviously comes out of our council tax and partially funded by the Daventry International Rail Freight, which is a huge, massive international Railway Freight Terminal, you’ll see all the warehouses that are over the boarder.”

“We only have two PCSOs because of the terminal, if that wasn’t part of our local area, we would probably have half the resource. We benefit from this quirk in the local geography, it is not the result of sensible investment.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The Fire & Rescue Service was unanimously praised for their prompt and effective responses, which starkly contrasts with the police service. This positive perception highlights a greater confidence in other emergency services compared to local policing.

“A few years ago, my lounge had a fireplace, and we had the fire on and the next thing I know a twig fell and then hot coals went all over the carpet and there were flames the size of me in my lounge but within 5 minutes the fire service were there. They cleared it all out, where our chimney is it goes all the way up the house, all the way to the attic on the third floor so they did some scanning through the walls to make sure it was all clear and so on. They went to the top of the chimney, they did a really, really good job of it and came really, really quickly.”

“We have needed them several times. They’ve all be pretty good.”

“They’re so much better, I haven’t needed either, thankfully, but that is still my opinion.”

10.0

South Northamptonshire Groups

10

10.0 South Northamptonshire Groups

10.1 Towcester

The group was held at the Mill Brewery Shop in Towcester on the 10th January 2024. A total of ten residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	30	White British
Female	39	White British
Female	52	White British
Female	54	White British
Female	55	White British
Male	56	White British
Male	57	White British
Female	60	White British
Male	62	White British
Male	72	White British

Police visibility and responsiveness

Resident's initial reactions when asked to describe Northamptonshire Police (in one word) were on the whole fairly negative with 70% of those in attendance suggesting they associated Northamptonshire Police to have a lack of visibility or a lack of response (if required). Words such as "invisible", "slow" and "non-reactive" were mentioned in this mini exercise.

However, it was interesting to hear that a recent resident of Towcester felt positively about the police and the levels of policing locally; this was mainly driven by a move from Wellingborough to Towcester that month and a perceived difference in the areas and how they are policed.

"I have a different perspective because in Wellingborough I would have said 'useless' but moving to Towcester with the police station, I feel like they do have a presence here."

“Absolutely, I always think the police presence here is great compared to Wellingborough. They closed the police station down in Wellingborough so there were no police there, so if you had an emergency and pressed the buzzer, it would get through to Northampton and then it was sort of a delayed reaction. The level of crime in Wellingborough compared to Towcester, that’s why we moved over this way because of the crime rates. We walk all around Towcester with the dogs at night, down alley ways and everything, I’ve never felt scared once. As soon as we were home in Wellingborough, we wouldn’t go out again, so because we’ve lived there, here is like, we’re quite fine with it.”

Visibility remained a significant talking point throughout the group with around half the group suggesting that a lack of visibility is a real issue in Towcester and that a lack of police presence was a key driver to the perceived lower-level crime and ASB locally.

“I honestly cannot remember the last time I saw either a police car or an officer on the beat or anyone. Whether it’s the time I go or whatever, they don’t exist as far as I’m concerned. Nothing at all so they’re unknown.”

“More visibility is needed because there is a lot of trouble locally, especially at the evenings and especially now it’s dark. There are groups of teenagers so I wouldn’t expect one policeman to walk around the town, there’d have to be a couple, but it is just more of a presence around the hotspot areas.”

“Now you only see them when there’s a problem or after a problem or speed camera checks.”

These attendees also felt it was very important to see uniformed officers, suggesting it is a strong deterrent and gives local residents peace of mind.

“I lived in Buckingham before I moved to Towcester and in the town centre that is smaller than Towcester, they would regularly have uniformed PCSO’s or a policeman just going around the town and it wouldn’t be continuously, but you always spot one just walking about and keeping an eye on things. I think it makes a huge difference.”

“I think there must be a subconscious reassurance about that sort of thing, you know the fact you see them and they’re probably walking around and picking up a lot more of what’s going on than if they just drive through the High Street.”

Others in the group actually held the opposite opinion in regards police visibility and said that a police presence was in their mind a negative concept and was more likely to cause them concern.

“Can I just say another perspective is, although I don’t see many police in the town, for me it feels safer, so I don’t need to see them. Whereas in Wellingborough, I’d be like ‘oh god’. I feel quite safe here, so it hasn’t even crossed my mind at all.”

“If I saw the police wandering around my area, I’d be thinking ‘oh shit, what’s happening?’”

Feelings of safety & Emerging and local priorities

The majority of all attendees said they felt safe in Towcester almost all of the time. Many felt very familiar with the town and its surrounding areas and reported very few concerns around crime and disorder. The only slight concern was with several attendees that said they did feel more vulnerable in the town on a Friday or Saturday night as there was an awareness of reported trouble especially emanating from one or two of the centrally located pubs. Lower-level crime and ASB were generally associated with the town centre.

“Towcester is not exactly a crime ridden place but a lot of it is the annoyance type problems of vandalism and ASB and the scraps outside pubs and so on. But it’s not like there’s regularly shop robberies or muggings or whatever else, a lot of it is just that low-level annoyance and generally over a weekend.”

“I don’t like walking through town on a Saturday night you do hear about fighting and a bit of a free for all but other than that no worries at all.”

Several local residents also mentioned drug dealing as a concern in Towcester and this was considered a priority in terms of local policing, again this was mainly considered a town centre issue.

“There is the drug dealing like what was mentioned earlier because that’s going on more and more and you do see it.”

“Mainly centred around the town centre and the back of Waitrose.”

“As I say, if I’m seeing it then surely other people must be seeing it, so why isn’t something being done?”

Trust and confidence in local policing

When asked to score their levels of confidence in local policing it was a varied response ranging from 5/10 through to 8/10 with many basing this on either personal experience (often higher) or again the perceived lack of visibility or ability to respond (often lower).

“I think I’d just have to go bang in the middle with 5 because obviously I don’t have the confidence that they are going to be there and be able to react.”

“Again, I’ve not had many dealings with them so again it would probably be a 5. I think what would be better is, they are slow to respond to anything in Towcester, whereas if the police station was manned again and there were actually police officers in the station that could respond quickly.”

“I’m going to say 8 from my personal experience and even from people I know, from the town and my perspective.”

“I’d have to go in the middle at a 5 because I’ve got no recent experience of that. My concern would be if there was an incident, how quickly someone could attend.”

“I’ve only had one big dealing with the police. I was in a big RTA, and they were beyond fabulous, they were there first out of the emergency services, sorted everything out, brilliant, so 8.”

Whilst victim experience was limited, there were examples of high satisfaction and low satisfaction, with a varied number of scenarios that had involved calling Northamptonshire Police.

“The school, I work at the preschool next door to the school, we run the after school club, and a child went missing, they didn’t come home from school, so they checked with us to see if they were with us. Within 20 minutes there was a police car going around the village trying to find where this child had disappeared to, and their response was amazing.”

“We had a number of incidents. We had a serious theft at work, over £1,000, I’ve not heard from the police and that was 3.5 months ago. We were targeted and the PCSO comes in and goes ‘I’m sorry, they should contact you’ but even that is low-level at the moment to what they are dealing with. So, it’s a hard one because if I’d have rung them when I was at home, I rang them once when our mini motor was stolen, and it was 7 hours before they came out.”

It was clear that with around a quarter of the group felt that their lack of overall confidence also affected the likelihood to report a crime. Several attendees also discussed the challenges of reporting online.

“Yeah, because when we used to have things happen in Wellingborough, we wouldn’t report it because we’d got desensitised to it. So, someone in your garden, you wouldn’t report it because no crime had been committed, they were just there, what would the police do? They’d be gone so you kind of negotiate with yourself what’s acceptable and what’s not and it seems that major crimes are the only thing people are really calling about because you know you’ll get a response because why would you ring for a response if you know you’re not going to get it?”

“I won’t report a crime anymore because I know they won’t respond, not at that level anyway.”

“It takes 25 minutes to report a crime online and at work, I don’t report the little crimes because it just takes too long.”

“It would just be easier if you had a point of contact and even just a PCSO and they could come out and speak to you directly because when you’re tapping away on the form, it’s just so general it’s just like filling out an application form, there’s no real interaction there so where does it go? You only get an automated response from it.”

Whilst affecting confidence, national media and headline stories mostly seemed to affect residents trust in Northampton Police, especially female attendees.

“I think with the media people see the police as an overall organisation, so what happened to Sarah Everard and things like that, you don’t distinguish where the police force was, it’s the police as a whole and that’s when people have a negative attitude towards them.”

“Yeah, if a policeman tried to flag me over, I’d drive all the way home before I get out because it makes you question everything you’ve been told. The more stories that come out about these things, the more you think actually ‘if I’m on my own, do I trust them?’ Because it’s not them as a police officer, it’s them as an individual, taking advantage of their position.”

“It just makes you suspicious because you don’t know people’s motives, you hear all these news stories and you lose trust in all police, including Northamptonshire.”

With the exception of one individual no one recalled any negative local press involving Northamptonshire Police.

“There was a policeman, in Northamptonshire. What was he charged with? I can’t remember if it was a sex offence, there was something and it was a Northamptonshire policeman. I can’t remember the details, but I remember seeing it in one of the national papers but it’s not like The Met police were it’s happening week after week.”

Importance of communication and engagement

Attendees generally considered communications and information as important as police visibility for their particular area. Many already followed Northamptonshire Police on Facebook which was deemed as informative, and the group all talked about the effectiveness of local neighbourhood group chats that linked communities together and it was recognised that information was more spread quickly through these platforms and that the force could maybe take advantage of these channels somehow.

“I had an email today, you can sign up for emails about things that are going on, so when the police visited the preschool they said to the adults, ‘do you want to sign up for something watch?’ and they send you emails about houses that have been broken into, cars that are broken into and all things like that and at the bottom of that was a monkey survey, and that said about the 1,500 officers and the council tax and were you willing to pay extra, it’s really good as is their Facebook page.”

“So, we’ve got local villages Facebook pages and there’s someone in each group that tends to put on updates from the police and things. Accidents, if someone is missing, last week there was a flasher outside one of the schools.”

“Yeah, I think so because if something happens, especially locally you sort of know about it quicker than a policeman walking around the village sort of thing. It’s an instant for the people that use socially media, I know not everyone does.”

“If the police jumped on, because we’ve all got a village chatter, if a policeman went on the chatter and said ‘it’s fine, we’ve got the baddie, he’s in prison now’ or whatever, we’d all be like ‘oh, that’s good. We use them a lot.”

A younger workforce was also cited by many in the group as affecting their perception of local policing and the force as a whole.

“Yeah, I see them looking like they have just left school, covered in tattoos and you think what an impression and what the hell are they going to do about anything? They lose your respect straight away.”

“I’ve been out and there are young police officers and they’re getting chatted up by the women coming out of the night clubs. So, they’re not concentrating on what they’re doing, they’re trying to.”

“I think they’re targeting the younger ones because obviously if they’ve got to go through these tests and everything else and make it really hard to people to actually get into the police force, then how are we supposed to have confidence in them?”

“It’s like the prison service, they recruit people who are very young who you don’t think are capable.”

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The majority were in favour of an increase in their council tax to support policing, with most agreeing they would be willing to pay up to £15, however there was a demand for tangible and relatable targets in terms of spending the additional funding. Local initiatives were also cited as important to show the local community the money had spent effectively.

“I’d put in £15 if it needs more.”

“I’m not ignoring it, I’ve had to cancel streaming services and pick and choose and things like that, the mortgage has doubled in 3 years but for the police, I’m more than willing.”

“I’d want to see more active units in the area, in our area.”

“Yeah, as long as we do start, you get all these promises and then you don’t see any difference. If I started to see a local bobby, police officers on the high street in Towcester, then yes, I’d feel a bit safer and I’d think it’d be worth it.”

“Yes it’s £15 a year, but they don’t quantify what that amounts to on the ground and I think that’s where the challenge is and I think probably everyone would say ‘£15, fair enough’ but if they could then quantify where that money will be spent on, I want to see x number of police officers recruited due to the increase.”

“Or a local initiative to say ‘this is what your money will go to. A fast response car which will be around in your area’ and then you can sort of identify with it a bit more.”

Transparency and better information on police spending was also considered important and most said it would also help improve confidence.

“I think so, if someone said this amount of money would mean, just something tangible, even if it said ‘we can buy two more police cars’, fine. You can say ‘okay that was money well spent’ but when you’ve got these money pits and they sweepingly say, ‘yes we’ve had these extra millions to spend’ but on what?”

“I just think for them to explain what you’re getting for your money is really important, be honest about it.”

“I’d like the accounts to be more open but it’s wishful thinking.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

When the group were asked to consider any previous experience with Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service, any perceptions or how well they thought the police and FRS worked well together it was all very positive.

“No, unfortunately I had my roof refitted and the gentleman that was refitting my roof had a heart attack and died on my roof and he had to be recovered. It closed the A5 because I live on the A5 and they had to get a special team with ropes and everything to get him down, they were absolutely amazing.”

“I had to call them out for a kitchen fire, and they were there quickly, very friendly and gave brilliant advice, they were fabulous.”

“They’re not offensive, people are happy to see a fire engine go past but people are suspicious when a police car goes past so you generally have a better opinion of them.”

“I just think as an organisation, the police have a more negative image.”

“They’re heroic.”

“When we had the thing, they were both there because one had to close the road and the other did the thing. Usually with an accident the fire brigade is helping recover and the police are sorting out the traffic or dealing with whatever.”

“They do knit together well if you ever see them working at a particular emergency, it’s quite canny, it just happens. There’s no running around saying, ‘what do we do?’, they just all work.”

10.2 Brackley and Middleton Cheney

The group was held at The Old Fire Station, in Brackley, on the 24th of January 2024. A total of eight Brackley and Middleton Cheney residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	19	White British
Female	37	White British
Female	42	White British
Female	44	White British
Male	46	White British
Male	51	White British
Male	59	White British
Female	62	White British

Feelings of safety

The issue of safety within Brackley is multifaceted, closely tied to the visibility of police forces and their responsiveness to community needs. Many residents expressed concerns over the apparent lack of 'police presence' in their communities, which they believe directly impacts their sense of security. One participant's experience in Brackley starkly highlights this concern: *"I haven't heard anything around here, I haven't seen any police, there's no patrols, I've seen one police car go by and that was it."* This statement not only reflects personal observations but also a broader sentiment that visible policing is crucial for fostering a safe environment.

The narrative further complicates when discussing specific criminal activities such as theft and antisocial behaviour. For example, a resident shared an experience of a recent car theft, detailing not only the theft itself but also the frustrating aftermath involving the police response: *"Car theft is bad, very bad. They [Northamptonshire Police] just push it away though and want the insurers to sort it out... That's all they were doing in my mind."* This account illustrates a perceived disconnect between the police's priorities and the community's expectations for security and justice.

Police visibility and responsiveness

Residents' narratives frequently circle back to the theme of police visibility and responsiveness, or the perceived lack thereof, as a core concern impacting their sense of safety. The scarcity of patrols and slow response times to incidents of antisocial behaviour or crime deeply affect community trust. One resident's experience highlights the frustration felt by many: *"The bar staff will be phoning the police trying to get them down and they'll say, 'there's nothing we can do at the moment, we're busy.'" This perceived inaction in the face of community needs undermines trust and confidence in the police's ability to safeguard the public.*

Concerns about personal safety, especially in social settings, were articulated. An individual shared their observations on the presence of drugs and violence in nightlife, coupled with a lack of effective police intervention: *"We always find whatever pub we go to in Brackley, there's either drugs being used by young people or there'll be a fight that breaks outside. The bartenders will be phoning the police trying to get them down and they'll say, 'there's nothing we can do at the moment, we're busy.'" This perceived inaction in the face of community needs undermines trust and confidence in the police's ability to safeguard the public.*

Victims of crime expressed dissatisfaction with the police's response to incidents, from 'slow' response times to feeling neglected during the investigation process. One person highlighted a particular incident involving aggressive behaviour that resulted in injuries, emphasising the delayed police response.

"... my wife works in the NHS in Brackley, they had somebody in the surgery who wasn't well, he's got mental health issues but went on an absolute rampage attacking people. He had taken his clothes off, had hit doctors and drawn blood and all the rest of it, they dialled 999 and it took them an hour to get there because the nearest police officer was in Crick and that's where the police car had to travel from."

The community's attempts to address crime independently, due to perceived police inaction, were also mentioned. This included residents self-policing in response to police disinterest in particular crime types.

“The only way that stopped [dog thefts] is because every resident pulled together and we kind of do our own policing... The police presence annoys me that they’re happy to put a speed wagon out all the time, they’re happy to prosecute on dash-cam footage but when it comes to serious stuff, they’re not here to do something about it.”

Emerging and local priorities

Residents expressed concern about emerging and local crime priorities, such as drug-related issues and the threat posed by county lines. The discussion reflected a broader concern about the adaptability and focus of local policing efforts to evolving crime trends. “Maybe drug use and drug dealing probably needs to be a priority, or explaining why it’s not,” a participant suggested, highlighting the disconnect between perceived police priorities and community concerns.

Moreover, the lack of visible action against known issues can exacerbate community frustrations and lead to a feeling of neglect or abandonment by the police force. For instance, the detailed recounting of drug issues in local parks and public spaces illustrates a perceived gap in police action and community expectations.

“Parks have been a problem from what I hear... It’s just from what my children who are now in sixth form are telling me who go to Brackley Park.”

“I think any green space now sadly, Middleton Cheney for example, the playing field there, I play tennis and you can just see and smell them [drugs]. It’s a constant problem picking up the needles and God knows what in the hedges and I know at the secondary school drugs is a big problem too. It just all feels normal and accepted now, this deterioration and lack of consequence.”

Residents, while not accepting of emerging types of crime were able to reflect on how these priorities may trend towards increasingly more significant concerns, and the emerging priorities are a precursor to greater concerns.

“I would like Northamptonshire Police to be more aware about drug problems, because that is a big issue, them little cannisters you see around now, they’re everywhere, Northampton is covered, and you are starting to see more and more in Brackley.”

“I think that is worry, I have done my Safeguarding training, and you start to think about things like County Lines, if you think more drug use is happening with young people, then they become vulnerable to other things too, are some of these things not being addressed precursors to bigger problems. That is my worry.”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in the Northamptonshire Police are influenced by several factors, with communication emerging as a critical component. The importance of effective communication in policing cannot be overstated, as it shapes public perceptions of transparency, approachability, and efficacy. Scepticism towards government institutions at large is reflected in residents' attitudes towards the police, as one participant noted, "There's a lack of trust now... It depends what role they're in because you might have all those police but are they on the ground or are they sat in an office?"

Importance of communication and engagement

Effective communication emerges as a critical area for improvement in rebuilding trust between the police and the communities they serve. The narratives shared by Brackley residents indicated a significant communication gap between local policing and the public. One resident described their ongoing relationship with Northamptonshire Police.

"My case it's a sexual assault case that I'm going through [currently]. When I reported it, I was told it could take 2-5 years to get to court, that's the quickest. My confidence was thrown from the start, and I understand it's such a long process, but they [Northants Police] didn't fill me with any courage. I kind of thought 'what's the point in saying it now? It's thinking it could be happening to another girl somewhere else right now. When you're in an interview room with one female officer and three males. Obviously, you can't be saying 'I don't want any males there' but when you're already feeling unsafe and vulnerable around males, it's just quite nice to be able to have a one-to-one chat. I got in there and they were like 'there's tissues there but there are three cameras on you right now' and they were like 'this video will be shown in court if it goes to court in 2-5 years. The case is linked to Northampton, I'm here in Brackley and when I've had to go in for interviews, I've had to go all the way to Northampton. Obviously, I've had to take time off work so I could go in, about 45 minutes away. They also they said they'd do monthly check-ups on me and ring me. I heard from them a couple of weeks ago but that's the first time I've heard from them in about 5 months. They're not very good at keeping me in the loop or following through with what they say. I know obviously it must be very confidential but if you're the main person involved, it's quite nice to know what's going on.

I've been given a number to call but it depends if the police officer deployed to my case is in when I phone them. She says that they work on a rota basis so obviously she's not in when I'm calling. I don't know who else to contact and you can't contact 101 because they'll get back to me in two working days. So, I think that's my main issue, the communication barrier."

This communication gap not only affects the immediate perception of police effectiveness but also has long-term implications for community trust. Residents' narratives suggest that improving dialogue and transparency between police and community members could significantly enhance perceptions of police responsiveness and effectiveness. It's not merely the presence of police that communities seek but also meaningful engagement and timely communication about their concerns and incidents affecting them.

The foundation of trust between the police and the community is built on more than just effective policing; it also requires fostering positive, ongoing relationships. The discussion around community policing and engagement activities, such as the involvement of PCSOs in local schools, highlights a desire for more proactive and preventative measures in community engagement.

“I work in a local primary school, and we had two PCSOs come in to speak to our 10 and 11-year-olds... The headteacher really thought ‘let’s get them in, they need to be speaking to these children before they go off to secondary and they’re faced with knife crimes and everything else that goes on.’”

However, the impact of such engagements is mixed, with some residents feeling that these efforts are insufficiently impactful or too isolated to foster substantial change. The narratives suggest a need for more consistent and wide-ranging community engagement strategies that address the diverse concerns and needs of different community segments, including youths, schools, and vulnerable populations.

Positive encounters with the police, where present, shed light on potential areas of strength within the force. Residents recounted a rapid and comprehensive police response to a personal crisis and such experiences underscore the potential for the police to positively impact individual lives and community safety when they effectively address urgent needs.

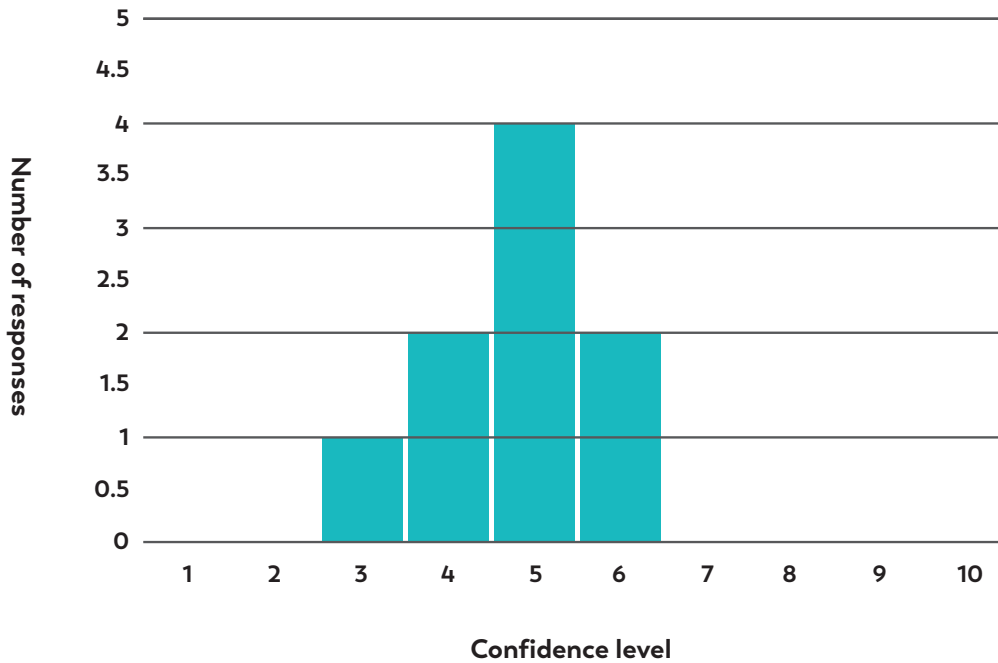
“I’ve had an experience I think last year, my ex-husband was struggling with his mental health, and he’d gone missing. ...within half an hour I had an unknown number phoning me saying ‘where are you? It’s the police, we’re at your house, come home now’. I was like wow. They were there within half an hour and there were three police cars looking for him and that to me, that shocked me because I wasn’t expecting that at all.”

“I follow Northamptonshire Police online and what they are quite good at is missing persons, they do get it dealt with quickly. It’s staggering how many people do go missing, especially younger people. Probably about 8 years ago, one of my boys was seen getting walked across the playing field by a stranger who nobody knew towards a wooded area in our village, and I didn’t know anything about it. A neighbour called me and said, ‘Is ### supposed to be with a bloke with a camera?’ and I said, ‘definitely not’ and he said, ‘I didn’t think so, I didn’t recognise him, and I’ve called the police.’”

I only stepped outside the front door to go and follow up and crikey, we had 3 police cars blazing down the road. That was 8 years ago probably, I’m not sure we’d get that now.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Brackley residents expressed some scepticism towards police effectiveness, influenced by media coverage, but it was not considered a significantly upheld perspective. For example, one participant criticised police programs on television, stating, "...then at the end of the programme, it's dropped, no further action and I just think 'why have I sat and watched that for an hour?'. It's the CPS that's the issue." The discussion also touched on how cultural representations, especially in music and social media, normalise crime and contribute to negative perceptions of the police among young people.

"From a young person's point of view, most of the stuff we do nowadays is on your phone and coming back to the word normalised, all the music nowadays focusses on 'we hate the feds [police]': I think these anti-police messages is reinforced with young people through their entertainment choices, through their music, so on some level, the police must consider this."

"It's similar with knife crime, drugs, stuff like that; people I know have taken drugs, have completely understood the dangers of it, completely understood that it's wrong but they do it to make themselves fit in and so they can relate to the music they're listening to."

Investment in local policing (and Precept)

The willingness of Northamptonshire residents to financially support enhanced policing services is conditional, tied to expectations of clear benefits and improvements. The idea of paying a higher precept for better police services finds some support, if the additional funding leads to visible and effective changes. “I’d pay £50 a year extra,” one participant offered, indicating a readiness to invest more in local policing, provided that these funds directly contribute to improving public safety and policing efficiency.

This conditional willingness to contribute more financially is tempered by a desire for accountability and clarity regarding how these funds would be utilised. Residents sought assurances that increased investments in policing will directly address their concerns and priorities, including heightened police visibility, faster response times, and more effective crime prevention and resolution.

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

Contrasting with the mixed views on policing, the Fire & Rescue Service enjoys a positive reputation among Brackley residents. Many view the service as ‘efficient’, ‘reliable’, and ‘highly responsive’ to emergencies, highlighting a stark difference in public perception between the two emergency services. “Confidence is sky high,” a participant remarked, capturing the general sentiment towards the Fire & Rescue service, and emphasising the critical role that visibility, accessibility, and proactive community engagement play in shaping public trust and confidence.

The favourable perception of the Fire & Rescue Service is further reinforced by its active involvement in community education and safety initiatives, contrasting with concerns about the police’s engagement with young people and schools. The proactive approach of the Fire & Rescue service in building relationships with residents, particularly through educational programs for children, sets a positive example of effective community engagement.

10.3 Hackleton, Bugbrooke, Deanshanger, Grange Park etc

The group was held virtually on the 15th of February 2024. A total of eight residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Male	24	Indian
Female	39	White British
Male	39	White British
Male	40	White British
Female	46	White British
Female	58	White British
Male	63	White British
Female	70	White British

Police visibility and responsiveness

The sentiments regarding safety and the effectiveness of police response in Hackleton and surrounding areas reveal significant variances in perceptions of local policing effectiveness. Community members voiced their experiences and concerns, providing a picture of the police presence and responsiveness in the area.

Many participants expressed a lack of confidence in the consistency and effectiveness of the police response. Specific incidents cited by residents illustrated their concerns about how different situations are prioritised and handled.

One participant described an incident where the response to a burglary was prompt and helpful, contrasting sharply with a lacklustre response to a missing child report, which was handled by a seemingly disinterested call centre. This disparity highlights perceived inconsistencies in the urgency and empathy of police responses.

“I know of a call that was made to the police about a very young person having gone missing and the call was handled by a call centre and actually the attitude of the person answering was really disinterested and non-committal and this is speaking to a very worried parent about their daughter. For me, I felt that was totally inappropriate when you have someone who was as worried about a person in their family and particularly for how long they had been missing.”

Another individual discussed the ongoing issue of theft from work vans in local villages, indicating a feeling of neglect by the police over several years.

“I know about lack of funding with the police, they’re short staffed obviously, but I’ve got myself a work van, and a lot of my friends and colleagues have got work vans around the surrounding villages and people are coming off the motorway from London, breaking into them, taking stuff and it’s been going on for years to be honest with you and it doesn’t get a lot of interest in that from the police. It not just the crime, it’s the lack of interest.”

The lack of police presence and engagement in the villages were a recurring theme. Participants noted the absence of ‘boots on the ground’, which they felt diminished the sense of safety in their communities.

“They are non-existent around the villages now, no presence at all.”

Community members strongly felt that the visible presence of police is integral to their sense of security, particularly in smaller villages. The shift from a visible, engaging police force to a more distant, less interactive presence ‘over the years’ has led to feelings of disconnect and insecurity among residents.

“We don’t see anyone on the streets anymore, boots on the street who you can talk to.”

Despite the lower frequency of direct interactions with crime, the perceived decrease in proactive policing and community engagement leads to heightened concerns, especially during the night or when less visible police presence is noted; residents were able to identify that the night-time economy for many was a time when feelings of safety deteriorated further.

“I might see a vehicle literally drive past my window, roughly around a Sunday mid-morning, I don’t think I have ever seen one at night.”

“I suppose with age I personally go out less in the evening than I did, in the winter if I go to the shops when it’s dark, I have local shops where I have access to them via a footpath away from the road. I won’t use that if it’s dark, I’ll go round by the main road and take a different route, simply for my own well-being, feeling of safety.”

“I think because I live in a rural village the main sort of crime I experience or am concerned about is night crime theft. I’ve got friends that live near the racecourse and obviously the crime they experience is more sexual attacks and that kind of thing, so I don’t hear any of that in my world. It’s protection at night and early hours really that I would want.”

“...my wife meets friends in the local pub for a meal or something, it’s only a 150m walk home but it’s mainly a dark path, not very well lit and because we’re a rural area there’s not many people around. If something happens there’s no one around to protect or help, so I’d certainly say there is a switch from daytime.”

The discourse among residents uncovered a need for consistent, engaged, and responsive policing that reassures all community members of their safety, especially in less urbanised areas. The desire for a return to a more visible and community-focused police presence is clear, underscoring the need for strategic adjustments in policing approaches to rebuild trust and ensure community safety effectively.

The issue of police visibility and responsiveness emerged as a significant theme during discussions with Hackleton and surrounding area residents. Their observations and experiences provide a nuanced understanding of the impact that police presence—or the lack thereof—has on their sense of security and trust in local policing.

Community members expressed a preference for a time when police visibility in villages and towns was more ‘commonplace’. Several participants reminisced about a time when local police officers were a ‘familiar sight’, engaging with residents and enhancing the communal sense of safety. The decline in this type of visible presence has been felt across the community, with many noting that seeing police only in vehicles, if at all, does not substitute for the reassuring presence of foot patrols.

“We don’t see anyone on the streets anymore, boots on the street who you can talk to.”

“We don’t have any police in the village, I probably see one police car every week. It’s not a problem because I don’t think there’s too much crime in Deanshanger at the moment, but it would be worrying if something happens and knowing they’d have to come from Northampton or Towcester because it’s quite a long way away if I was really in need of the police at a certain time.”

“...and that’s why I think the smaller villages might get left out a little bit, sort of left behind.”

“I can remember a police house in the village. I know that won’t happen again, but I suppose if there was a contact number or a line that was specific for that village or something, just so you felt that if something did go wrong, there’s a contact for someone who knew where you were talking about and what you were talking about kind of thing.”

The responsiveness of the police to incidents varies widely, with some residents reporting prompt and effective actions while others felt neglected, particularly in less urgent situations or ongoing issues like theft from work vans. The perceived priority given to different types of incidents influences the community’s trust in the police’s ability to protect effectively. There is a clear call from the community for not only more consistent responses but also for responses that are perceived as empathetic and engaged, regardless of the incident’s nature.

“I’ve got a relation who has had a motorbike stolen, motorbikes are a massive problem in terms of theft, and they’re a lot of money. It’s just, you never seem to get anywhere with them once something has been reported.”

“If you haven’t got anything that’s consistent you haven’t got confidence in it.”

The community’s perspective on police visibility and responsiveness reflected a mix of nostalgia for past practices and a critical eye towards current strategies. There is a notable desire for a return to more traditional forms of policing where officers are not only visible but actively engaged with the community they serve. This engagement is viewed as crucial for fostering a secure environment and for enhancing the efficacy of the police response to incidents both major and minor. The discussions suggest a need for strategic adjustments in policing, aiming for visibility that is not merely symbolic but functionally integral to community safety.

“I guess we all know we aren’t going back to a time of police houses and local bobbies, but I think we want the principles of what that achieved, i.e. more visibility, more familiarity between police and community, and more deterrence.”

“Policing feels more anonymous and less professional now compared to my experiences a decade ago, leading to diminished trust and confidence. Previously, there was diligent follow-up and a sense that issues were taken seriously. Now, the lack of personal attention and accountability makes me feel less safe and confident in how matters are handled.”

Despite concerns about the consistency of police responses, there were positive reflections on local policing within the Hackleton and surrounding communities as well. Participants highlighted instances where the police response was prompt, supportive, and impactful, which fostered a sense of security and trust among residents. For example, one resident recounted an efficient and effective police action following a burglary, describing how the officers provided practical advice and were quick to respond, which led to the recovery of stolen items. This experience was characterised as ‘professional’ and ‘very satisfying’, highlighting the potential for positive community-police relations when the response is managed well.

“I was burgled, and they were round straight away, very interested, extremely helpful, made some very pertinent and important advice in what I should do and how they were going to handle it and I thought the response was excellent.”

“In that instance they were actually very good, they took a statement from me. It was like a luxury vehicle which was stolen. I’d gone out at lunch time; I noticed some people coming out of this house and getting into the vehicle. It wasn’t directly from the description that I gave but they did manage to find it, they picked it up on camera in London I think, and they did recover it, so that wasn’t a bad experience I had of the police.”

While visibility and response were considered significant drivers to levels of satisfaction and a key metric which residents measure local policing by, it was suggested that the frequency and effectiveness of post-crime follow-up remains significant.

“I feel I have taken away a lot of positives from that very professional, very good response with advice, with exactly how they were going to deal with it, it was extremely quick as well but also the feedback which I got afterwards was on a regular basis, and that made all the difference.”

The dialogue with rural residents highlighted very few emerging priorities for local policing as their challenges appeared consistent rather than new or emerging. However, there was recognition of the changing nature of criminality and the impact this may have on prioritisation.

“We live in the modern world now so we’re not talking about just people on the street, we’re talking about people with cyber, the world has moved on so fast and so furious now with all these different aspects of spams and cyber-attacks or whatever you want to call it.”

The need for improved training and consistency in police responses was a recurring theme. Participants highlighted discrepancies in how incidents are handled, depending on the nature of the crime and the personnel involved. There is a strong call for standardised training to ensure that all officers can provide a uniformly high level of service, which is crucial for building trust and confidence within the community.

“I think what needs to be in place is some more standardised training because the way every policeman will handle a situation is different and I’ve received phone calls from my friends, innocent friends were they like ‘I’ve just randomly been pulled by a policeman, they’ve thrown me in handcuffs just for a random stop and search. They’ve thrown all my stuff on the floor’ and I’m like that’s crazy, they should be respecting your belongings.”

There is a clear desire for enhanced community engagement and visibility of police. Participants reiterated their nostalgia for a time when police officers were a more common sight within communities, engaging with residents and fostering a sense of security. This visibility is not only about deterring crime but also about building relationships that enhance community trust in the police.

“It would be nice to see patrols in the villages, obviously, and in Northampton town centre as well. I do work in Northampton Town but again you don’t see many coppers walking about really like they used to. Or even on a push bike, they used to have a push bike, didn’t they?”

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing have been shaped by various factors, ranging from individual experiences with crime response to broader perceptions of police presence and effectiveness. Community feedback indicates that these aspects play crucial roles in determining their overall trust in the police.

Trust in the police varies significantly based on individual and collective experiences. Positive experiences, particularly where the police have responded quickly and effectively, bolster trust and confidence. Conversely, negative experiences, such as perceived indifference or inconsistent responses, can severely undermine trust.

“I think it was a couple of years ago now, the police did come knocking on my door because a vehicle had been stolen near to our house and when they came round, I didn’t actually realise it had been stolen at the time. In that instance they were actually very good, they took a statement from me.”

“...we reported something and that was a positive experience because they followed up with us as well to make sure we were okay the next day and they stayed with us and that was really, really good.”

The public’s perception of the police is also influenced by media portrayals, which can either reinforce or challenge their views. When local or national media report negative stories about policing, it can impact community trust. Participants noted that such reports contribute to their concerns about the police’s ability to handle situations appropriately.

“Of course I am affected by national stories, it’s horrendous at the moment. The ludicrousness of the mistakes being made and in the press. There’s always this sentiment of ‘lessons will be learnt’ but it doesn’t seem to me that lessons are learnt because they keep coming back year after year.”

“You read and hear so much more about what individual officers have done, or small groups of officers within a particular force. Fortunately, I don’t read that about Northamptonshire, but there is a bit of you which thinks, they are all police.”

A recurring theme from the discussions was the need for improved communication between the police and the community. Clear, consistent communication about police actions and initiatives can help build trust. Residents expressed a desire for more transparency regarding what the police are doing, which they believe would help in forming a more accurate picture of the police’s effectiveness and responsiveness.

“I think communication would be key, so for example I’m sure most people have in their villages or areas, a local Facebook page where everybody moans about the dog poo and someone has broken the new park bench or something, and actually if we had better communication in the village and sort of that reassurance to say ‘this is what’s happening’ or ‘this is who you can contact in certain situations’, maybe that would put people’s minds at ease a little bit more.”

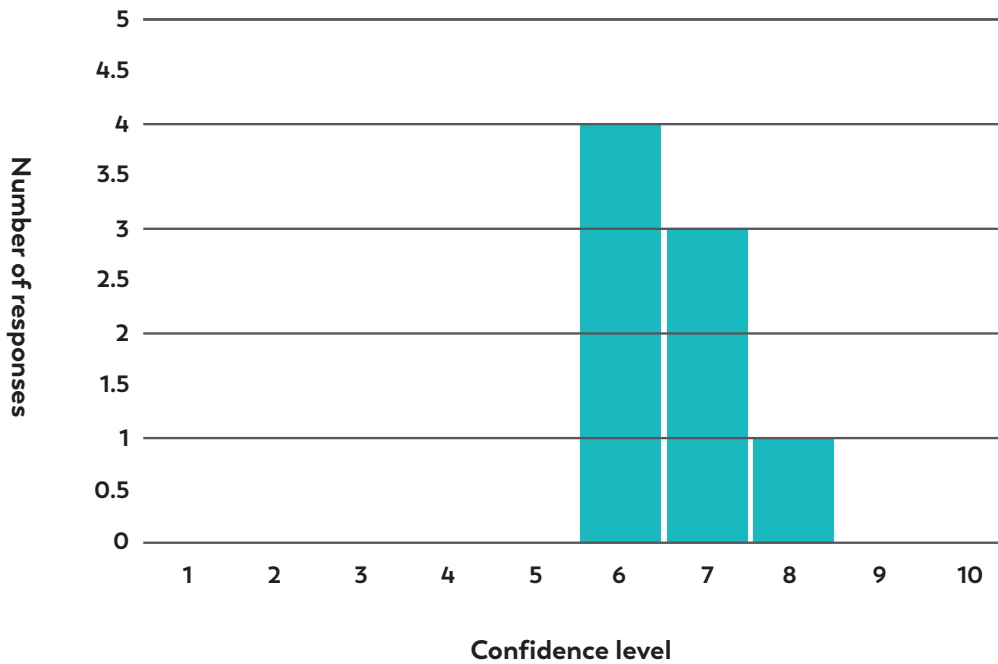
“I think sometimes it is the disconnect between what residents’ feel is important, and what the police consider important. They won’t always be the same, but you would probably trust the police a bit more if there was an explanation why we didn’t see things the same.”

“That’s an important thing for me. I think the police are potentially doing a great job, they might be dealing with stuff, but we don’t necessarily know about it, I would feel better knowing about this work, even when it doesn’t affect me.”

“I generally feel safe, though there are times I do not. My husband often works away, and recently, some older kids drinking near the rugby club caused trouble, smashing bottles outside our house. This makes me hesitant to report anything for fear of retaliation, like damage to my car, especially since the police seem unresponsive to such incidents. The lack of follow-up on damage in our parks adds to this fear. The main issue here is the need for better communication and connection with the police in our village.”

The group were encouraged to generate an indicative confidence score, based on their perceptions and experiences of Northamptonshire Police. The scale was introduced as 0 = 'Not at all confident' and 10 = Extremely confident. While confidence scores were perceived to be lowered, residents indicated such scores were vulnerable and 'easily changed if you have a good or bad experience with the police, and that could go up or down, again'.

Level of confidence in Northamptonshire Police



Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

The discussions among residents revealed mixed feelings about the potential for increased financial support for local policing through a precept or other forms of investment. While some expressed a willingness to contribute more if it leads to noticeable improvements, others expressed doubt about the efficient use of funds based on past experiences.

Many participants indicated that they would be more open to supporting financial investments in local policing if there were clear, tangible outcomes. They emphasised the importance of seeing direct results from their contributions, such as 'increased police visibility', more 'responsive policing', and a 'decrease in crime rates'. This conditionality suggests that residents need assurance that their money is being effectively utilised to improve public safety.

"I think it comes back to what I said before, I'd like to know they have been trained in a consistent manner so there is a consistency in their response, and it was fair. That they are better trained."

However, there is significant scepticism regarding the management and allocation of funds within the police service. Some residents expressed doubts about whether increased funding would lead to the desired improvements, citing past inefficiencies and a lack of transparency in how funds are used. This scepticism underscores a trust barrier that must be addressed to garner broader support for increased policing budgets moving forward.

“My confidence is low because there’s an indication across all of these departments that money is squandered, wasted. I think if they could actually prove that it’s been well spent, that would be a huge boost to confidence in the service.”

There is a clear call from the community for greater transparency and accountability in how policing funds are spent. Residents want detailed reporting on financial expenditures and their impacts. This desire for accountability is linked to their willingness to support increased funding; they want to ensure that any additional financial contributions directly contribute to improvements in local policing.

“...basically, we don’t have a choice, we’re going to have to end up paying this increased council tax and it’s up to them where they spend the money, but it would be good if they told us ‘You’ve paid this, and this is exactly what we’ve done with it.’”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

The research conversation with residents also touched upon their perceptions of the Fire & Rescue Service. Compared to their views on local policing, the sentiment towards the Fire & Rescue Service was notably more positive. Participants generally expressed high confidence in the capabilities and responsiveness of the Fire & Rescue teams, despite very few direct experiences of utilising the services.

Residents hold a largely favourable view of the Fire & Rescue Service, often contrasting it with their more mixed feelings toward local policing. The Fire & Rescue Service are perceived as efficient, reliable, and highly professional in their responses to emergencies. The positive perception is further enhanced by visible and effective actions during incidents, which strengthens community trust and reassurance.

“Yeah, I think they’re pretty good actually. I haven’t dealt with them directly, but I’ve seen if something happens, they’re out there.”

“I’ve not had dealings, but I agree I just feel like they’re there and things are dealt with, and you don’t hear of anything bad. Is it fair to compare them with the police? I’m not sure really. Their jobs are very different.”

The positive perception of the Fire & Rescue Service is also supported by media coverage, which tends to focus on their successful interventions and the ‘heroic’ nature of their work. Unlike the police, whose media portrayal can sometimes be negative, coverage of the fire and rescue service is perceived as almost universally positive, which significantly influences public opinion.

“Possibly because I haven’t seen what I would call adverse press, the things that are usually published are positive about the way in which the fire service has reacted.”

The engagement of the Fire & Rescue Service with the community, especially during local events and festivals, contributes to their positive image. Their presence at community functions and their readiness to engage with residents, including educational activities, helps build a strong bond with the community, enhancing their reputation as a vital and caring part of public safety services.

“My experience of the fire service over the years, I had a lot of village festivals and there was always the fire brigade there with their trucks and they’d just be visible. Sometimes they get called off and they’d have to go but they were visible.”

“I take the point that they are different services, and you can’t really compare operational roles, but the things they can and do, outside of their core business, that can be compared. The visibility, the community engagement, those sorts of things.”

10.4 Silverstone

The group was held at the Silverstone Garden Inn, in Silverstone on the 1st of February 2024. A total of nine Silverstone residents were in attendance and the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the group members was as follows:

Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Female	37	White British
Female	42	White British
Male	42	White British
Female	44	White British
Male	49	White British
Male	52	White British
Male	58	White British
Female	74	White British
Female	76	White British

In the focus group discussion, participants from Silverstone shared their experiences and perceptions of police engagement within their rural community. The conversation revealed a range of insights into the effectiveness and challenges of local policing, highlighted through personal stories and observations.

The discussions underscored a need for more consistent police presence and improved communication methods as means to enhance community safety and trust. The integration of direct interactions with the strategic use of digital tools was also seen as essential in maintaining effective community policing.

A significant point of conversation was the visibility and engagement of the police in rural areas. Participants provided mixed feedback about their experiences, which highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement in the approach taken by local policing.

Several participants appreciated the efforts made by police to engage with the community, particularly through proactive visits to local areas such as farms. For instance, one participant shared a positive interaction where the police made an effort to communicate with local farmers about suspicious activities: *“The police officer did come to the farm and say, ‘we are aware someone who has been around’, so they did come, and they do occasionally pop into the farm to let us know they are in the area.”*

However, the infrequency of these visits was a concern that many shared, indicating a gap between the community’s needs and the police’s capacity or strategy for rural engagement. The sentiment that police presence is too sparse to effectively build strong relationships or deter crime was summed up by another participant: *“It’s not very often they appear in the villages, once every two years is a fair average to be in any particular village, I think.”*

This comment underscores a desire for more consistent interaction, which many believe could enhance both safety and community trust.

The challenges of engaging residents across extensive rural areas with limited resources were acknowledged, but the discussions reflected a clear call for strategies that increase both the visibility and the effectiveness of police engagement. Participants seemed to agree that an increase in the frequency and quality of interactions would likely lead to better community relations but did acknowledge the strategy currently in place and the traditionally low public interest.

“Northamptonshire have a rural group associated with PCSO’s; they have to cover twenty odd villages. They do try and turn up to at least one parish council meeting a year.”

“If you can get any public to turn up to the council meetings, you’re doing well. A PCSO might be an added draw if they have any issues.”

“The problem I have is for the public’s perception of what it means for a 24-hour cover, they presume because you’ve got a PCSO, he or she is always available but to have 24-hour cover takes four people. People don’t understand that.”

Discussion also touched upon the challenges inherent in rural policing, particularly the logistical and resource constraints faced by the police force. Participants expressed that the response to rural crime varied significantly, with some incidents receiving prompt attention while others seemed to be overlooked. Reflecting on different experiences, one resident noted, *“For rural crime, you can have quite a major crime in farms and the police aren’t the slightest bit interested... for our last incident though, they actually came out and engaged, whereas before I’ve had some pretty low levels of interest.”*

The role of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) was emphasised as vital for maintaining feelings of safety, particularly through visibility. The effectiveness of PCSOs, however, appeared to be limited by their availability and visibility, as well as levels of support from within the community, which is a recurring theme in rural policing. The community's reliance on these officers was evident in statements like, *"The reason the village continues to use him is because he is able to quell a lot of anti-social behaviour within the village... We've had the same PCSO for the best part of 15 years, and that consistency helps with engagement."*

"The PCSO is very good, he's good at making enquiries so people know that if they do things, questions will be asked. He's not always successful but it is a useful role. It's only in Woodford Halse that I'm aware of that."

"The police officers themselves have a very low opinion of the PCSOs and in Woodford Halse where we have to find £42,000 a year budget for the PCSO and his training and everything else, the big antagonists against it have traditionally been the retired policemen in the village ...they were very negative about supporting him, one of them was a councillor on the parish council. He's moved to pastures new and we're very pleased."

"We're on our 5th now in 15 years so actually some stay in post for quite a while and they do really get to know the people and the beat and that is really appreciated."

"PCSOs is just another way of being visible or seen to be visible."

Trust and confidence in local policing

Trust and confidence in local policing were central themes in the Silverstone focus group discussion. Participants expressed varied levels of trust, shaped by their direct experiences with the police and its perceived effectiveness in their rural communities. These experiences influenced their overall perception of safety and the role of police in their daily lives.

Some participants shared positive interactions that notably boosted their confidence in local policing. For example, one recounted a proactive approach by the police that left a strong impression: *"He seemed to actually care, he actually made the effort to come and pop in occasionally to make sure everything's okay."*

However, not all feedback was positive, as some residents discussed experiences that led to decreased trust and confidence in the police's ability to address local issues effectively. A common concern was the apparent *'lack of interest'* or inconsistent engagement from the police.

Despite these challenges, there was a recognition of the difficult job police face, especially in areas with diverse and extensive needs. This recognition did temper some of the criticism and underscored the complex dynamics of trust in local policing. As discussions concluded, the focus shifted towards constructive suggestions for improving engagement and visibility, which many

Importance of communication and engagement

Communication between local policing and residents emerged as a vital theme during the Silverstone consultation. Effective communication strategies were considered crucial for fostering a sense of security and partnership between local policing and the communities they serve. Participants in the discussion highlighted both the current methods and potential areas for improvement in how police communicate with rural residents.

Several participants noted the use of social media as an important tool for communication, which has been beneficial in keeping the community informed of police activities and presence. As one resident pointed out, *“They usually give us notice if they are coming to the area; they send it out on social media,”* demonstrating the value of digital platforms for timely and broad communication.

Despite the benefits of digital communication for raising awareness, there was a strong preference for face-to-face interactions, which were viewed as more effective for discussing and resolving community concerns.

The introduction of the 101 service was discussed as a notable improvement in communication, providing a direct line to local officers. One participant shared their appreciation for this service, *“There is a feature on it where if you know the name of your PCSO, you can call 101, you can talk to the computer and say ‘PCSO ### ####’ and it will send you straight through to his mobile phone if he’s actually on duty.”*

“We’ve got all the direct numbers for all the local PCs in a window at the shop. I think it’s quite good in our village, it’s well documented, and they’ve got the neighbourhood alert you can register on the email system as well and that’s for any member of the community.”

Despite these advancements, there were concerns about the effectiveness of communication in urgent or serious situations. The *‘lengthy response times’* and sometimes *‘lacklustre’* engagement from the police were frequently mentioned, with one resident detailing a frustrating experience: *“I actually fitted a floor whilst I was on hold. I put the phone down and rang again and I’d fitted the floor by then. I eventually drove to the police station, and I couldn’t get in, no one answered, I had to wait for someone to come out and she said, ‘I think they’re all on lunch’ and I gave up at that point.”*

This anecdote highlights the gaps in communication that can leave residents feeling frustrated. While there have been strides in adopting technology to facilitate communication between the police and the residents of Silverstone, the discussion indicated that there is room for improvement. Participants suggested that enhancing both the quality of interactions and the accessibility of communication channels could lead to better community relations and increased trust in local policing.

In terms of improvements, the group suggested that increasing the frequency of police visits and enhancing the visibility of officers in rural areas could significantly improve both safety and the level of trust between the community and the police. Better communication about the roles and availability of PCSOs through more informative postings both locally and online was recommended. Highlighting a common sentiment, one participant remarked, *“It would be nice to see a community officer more than once every year, once every 4 years... A couple of posters around isn’t enough.”*

Investment in Local Policing (and Precept)

Investment in policing and the precept were discussed, reflecting the community's concerns about the financial resources allocated to local policing and their direct impact on service quality. Participants expressed varied opinions on whether increased funding through the precept could lead to improved policing services, particularly in rural areas.

The group generally recognised the need for better funding of police services to address the unique challenges of rural policing. Several participants were open to the idea of *'paying more if it resulted in visible improvements in policing'*. For example, one participant noted their willingness to increase their contribution: *"I'd pay £30, if I was confident it was going to get done, I'd pay whatever it takes."*

However, scepticism about the efficient use of funds was also evident. There was concern about the broader implications of increased funding and whether additional resources would actually reach the intended services. One resident expressed this doubt by highlighting past mismanagement: *"The trouble is you've excluded the context, the context is he's police, he's fire so are you going to give them a £15 increase? Then there's the unitary that have their social fund for all the immigrants and everything else plonked on their doorstep and then you have the unitary themselves who are the same plonkers that bankrupted the county council 5, 6 years ago that re-elected themselves."* This quote reflects a deep-seated mistrust in the administration and concerns over financial governance, which could hinder community support for increased police funding.

Furthermore, discussions touched upon the need for transparency in how funds are utilised within the police service. Participants wanted more detailed breakdowns of spending, suggesting that greater transparency could help justify the precept increases.

As residents discussed their expectations for funding allocation, one remarked on the need for clear communication about what the additional funds would achieve: *"I think also what I'd want to know is if I'm putting in an extra £15, what's that going to give us? What does that mean? Does it mean 300 more police officers? Does it mean more cars? More hours? What does that get us?"*

While there is a willingness among Silverstone residents to financially support their police through a higher precept, this support is conditional on assurances of effective use of funds and tangible improvements in policing. The need for transparency and accountability in funding allocation was emphasised as essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring that additional resources lead to better policing outcomes. The research conversation with participants articulates a community that is both aware of and concerned about the financial aspects of local policing and its impact on their daily safety and security.

In the Silverstone focus group discussion, while the primary focus was on policing, there was a brief but insightful mention of perceptions towards the fire and rescue service, particularly in the context of overall emergency services funding and resource allocation. This topic was less prominent compared to the extensive discussions on policing, but it still provided valuable insights into the community's views on emergency services in general.

The participants briefly touched upon the integration of funding for the police and fire services, reflecting a broader concern about how resources are managed across different emergency services. One participant highlighted the complexity of funding allocations, pointing out the challenges of distributing increases fairly: *"I believe that the police should be funded nationally, in the first instance anyway. I worry that making it a local issue results in reduced funding. Now we have a commissioner responsible for Fire & Rescue too, are we creating the same problem in that it takes the responsibility away from national government?"*

“I have always been quite happy with Fire & Rescue, I haven’t really used them, but are confident in them. I don’t want them to go the same way as the police, a bit like what has happened to the NHS.”

Perception and experience of the Fire & Rescue service

While there wasn’t a detailed discussion specifically about the Fire & Rescue Service, the mention of it alongside policing indicates an awareness of the interconnected nature of emergency services and the importance of ensuring that both are well-supported. The participant’s remarks imply a recognition that both services are crucial to community safety and that funding decisions should be made with an understanding of their complementary roles.

“I would like to see fire and police be closer, but more because I want fire to raise the standard of policing, not police drag fire down to its level.”

“I would need to know more about who gets what. I agree with everyone, fire and rescue seem okay to me; visible, well thought of, effective. What is the end-goal here with financing?”

This brief discussion points to a need for greater public engagement and transparency about how funds are allocated to emergency services, including Fire & Rescue. By understanding the specific needs and challenges of these services, residents can better appreciate the implications of funding decisions and advocate for improvements that enhance overall community safety and emergency responsiveness.

Social & Market Strategic Research

Norwich House
1 Savile Street
Kingston-Upon-Hull
HU1 3ES
(01482) 211200
info@smsr.com

SMSR
RESEARCH