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# CONTACT AND CONFIDENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE

IMPROVING POLICE-PUBLIC  
RELATIONS WITH TECHNOLOGY

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# CONTACT AND CONFIDENCE IN A DIGITAL AGE

## IMPROVING POLICE-PUBLIC RELATIONS WITH TECHNOLOGY

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### About the Sponsors

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# SUMMARY

Public support and approval sit at the heart of the British policing model and are critical dependencies for effective policing. Although citizen attitudes have slipped out of formal policy focus over the last decade, a complex combination of factors – most obviously the recent set of misconduct scandals and cultural failings exposed within the Metropolitan Police in particular – have pulled questions of trust, confidence, and police legitimacy back into the spotlight. The first data to emerge from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) following its hiatus during Covid, confirms a consistent deterioration in public sentiment towards the police, which has begun to spread into more ‘relational’ dimensions (of fairness and respectfulness), not just appraisals of service quality. The downturn in London is particularly stark.

These conditions and their causes require action from police leaders and policy makers, and a range of ‘issue based’ reform efforts, reviews and change programmes are underway. Additionally, however, the strategic-level questions these shifts pose, about the future working relationship between police and public, demand that concerted attention should also be given to *contact* – the way that citizens experience ‘everyday’ interactions with the police, across a variety of contexts, and the attitudinal traces these episodes leave behind.

Personal contact is what citizens consistently say affects their trust and confidence in police, and its impact can ripple beyond those directly involved, through ‘vicarious’ transmission (e.g., reports from family and friends) and media (and social media) coverage. It also seems to be an aspect of service delivery amenable to policy and practice change, drawing on a well-established evidence-base about what is likely to be effective.

But contact is also an area of considerable flux and disruption. Right across society, technology is precipitating radical shifts in the way citizens communicate with each other and interact with businesses, organisations, and government services. Online commerce and service provision,

social media, videoconferencing, artificial intelligence (AI) powered chatbots, and advanced analytics are all contributing to a much more complex and plural contact environment. These developments are shifting public expectations and promise real benefits in terms of the speed, efficiency, convenience, and choice available to citizens in their everyday lives. The pace of change, however, is such that the wider social implications are difficult to comprehend.

Policing, of course, is not immune to these shifts and technologically enabled developments such as in online crime reporting, self-service portals, social media engagement, Body-Worn Video, live chat and video-link responses are increasingly coming to augment and mediate the public experience of dealing with the police. At a strategic level, the service seems optimistic about the potential for these and future innovations to generate mission critical efficiencies, optimise effectiveness, enable the sector to keep pace with public expectations, and promote public trust and confidence – although the mechanisms through which the latter might occur remain largely under-theorised.

This report begins to address the interconnections between those two trajectories: the deterioration in police/public relations (and associated imperatives on policing to halt and reverse this), and the technological transformation of police/public contact. More specifically, it asks: *what are the implications, opportunities, and risks for public confidence (and related attitudes) arising from the introduction of new technology into police/public contact experiences?* Our investigation proceeds in three parts:

- First (in Section 2) we revisit and summarise what is already known about the way police/public contact impacts on public confidence (and related attitudes) from research conducted in more ‘analogue’ times and contexts.
- Second (in Section 3) we ask: what evidence is emerging, what is promising and what can be hypothesised, about how various forms of

technology might impact on public experiences of contact, and the lasting impressions these leave behind? We present six promising mechanisms and one pressing risk.

- Third (in Section 4) we conclude by considering the strategic implications for policing and present eight recommendations.

Our analysis is informed by a literature review, analysis of survey data collected by the London Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC), a survey of police contact management and community engagement leads, a roundtable discussion, and interviews and discussions with relevant experts and stakeholders.

## **ANALOGUE LESSONS FOR A DIGITAL AGE**

Public attitudes towards the police, including *confidence* (an overall assessment of local service quality, but with important 'forward-looking' aspects), *trust* (willingness to be vulnerable) and *legitimacy* (recognition of rightful authority), and the way these are affected by *satisfaction* with particular police contact episodes, have been the subject of considerable theoretical and empirical attention. *Procedural justice* emerges as the most salient 'general framework' for understanding how and why contact experiences affect citizens' overall views and predispositions. This body of theory draws on consistent evidence that perceptions of *fair process* (being listened to, given a voice, experiencing even-handed decision making etc.) and *decent treatment* (being treated politely, with respect and dignity etc.) are particularly important to people during their dealings with the police and other authority figures, often more so than the *outcome* of these interactions. This is explained in terms of the way experiencing these behaviours, at the hands of potent group representatives such as the police, conveys messages about social inclusion and status.

While procedural justice is most closely associated with ascriptions of legitimacy, it is also an important predictor of trust and confidence. Most importantly for our current focus, it also helps explain findings about the drivers of public satisfaction with police contact episodes, such as when reporting a crime, where feeling

that the police took the matter seriously and showed interest have been found to be powerful predictors.

Empirical research has addressed the question of 'asymmetry': the relative power of positively and negatively experienced police contact to improve or damage general attitudes. While there is some evidence for 'negativity bias' (i.e., that bad experiences do more harm to overall views, than positive experiences do good), recent and more sophisticated studies suggest a more nuanced conclusion. Negative asymmetry (bad experiences having more of an impact than good ones) applies more strongly to opinions of police effectiveness than of fairness and community orientation. Also while it is clear that people with pre-existing negative views are more likely to experience contact negatively, it is also the case that specific contact experiences can 'cut through', leading to positive attitudinal changes.

These conclusions are illustrated by our analysis of responses to the MOPAC User Satisfaction Survey, which monitors the views of a subset of crime victims. Of the two thirds of recent crime victims who were satisfied with the service received, just under half reported an overall positive change in opinion while of the quarter who were dissatisfied, six in ten said it had changed their view for the worse (i.e., modest asymmetry). However, this was only found to apply to service recipients with 'high' prior opinions of the police.

Finally, we note positive evidence on the impact of community engagement activity, on confidence and related attitudes, particularly in the context of community policing efforts to consult or collaborate with communities around the delivery of local policing.

We can carry forward then, from research conducted in more analogue times, some optimism that well received police contact can and will impact positively on public confidence (and related attitudes) – as well as a warning that poorly received contact can be (potentially more) damaging. We also have a firm theoretical starting point, in procedural justice theory, for thinking about the process and treatment mechanisms through which police can convey (or undermine)

signals about social inclusion and alignment, that seem particularly important for promoting trust, confidence and supportive citizen views and behaviours.

## **THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON CONTACT EXPERIENCE AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISK**

Relatively little research has directly explored the impact of technology on public experiences of police contact, and we therefore draw additionally on some theoretically grounded hypotheses and examples of current practice, to suggest **six promising mechanisms** through which police might use technology to improve public confidence (and related attitudes). We present these alongside one risk.

In relation to citizen-initiated contact, we first highlight recent evidence on the positive impact of Rapid Video Responses and other forms of ‘remote’ response options on the satisfaction, trust, and confidence of citizens who request attention from the police. We profile the way Kent police is responding remotely and effectively to domestic abuse victims and argue that these findings fit within a procedural justice frame, where the speed of response, the choice offered to victims/users, and the quality of interactions enabled, act as status-affirming signals of police interest and attention. The findings suggest a public readiness (and, in some circumstances, preference) for **remote contact technologies**, (including video, telephony and text-based applications), to **enable prompt, attentive police responses**, that can leave an improved lasting impression.

Second, we note consistent observations about the way digital (and particularly text-based) contact channels allow a level of citizen control, discretion, and anonymity, which opens up **opportunities for crime reporting, disclosure, and information provision**, including by vulnerable victims of crime and abuse, who would not otherwise interact with police. We argue, however, that translating these benefits into trust and confidence will depend on the **quality of the police response** to this newly surfaced information and ‘demand’. We present a case study of how Norfolk Constabulary has used

anonymous information, provided via the online *StreetSafe* portal, in ways that might plausibly demonstrate *community commitment*: a known predictor of confidence.

We also consider the **risk** associated with the shift to more ‘virtual’ contact mechanisms, such as online crime reporting, where opportunities for police to demonstrate the more intrinsically ‘human’ aspects of procedural justice, such as politeness and giving people a voice, seem substantially curtailed. Our analysis of MOPAC’s TDIU survey (of London crime victims who had their cases handled by the MPS Telephone and Digital Investigation Unit after reporting by telephone or online), indicates that online reporters are slightly (but statistically significantly) less satisfied with their overall interaction than (otherwise similar) telephone reporters – although these differences do not clearly carry through into differences in overall opinions. The data provide a warning about the way online technology can be used as **a convenient front-end for policing services that many citizens find cursory, inattentive, and unsatisfactory**, which in the context of renewed focus on public trust and confidence appears increasingly problematic.

Noting the demand and capacity challenges that often present significant barriers to attentive, citizen-focused police responses, we highlight the potential for two linked, technologically enabled mechanisms to enable incremental improvement. Both centre on the concept of ‘failure demand’, arising from sub-optimal business processes, that return poor user experiences and generate avoidable demand on police resources. We highlight the potential for greater automation, for instance via portals that allow crime victims to track the progress of their case, and chatbots – which are already being used in critical contexts like suicide prevention – to improve the way contact demand is managed, remove friction and inconvenience from the user experience, and **reduce citizen effort**. Despite the considerable potential to deliver *instrumental* public value in this way, we remain cautious about the likelihood that this would directly deliver more *relationally* grounded trust and confidence and suggest that a strategy of **attention reinvestment** (redirecting

capacity gains made at the more ‘transactional’ end of police contact, into high quality personal interaction elsewhere), would be prudent while further testing is conducted.

Reflecting consistent evidence on the positive effects of police community engagement work on citizen attitudes and police/public relations, we highlight the potential for analytics and digital communication technology to **enhance, amplify and more effectively target neighbourhood policing and engagement work**, for instance by providing deeper, more representative, timely insights into community sentiment – as illustrated by the way several US police departments are using targeted digital survey applications – and as a medium for consultation and information exchange.

We also consider the powerful role of social media in shaping public opinion and as an arena of challenge to police legitimacy. We argue that **informative, helpful police participation in online discourse and dialogue**, that demonstrates procedural justice values – exemplified by the @YourPolice.UK Instagram channel – is increasingly necessary.

Finally, we reflect on the way technological advances mean that more police activity, including previously opaque enforcement contact, is now recordable and auditable. The currently available evidence around Body Worn Video suggests there may be routes to improved public relationships, if these records are used to **demonstrably strengthen accountability and improve police practice**, in ways that are open, transparent, and actively involve citizens. We profile emerging practice relating to community scrutiny of stop and search.

### **Improving police-public relations with technology: six promising mechanisms**

1. Enabling prompt, attentive, remote police responses.
2. Removing barriers to reporting and information provision; demonstrating attentiveness and community commitment.
3. Reducing citizen effort; reinvesting police attention.
4. Supporting, deepening, and targeting community engagement and participation.
5. Enabling discourse and dialogue.
6. Demonstrating organisational accountability.

## **STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Relational imperatives (like improving public trust) are increasingly dominating strategic police rhetoric; numerous ‘issues based’ reform programmes are underway and there are indications, in some forces, of growing senior level attention to quality of citizen service. But there is little sense of an overall strategy emerging for how the police service will improve its working relationship with the public, into the mid-21st century: the evidence base on what drives public support is not routinely being applied to practice (including in relation to digital innovation) and ownership of the public experience of policing remains fragmented. We recommend therefore that:

### **Recommendation 1<sup>1</sup>**

The NPCC should establish a *Citizen Experience of Policing Coordination Committee*, working across police forces and functions to embed learning about the drivers of trust and confidence into practice. The Committee’s remit would span all forms of contact (citizen-initiated, engagement and enforcement-based; in-person and digital) and would cut across multiple police functions. It should develop an *Improving Citizen Experience Strategy* to align delivery across forces and focus on developing, testing, and then mainstreaming innovative practices.

1. Recommendations in this summary are abridged, see Section 4.

Despite the stated ambition for police digital contact innovation to drive public trust and confidence, how this might happen (the theory of change) is often under-articulated. It is yet to be established, for instance, whether greater convenience, less effort, and more 'seamless' citizen experiences – for all the undoubted public value these will bring – translate into relationally-grounded trust and confidence (specifically). Technology offers policing significant opportunities to change and improve the way it interact with citizens, but both rigour and imagination are needed to design and articulate what the service wants it to do. We suggest that the six mechanisms, summarised above, provide a useful starting point.

### **Recommendation 2**

Police forces should seek to improve public contact experiences, trust, and confidence, by developing and adopting technologically enabled processes and capabilities, (initially) in line with the six promising mechanisms set out above. All innovations should be based on an explicit theory of change and subject to appropriate evaluation and review.

Significant knowledge gaps remain about the connections between police contact and public confidence, as they apply in a more digital contact context. In particular, there is a need for greater empirical study of public experiences of digitally augmented contact, more rigorously evaluated trialling of innovative practices, validation of the 'effort reduction' hypothesis and for an enhanced understanding of 'transactional' police service users.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Home Office should ask the Office of National Statistics to include questions on police contact and public perceptions of the police, within the new panel component of the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and make data available to researchers.

### **Recommendation 4**

In conjunction with the Home Office, the College of Policing and universities, police forces should seek to conduct robustly evaluated trials of new contact technologies, including their impact on public satisfaction, confidence, and related attitudes.

### **Recommendation 5**

The Police Digital Service/NPCC Digital Public Contact programme should work with the College of Policing to commission research on the links between citizen convenience and 'effort' expended during police contact, and public trust and confidence. It should also seek to gain a greater understanding of 'transactional' users of police services.

A significant risk to public confidence persists around the experiences of service users in the 'excluded middle', who do not necessarily present to policing with significant risk, but nonetheless have needs and expectations that extend beyond the transactional. The contact innovations surveyed in this report appear to have less to offer this group, and there remains a risk that technological mediation may exacerbate 'abstraction'; presenting an additional barrier to a sense that policing is interested in or willing to engage with their matter. Collaborative attention to this core problem is required.

### **Recommendation 6**

Police forces should identify groups of service users with the poorest outcomes, in terms of satisfaction and confidence, and analyse the drivers. They should convene working groups, including, procedural justice scholars, psychologists, and technologists, to devise ways that processes might be reconfigured to generate a better citizen experience and a more favourable lasting impression.

It is clear that the ability of police forces to innovate, adopt well-evidenced contact technologies and make the most of the promising mechanisms we have identified, depends on the effectiveness and adaptability of their core IT infrastructure.

### **Recommendation 7**

Police chiefs should implement the renewed police digital strategy, recognising its value as an enabler of improved citizen contact experiences and, ultimately, of public trust and confidence.

Finally, we highlight the importance of ongoing public dialogue and consultation around police use of technology and the way it changes its interface with the public.

### **Recommendation 8**

Police agencies should use a varied portfolio of public consultation methods – including surveys, product testing, qualitative research, scrutiny panels and deliberative practice – to understand and engage with the public around its use of technology, and the ways it connects and transacts with the public.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 A CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

What the public think about the police matters. It matters because taxpayers' judgements about public service quality are a key part of the value those services create (Bennington, 2011). It matters because citizen's expectations about what the police can and will do, affects how safe and secure they feel (Loader, 2020). It matters ethically, because in a democracy it is important that governments and their agencies maintain 'consent' for the way laws are enforced, and it matters pragmatically, because people's judgements about the police are linked to the way they behave, and this in turn has consequences for crime control, public safety, and the provision of justice (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al, 2012a; Myhill and Quinton, 2011).

For police chiefs, public opinion can also determine success or failure. As current and recent Metropolitan Police Commissioners can attest, the continued backing of policing's political masters depends on their ability to secure and bolster public trust, while for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Mayors, representing public views and ensuring they are brought to bear on priorities and practice is an intrinsic part of the job.

Despite all this, attention to public 'confidence' (a loose 'umbrella term' for this set of supportive perceptions, attitudes, and judgements) within British policing policy, has ebbed and flowed, in response to crisis and in line with the political programmes of successive governments. For instance, while public attitude metrics (most notably the 'single confidence measure', in place between 2009 and 2012) were commonplace under New Labour-era police performance regimes, (accompanying a broader emphasis on reassurance, neighbourhood policing and citizen focus), they have received much less formal attention under the Coalition and subsequent Conservative governments, as the focus shifted to efficiency saving, local accountability, harm and demand reduction, and later the response to serious violence.

In the last three years however, confidence and trust in the police have been thrust back into the spotlight by a combination of events beyond the formal policy sphere. Coinciding with the onset of Covid-19 and the global challenge to police institutions brought by the Black Lives Matter movement, a series of controversies and misconduct scandals – in particular involving London's Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) – have directed intense scrutiny onto police conduct, 'culture', trustworthiness, and institutionalised prejudice.

In the background, longer-running concerns about falling crime detection rates, the withdrawal of visible policing from communities, and the failure of policing to keep up with online crime have continued to mount.

It is fair to say that the relationship between British policing and the public it serves is undergoing a period of profound challenge, and it is no coincidence that becoming "*the most trusted and engaged policing service in the world*" has been put forward as the headline strategic objective for the service over the remainder of this decade (APCC, College of Policing and NPCC, 2023).

## 1.2 TRACKING SHIFTING SENTIMENT

Survey data shows the impact of these events and trends on public sentiment. From a point of relative stability in the middle of the last decade, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), has tracked the gradual (and initially relatively minor) erosion of public confidence in local policing, (both on the 'literal' and more frequently used '*good job*' measures), accompanied by downturns in ratings for police *reliability*, *local understanding* and *dealing with public concerns* (see Figure 1). Full surveying was suspended in early 2020 due to Covid, but the first full release of public perceptions data following resumption, covering the year to March 2023,

shows continued deterioration. Most notably, it also shows unprecedented deteriorations in perceptions of police *fairness, respect, and trust*, which prior to early 2020 were holding firm. As we explore in more detail later, these more ‘relational’ dimensions of public opinion are particularly significant, given their links to police legitimacy and associated cooperative behaviours.

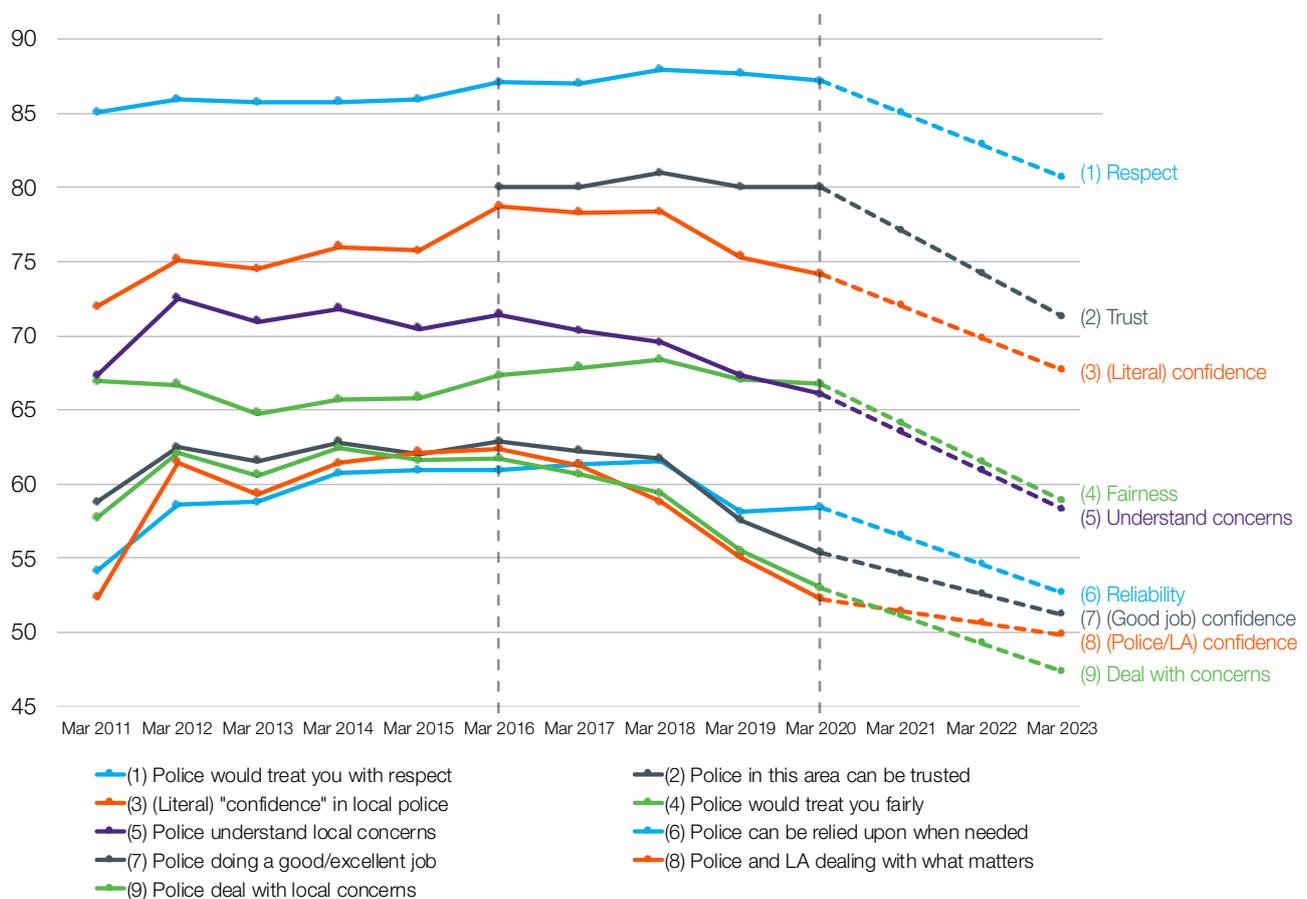
Findings from the long-running Public Attitude Survey (PAS), carried out in London by the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), (which was not interrupted by Covid), tells a similar and even more dramatic story. Local confidence and associated measures of *reliability* and *local focus* have been in general decline since 2015/16, with the headline ‘good job’ measure falling 20 percentage points in five years. Public assessments of police *fairness, respectfulness* and *trustworthiness* were bearing up well before 2020, but have responded precipitously to the controversy and scandal engulfing the MPS in the subsequent period (Figure 2).

The available data make it difficult to assess how universally these shifts apply across the country, (more police force areas than not, saw a downturn in CSEW ratings between 2020 and 2023, but small bases mean not all reductions were statistically significant (ONS, 2023a; ONS, 2020)). What is clear, however, is that overall, public views about the police have shifted for the worse, beginning gradually around the middle of the last decade, but gaining momentum and extending into ‘deeper’ dimensions, where it is the character and motives of the police, not just the quality of service they provide, that is increasingly being called into question.

### 1.3 THE CASE FOR CONTACT

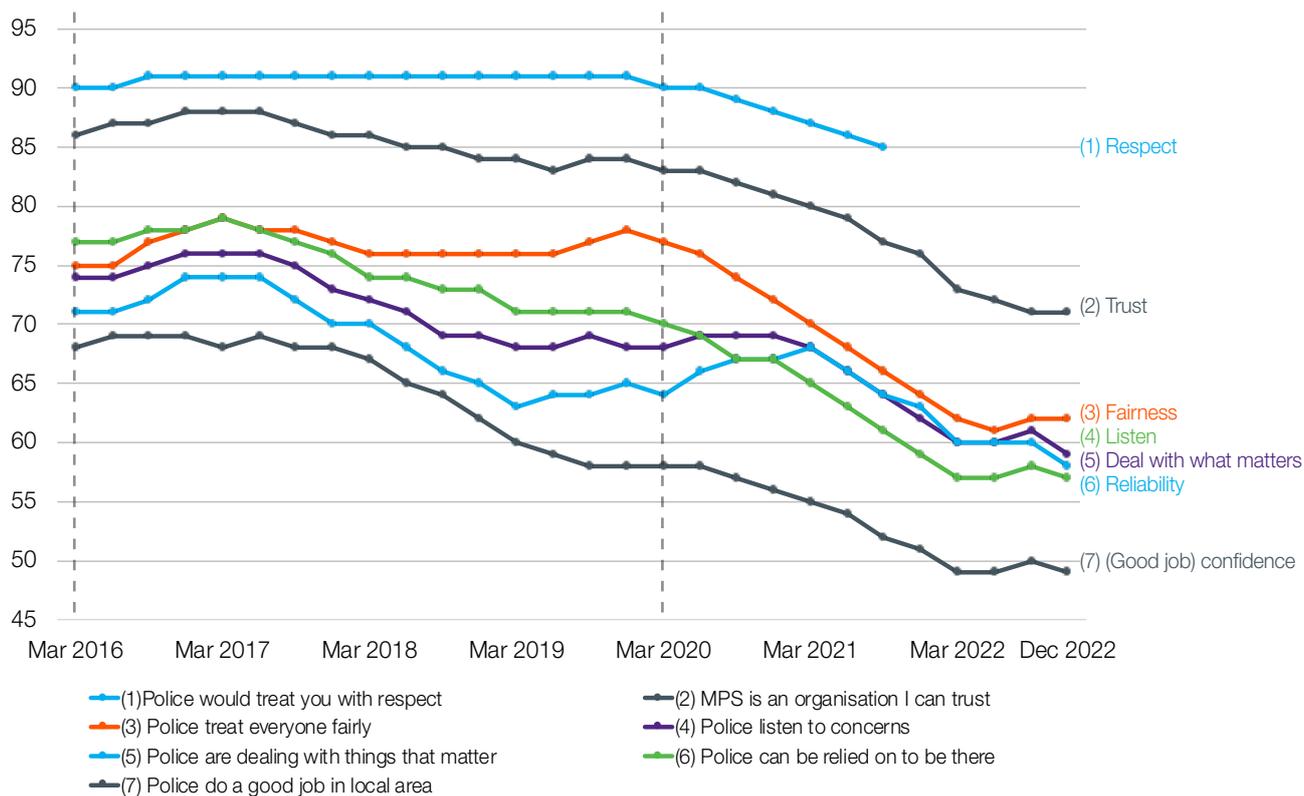
Whether or not the scale of these shifts amounts to a ‘crisis’ of public confidence, it is clear that the current context demands action from police leaders and policy makers, to bolster the service’s standing and trustworthiness in the eyes of the

**Figure 1:** Public perceptions of local police: England and Wales, 2011-2023 (CSEW)<sup>2</sup>



2. (ONS, 2023a) chart shows percentage of respondents who agree/strongly agree.

**Figure 2:** Public perceptions of local police: London, 2016-2022 (MOPAC PAS)<sup>3</sup>



public. Much work is currently underway: the *Police Race Action Plan* (NPCC and College of Policing, 2022), the government’s *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy* (HM Government, 2021), updates to guidance on police misconduct outcomes (College of Policing, 2023), and the police Code of Ethics (College of Policing, 2022), the MPS turn-around plan (MPS, 2023) and the emerging response to recent and ongoing reviews of police conduct, culture, and processes (HMICFRS, 2022a; Casey, 2023) represent concerted efforts at police reform, in areas with significant bearing on public trust and confidence.

Important though these processes and interventions are, however, they amount to a rather piecemeal and reactive response to the challenges to police legitimacy that have surfaced in recent years, with little sense of an *overall strategy* emerging for how the service might reverse the downturn in public opinion or build and sustain more productive working relationships with citizens and communities.

Developing an overarching, long-term plan of this kind was a key recommendation of the Police Foundation’s *Strategic Review of Policing*

*in England and Wales* (2022), which identified ‘legitimacy’ (in this context, the dividend of public cooperation and community resilience that accrues from a shared recognition of the rightfulness of police authority), as a vital capability for effective policing in the mid-21st century, requiring concerted strategic attention.

In addition to addressing specific reform priorities, any more holistic public confidence and legitimacy strategy of this kind, would need to give significant attention to **police/public ‘contact’**: that is, the way that every-day, routine interactions between citizens and police officers (and organisations) are conducted and experienced.

While trust, confidence and police legitimacy are complex phenomena, with multiple drivers, contact warrants particular attention. This is first because it appears amenable to policy and practice change. Whereas police chiefs can do little about government funding decisions, the tone of media coverage or shifting social attitudes to authority, the way officers and staff interact with the public during day-to-day encounters should be something they can influence and, to some extent,

3. (MOPAC, no date; MOPAC, 2023) chart shows percentage of respondents who agree/strongly agree.

control. Moreover, research provides some cause for optimism that strategies aimed at improving the quality of police-public interactions can be impactful (see Nagin and Telep, 2020 for a review).

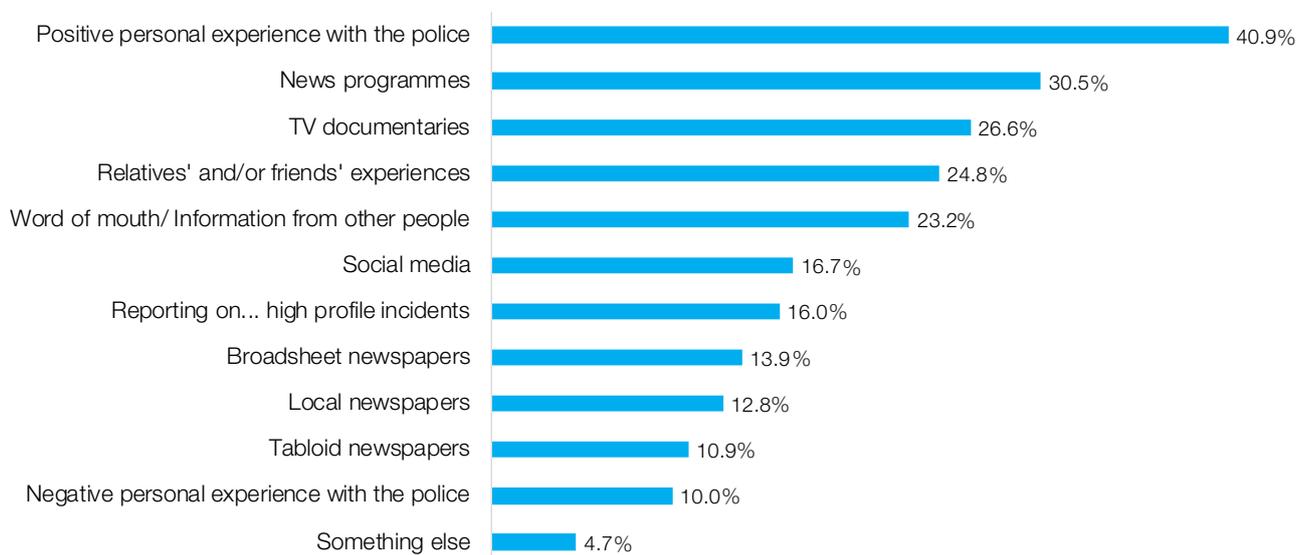
Second, contact is also what citizens consistently say affects their views about the police. Among CSEW respondents who report that they ‘trust’ the police, 41 percent say their level of trust has been affected by positive personal experiences (Figure 3). For those with little or no trust, 57 percent say this has been impacted by negative personal experiences (Figure 4).

Separate qualitative analysis of survey responses from London tells a similar story (MOPAC,

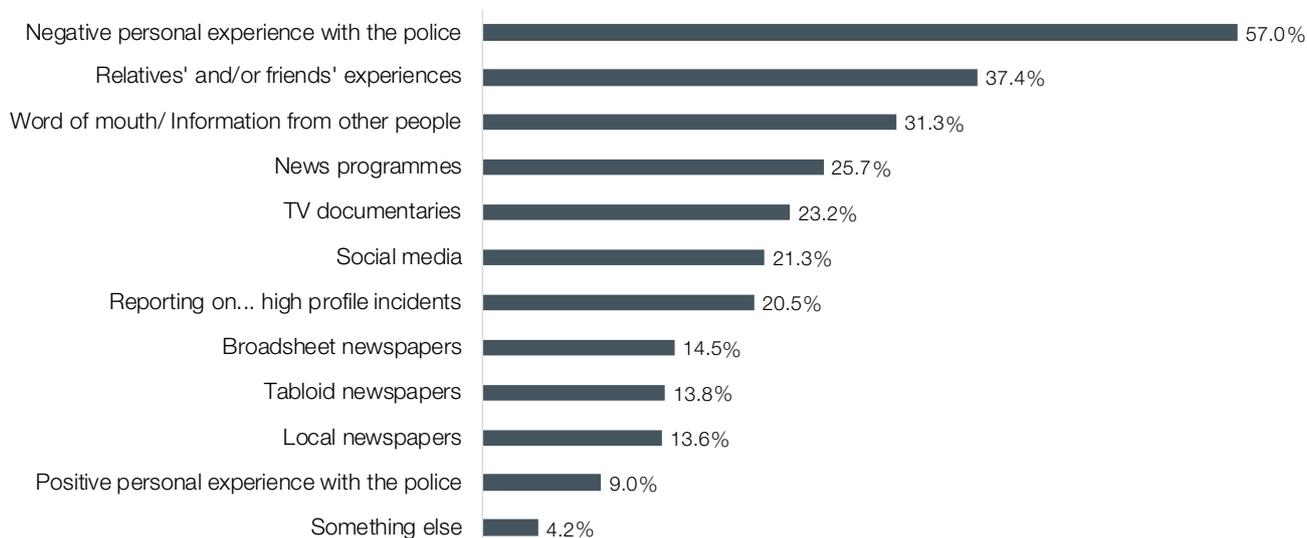
2022a). Personal experiences were found to be the most frequently arising theme in Londoners’ explanations for their level of trust in the police, both for those with generally positive and negative views. In both cases, this was often the result of the treatment and quality of service received when reporting crime.

Third, as we explore in more detail in section 2.2, efforts to bolster public opinions by attending to the quality of contact can also draw on a strong base of research evidence showing that police-citizen encounters are potent ‘teachable moments’ in which enduring attitudes are formed, tested, confirmed, and challenged.

**Figure 3:** What has affected trust in police, among those with ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair amount’ of trust in police (CSEW, year to March 2020. Base: 14,775) (ONS, 2022a).



**Figure 4:** What has affected trust in police, among those who trust the police ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’ (CSEW, year to March 2020. Base: 2,492) (ONS, 2022a)



While it is of course true that not everyone experiences contact with the police, the proportion who do is not insubstantial: one survey suggests 29 per cent of the public had some form of contact with police in the last year, (based on a question strongly oriented toward *face-to-face* interaction (BMG, 2019)). In addition, as Figures 3 and 4 also indicate, contact episodes have significant potential to ‘ripple out’ beyond those immediately involved via ‘vicarious’ experience (e.g., reports from friends and family) (Rosenbaum et al., 2005), and various kinds of media coverage. It is also noteworthy from these data that both direct and vicarious contact experiences appear to be more potent drivers of *distrust* than of trust.

In summary then, there is a strong case for renewed strategic attention to the public experience of police contact, in the current context of contested legitimacy and eroding confidence. We should also note that this is an area of increasing performance concern, with His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) rating 25 of the 43 English and Welsh forces as Inadequate or Requiring Improvement for the way they respond to the public,<sup>4</sup> while our own survey of police force contact management and community engagement leads found widespread acceptance that service standards and disappointing public contact experiences (and not just ‘national issues’) were contributing to the erosion of local confidence, as the comments below illustrate:

*“In addition to the current high profile police conduct cases... the main issues and factors affecting public trust/confidence stem from the first contact point with police. Whether that be by phone reporting or subsequent officer communication, victim care contract compliance etc.”.*

*“Delays in answering 101 result in under-reporting or reporting to other bodies such as local councillors... police response times or non-deployment are also key factors in maintaining confidence”.*

*“Lower-level offences that aren’t investigated lead people to not have trust and confidence in us”.*

As we discuss below however, contact, both as it relates to policing and across society more generally, is undergoing radical change.

## 1.4 CONTACT REWIRED

‘Contact’, in the 21st century, is not what it once was. Right across society, technology is precipitating radical shifts in the way people interact with each other, engage in society, communicate with commercial organisations, and access government services.

84 percent of the UK population are now active social media users (Hootsuite, 2022). Online retail has grown from three to 27 percent of all UK transactions since 2007 (ONS, 2023b). The proportion of people using online banking has almost trebled (Statista, 2023a) and the way we do everything from booking flights and train tickets, to ordering taxis and takeaway has undergone substantial ‘channel shift’.

Even in less transactional aspects of life, the way we connect and engage is being transformed by technology. The online learning sector has grown substantially (Statista, 2023b); a third of all new romantic relationships now begin online (Lloyd, 2021); online counselling has boomed and may be at least as effective as traditional face-to-face therapy (Mansfield, 2020), while Estonia and Singapore are leading the way in delivering government services online.

In recent years the Covid-19 pandemic has massively accelerated the growth of video conferencing, with platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams experiencing substantial, and partially sustained growth (Ofcom, 2021) so that more than a third of UK workers now do some work from their homes (ONS, 2022b). In healthcare, the pandemic triggered an abrupt shift from face-to-face GP consultations onto the telephone (RCGP, 2021), and accelerated the adoption of telemedicine (Hollander and Carr, 2020), while the education sector quickly shifted to online learning (Daniel, 2020).

Reflecting these shifts, both fixed-line and mobile telephony volumes, as well as the number of

4. See <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/peel-assessments/peel-assessments-2021-22/> (correct as of May 2023).

letters sent by post, have fallen, while mobile data consumption and the volume of parcel and packages sent is going up (Ofcom, 2022; Ofcom, 2020; Sweeny, 2019).

Alongside these changes, the application of big data analytics to our increasingly information rich society, is providing opportunities for organisations, in all sectors, to target their communication and engagement activity based on a much more sophisticated understanding of what customers and citizens want, need, and think. This is not only being exploited for commercial advertising and for political campaigning, but offers opportunities for innovation in public service delivery, such as through targeted provision of public health messaging (Krawiec et al., 2021).

On the one hand, technological innovation presents very real opportunities for the contact interfaces necessary for the effective functioning of modern society to happen more effectively, efficiently, and satisfactorily: it seems clear, for instance, that new forms of contact are enabling businesses to better satisfy customers and deal with complaints more quickly (Institute of Customer Service, 2023). On the other hand, the rapid pace of change means that the implications of these shifts – on everything from health and crime to public service demand (Salisbury, 2021; Rosen, 2020), social equality and cohesion – are running ahead of current understanding.

## 1.5 POLICE CONTACT IN A DIGITAL AGE

Policing, of course, is not immune to these shifts and has begun to adopt a range of technologies that change how public interactions take place.

Citizen-initiated police contact, such as reporting crime, making enquiries, providing information and paying fines, is now widely available online, often via the Single Online Home (SOH) platform available through many police force websites (HMICFRS, 2019). Chatbots, live chat and social media webchat functions also increasingly feature as media for non-emergency enquiries and crime reporting, and sometimes as the preferred channel of communication for ‘higher risk’ crime and abuse

victims (Bingham and Burton, 2021; Jones, 2022). Automated attendant functionality and automated dispatch messaging are being deployed to efficiently deal with telephony contact (NPCC, 2019a); voice analytics are beginning to be trialled, and the potential for AI to become the “*natural pinnacle of self-service*” has been recognised (NPCC, 2019a).

At a strategic level the ambition is bold: *The National Policing Digital Strategy 2020-2030* (NPCC and APCC, 2020) promises the public a “*seamless digital experience*”, offering channel choice and a “*frictionless*” interaction, while police leaders seem optimistic that new technology can improve accessibility, inclusivity, speed of resolution and – ultimately – public trust and confidence (Bingham and Burton, 2021; Bergin, 2021; CoPaCC, 2021).

Striking a more pragmatic note, and emphasising the need for national consistency, the NPCC’s *National Contact Management Strategy* (2019a) emphasises how these developments are accompanying (but also contributing to) an intensification of complex police ‘demand’, that requires a “*fundamental shift*” in how the interface between the public and the police operates. This shift arises from the service’s need to maintain its ability to respond to acute, time-critical risk in a context of rising multi-channel contact demand with constrained resources.

To do this, the strategy advises police forces to focus on 1. earlier and remote ‘resolution’ (i.e., dealing with service requests within contact centres where possible, without the need for further resource deployment), 2. promoting public ‘self-service’” for low-risk and transactional matters, and 3. more robustly challenging the misuse of the 999-emergency channel.

Alongside the aspiration for enhanced channel choice then, there is also an imperative to *shift* public behaviour, so that contact increasingly flows through manageable, risk-appropriate channels. Little attention, however, is given within the current strategy to the public *experience* of this rapid rewiring of police contact. Although there is a stated aspiration for contact management to: “*ensure that we protect the public and **increase***

**confidence in policing**” (emphasis added) the latter does not receive further explicit attention.<sup>5</sup>

Social media now provides additional channels for the public to report crime, make enquiries, and provide information to the police, while offering opportunities to cost-effectively ‘engage’ with citizens, in a space where they spend increasing amounts of time. As we describe in more detail later, UK police forces operate numerous social media accounts, across multiple platforms, at corporate, local, and individual levels, offering opportunities for two-way public contact and dialogue, both in open forums and via direct messages. The national strategic approach is coordinated through NPCC Digital Public Contact team’s *Target Operating Model* (NPCC, 2019b), which stresses the need for forces to collaborate internally, understand their target audiences, exploit analytics, and adopt clear processes for managing inbound content. Public confidence and satisfaction are listed as anticipated benefits, although (again) the mechanisms through which these might be improved are not explored.

Finally, enforcement-related police/public contact also increasingly takes place in a technologically ‘augmented’ environment, in which Body Worn Video (BWV) (as part of wider ‘ambient’ video surveillance) has potential to modify the experiences and lasting perceptions of those involved. Opportunities to use BWV as a training aid, for supervisory review and to enhance transparency and community scrutiny, have been identified, including within the Police Race Action Plan and the Mayor of London’s Action Plan (2020), although overall evidence on the impact of BWV technology is currently mixed (see Section 3.4).

Police/public contact, then, is already ‘suffused’ with digital technology, but as the technological dimensions of our social world continue to develop, the implications for policing will only become deeper and more complex, and the pace of change more rapid. Some have expressed frustration at the excessive caution, and persistent barriers to innovation within the sector, with the

associated risk that policing falls ever-further behind the technological curve (Gargan, 2023).

It seems inevitable, for instance, that police/citizen contact will increasingly be impacted by sophisticated AI technologies, powering advanced Chat functions, or involving Virtual Assistant Technologies, that have been adopted at pace in other sectors. Similarly, the demand for police ‘presence’ and accessibility in new contexts like Virtual Reality is likely to become more salient.

At the same time, however, concerns have surfaced about the lack of attention being given to the wider social and relational effects of increased technological mediation of police/public contact, and the risk of: *“undermining the legitimacy with which policing is perceived, if we proceed to change the nature of contact... without understanding how it changes the contact experience”* (Wells et al., 2022).

## 1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

We stand then, at critical junctures, both in the ‘bedrock’ relationship between the police and the public, and in the transition from an ‘analogue’ to a digital society. The relationship between these two themes demands greater attention.

Policing needs to urgently address the problems of culture and prejudice that have eroded confidence, trust, and police legitimacy, but much could also be gained by going ‘back to basics’ and refocusing on the impressions and messages citizens take away from their first-hand experiences of day-to-day police contact.

Many forms of police-public contact, however, are undergoing important transformations. Technology and data analytics are reshaping public behaviours and service expectations, and present imperatives for the police to be ‘present’ and offer ‘contact’ in new domains of salient social life. At the same time technology presents opportunities for gains in police efficiency and effectiveness that are increasingly mission critical.

5. For example, all the suggested performance measures relate to call answering times or shifting channel ‘loadings’, rather than the quality of public experience.

But the public experience of interacting with the police in this new technologically mediated age – and the implications of doing so for the lasting attitudes, judgements, and propensities they form – remains underexamined. Important questions remain about how the police can use new technologies at its interface with citizens, in ways that build, and do not undermine, public relationships.

This report explores the implications, opportunities, and risks to public confidence that arise from the introduction of new technologies into police/public contact. We investigate in the parts.

First, (in Section 2) we revisit and summarise what is already known about the way police/public contact impacts on public confidence (and related attitudes) from research conducted in more ‘analogue’ times and contexts. We draw out the key lessons from the existing literature and illustrate key points using recent survey data from London.

Second (in Section 3) we ask: what evidence is emerging about how various forms of technology impact on public experiences of police contact?

We summarise relevant evidence and theory and present five case studies of positive or promising practice, along with analysis from recent a sample of Londoners who reported crime online. We identify six promising mechanisms and one pressing risk.

Finally, (in Section 4) we discuss the strategic implications, opportunities and risks for police/public relations that arise from the introduction of new technology into contact experiences, and present eight recommendations.

Our findings draw on:

- A review of relevant research and policy literature.
- Analysis of survey data collected from crime victims in London by MOPAC.
- A survey of police force leads for contact management and community engagement functions, that received a total of 14 responses.
- A set of interviews and conversations with informed stakeholders.
- An online roundtable discussion conducted in November 2022.

# 2. CONTACT AND CONFIDENCE: ANALOGUE LESSONS FOR A DIGITAL AGE

In this section we summarise the existing evidence on the links between police/citizen interactions and public attitudes towards the police, which provides some lessons that can then be considered in the context of digital contact.

We begin by defining key concepts and then present procedural justice as a ‘general frame’ for thinking about what matters to people during their encounters with the police. We consider ‘asymmetry’: the claim that negative experiences have a greater impact on citizen attitudes than positive ones. We look at how prior attitudes can impact on contact experiences and summarise the largely positive evidence on the effects of community engagement. Finally, we distil some key lessons to take forward into a digital contact environment and illustrate their relevance using an attitude survey of recent crime victims from London.

## 2.1 KEY CONCEPTS: UNPACKING PUBLIC ATTITUDES

So far, we have discussed ‘public confidence’ as a rather loose and general ‘bucket’ concept, that ‘sums-together’ various distinct but connected views, opinions, and beliefs that citizens can hold about the police (Bradford and Jackson, 2010). We have also mentioned (but not examined) related concepts such as trust and legitimacy. Before proceeding, it is necessary to be a little more specific about what is meant by these terms.

As already suggested, **public confidence** in the police can be understood as an overall orientation, roughly analogous to public ‘backing’ or ‘support’. It gains more specificity, however, from attempts to operationise and ‘track’ its fluctuations across society and over time using public opinion surveys, most often in the form of questions that ask for

an overall ‘job rating’ of local police performance (for instance, how strongly respondents agree that police are ‘*doing a good job*’ in their area).

Rather than just reflecting perceptions of current or recent police performance, however, it has been suggested these questions capture an important *forward-looking* aspect of people’s attitudes, that reflect something about how they expect the police to behave towards them, and/or their community/neighbourhood, in the future (Jackson and Bradford, 2010). This interpretation is supported by analyses showing that measured confidence is linked to a set of more specific views, including about police *commitment to the community* (i.e., whether they understand, care about and are dealing with what matters locally) and *fairness* as well as more instrumental concerns for police *effectiveness*, and (to a lesser extent) perceptions of *local disorder* (Stanko and Bradford, 2009). The strong contribution made by the first two factors indicate that the public ‘backing’, or ‘support’ contained within the concept of confidence is in some sense mutual: it implies a degree of perceived alignment or ‘same sidedness’, which has been likened to trust.

Whereas confidence is a general, ‘background’ attitude or opinion, **satisfaction** relates to the way citizens feel about *particular* incidents or episodes of police contact in which they are involved. The concept is closely associated with efforts to monitor police performance using feedback surveys, that ask crime victims or other service users for their views on how well the matter or incident was dealt with. While surveys sometimes ask for reflections on particular elements of police performance, satisfaction usually refers to an *overall* rating in relation to a particular matter.

It is helpful, therefore, to think of this study as dealing with the interconnections between

*satisfaction* (with particular instances of police contact), and confidence and other more general, ‘background’ attitudes – and about how this interaction is affected by bringing various forms of technology to bear on the contact experience.

**Trust**, in relation to the police, is sometimes viewed as operating at an interpersonal level, while confidence is more institutional (Roberts and Hough, 2005). However, it has also been argued that institutional-level trust – or, more properly, the perceived *trustworthiness* of the police organisation/institution – is closely related to confidence and may even serve as a more useful conceptual alternative (Bradford and Jackson, 2010; Oliveira et al., 2021).

Trust is a complex sociological concept, but theorists have highlighted several features relevant to our discussion. First, it can be viewed as predictive: it draws on expectations about how others are likely to behave in the future, in relation to matters of personal risk and consequence. In this sense trust can be seen as involving a willingness to be vulnerable, or as putting oneself at another’s mercy (Bradford and Jackson, 2010). Second, trust can have multiple dimensions: trust in police effectiveness, for instance, can exist separately from trust in police fairness or in community alignment. Third, at least some of these trust dimensions hinge on judgements about others’ intentions, character, and motives (Tyler and Huo, 2002), that are formed during social processes (such as contact interactions) and are linked to a sense of shared values or aligned interests.

Police **legitimacy** shares many of the same drivers as trust but is less concerned with the personal implications of expected police action in specific future circumstances, and more with a more abstract recognition (or otherwise) of police *authority* (their right to hold power) and the felt obligations and behaviours that flow from it (Beetham 1991; Mawby, 2002; Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012; Hough, 2020). As such, legitimacy carries both moral and pragmatic implications for the police, aligning with ideas about policing by consent, normative order maintenance, and policing in the ‘British’, Peelian tradition.

## 2.2 PROCEDURAL JUSTICE: WHY CONTACT MATTERS

Attention to police legitimacy over recent decades has largely flowed from a programme of theoretical and empirical work on **procedural justice**, catalysed by American psychologist Tom Tyler. Tyler’s seminal analyses of Chicagoans’ reactions to law-enforcement encounters (2006) demonstrated two important associations: first, between citizens’ perceptions of *fair process* and *decent treatment*, during interactions with police officers and their ascriptions of legitimacy to the police organisation/institution, and second, between those legitimacy ascriptions and their willingness to comply with the law. *Fair process* factors include being given a voice, being listened to, experiencing neutral and even-handed decision making, while *decent treatment* relates to politeness, respect, concern for dignity etc.

In multiple survey-based studies these procedural justice factors have consistently been shown to be more important in attitude formation than the *outcomes* of police encounters. They have also been linked to a range of ‘instrumental’ benefits for authorities including public cooperation (Jackson et al., 2012b), acceptance of police decisions (Tyler and Huo, 2002), the rejection of violence (Jackson et al. 2012c) and crowd control (Stott et al., 2012). One important British replication (Jackson, et al. 2012a) indicated that legal compliance operated most clearly through a sense of *moral alignment* with the police. Thus, it was the sense of a shared moral outlook, arising from perceived fair and decent treatment, that was most important for predisposing cooperative, compliant behaviours.

This highlights one important explanatory mechanism posited by procedural justice theorists, namely that police officers – as symbolic representatives of society at large – convey important messages to citizens, through the way they interact with them during contact, about their status and standing within society. On this view, police displays of fairness, listening, respectfulness, politeness, attentiveness etc. act as potent tokens of social inclusion and belonging, which are then reciprocated by citizens, in the

form of positive attitudes and behaviours towards society and its representatives.

Over the last decade, the evidence around procedural justice has been used to advance the case for attending to police legitimacy – and in particular for improving the quality of police contact – not just as a moral matter, but as a meaningful component of an effective crime-control strategy (e.g., Myhill and Quinton, 2011; Hough, 2020). There is also some cause to be optimistic that efforts to improve procedurally just police behaviours, through officer training (Skogan et al., 2015, Wood et al., 2020, Wheller et al., 2013), ‘scripting’ (Mazerolle et al., 2013), and the design of forums/meetings (Wallace et al., 2016, Mazerolle, 2019) can be impactful – although whether such behaviour is always ‘read’ in a positive light by recipients, in the context of the prior experiences, expectations and beliefs they bring to police encounters, remains more controversial (Worden and McLean, 2017; Waddington et al., 2015; Nagin and Telep, 2020).

## 2.3 PROCEDURAL JUSTICE BEYOND LEGITIMACY

It is important to note that owing to the overlaps and interconnections between legitimacy, trust and (to some degree) confidence, procedural justice provides the basis for a useful overall framework for thinking about how to improve public attitudes toward the police, particularly if the starting point (as in this study) is public-police contact.

As we have seen, public views about fair treatment and community orientation/alignment are important antecedents of trust and are also related to ‘good job’ confidence (Stanko and Bradford, 2009). Most importantly for us, there is also a convincing case that procedural justice, with the emphasis it places on the way police treatment is ‘status affording’ provides a helpful model for explaining the observed drivers of *satisfaction* among crime victims with the service they receive from the police.

Bradford et al. (2009) found that by far the strongest perceptual driver of satisfaction among crime victims in London (across all demographic

groups and crime types) was whether police were perceived to have **taken the matter seriously**. Response times were next most important, while negative assessments of ease of contact and ‘follow-up’ could damage overall satisfaction, but to a lesser degree. In procedural justice terms these key factors (*taking matters seriously* and *attending quickly*), can be interpreted as status affirming demonstrations of implied citizen/victims ‘worth’ and recognition of shared group membership by the police, while outcomes (here approximated by ‘follow-up’) do not appear to carry these messages in the same way.

Myhill and Bradford’s (2012) analysis of national survey data reinforces the key message: while both *process* factors, such as waiting times and ‘treatment’ (e.g., showing interest, and keeping victims informed), and *outcome* factors (e.g., whether charges were brought, whether property was returned etc.) were found to influence victim satisfaction, again, it was the process elements, in particular **showing interest**, that had the greatest impact. In fact, it was found that when officers were *not* seen to have shown enough interest, identifying an offender had no positive impact on satisfaction.

The value of these more relational, quality-of-process factors is reinforced by recent studies on the impact of police call-backs on the satisfaction levels of victims of ‘screened out’ vehicle crime (although the findings are nuanced). While McKee et al. (2022) found a 55 per cent increase in satisfaction among those who received an explanatory phone call (designed around procedural justice principles) when their case was closed, Clark et al. (2022) found an effect only for those who had reported pedal cycle (and not car) theft, explaining the finding in terms of different expectations of the two groups.

The key message however is clear: perceived treatment and ‘process’ factors matter to crime victims (and other recipients of police contact), and while outcomes are not unimportant, these are generally secondary to what police actions and interactions convey to citizens about where they stand within the social group.

## 2.4 LEGITIMACY BEYOND PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

We should also briefly note that various efforts have been made to expand thinking on police legitimacy from a narrow focus on interactional fair treatment to also embrace issues of legality, distributive fairness (whether the costs and benefits of policing are equitably borne) and police efficacy (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012; Tankebe, 2013), and the extent to which police use of power remains within appropriate (not just legal) boundaries (Huq et al., 2017; Trinkner et al., 2018).

Among these revisions, Bottoms and Tankebe's (2012) influential account of the 'dialogic' nature of legitimacy – the way it comes into being through claims, rebuttals, and revisions – draws attention to how police officers' understandings of their *own* right to power, influences their interactions with citizens, and ultimately the perceptions and attitudes that those citizens form.

This idea has influenced thinking on organisational justice within police organisations (Bradford et al., 2013; Bradford and Quinton, 2014; Tankebe, 2019), and the way officers' experience of fairness and decency in their *internal* dealings with leaders and peers, relates to their external behaviours. For our purposes, this draws out questions about how technology might impact on the working experience of police officers and staff (Aston et al., 2022), for example on the quality of service they feel able to provide to the public, or the way it affects their relationships with leaders or colleagues, and how these factors might, in turn, affect the experiences and attitudes of the members of the public they come into contact with.

## 2.5 CAN POLICE 'WIN' OR ONLY 'CUT THEIR LOSSES'? AND, DOES SATISFACTION LEAD TO CONFIDENCE, OR VICE VERSA?

One prominent strand of empirical research on the relationship between police/public contact and more enduring public attitudes, revolves around the 'asymmetry' thesis, set out most clearly

by Skogan (2006). Using survey samples from Chicago and seven other world cities (including London) Skogan demonstrated that, once personal and neighbourhood factors were controlled for, the negative impact of badly received police contact on public confidence, was four to fourteen times greater in magnitude than the positive response arising from well received contact (which was small and not significantly different to zero). Citizen-initiated contact, such as reporting crime, showed greater asymmetry than police-initiated contact, such as being stopped.

If substantiated, asymmetry poses a challenge, both theoretically for procedural justice advocates (who hold that fair and decent, status-affirming contact should have a positive impact on supportive attitudes), and for police practice: if the best police can expect from public interactions is that it does not damage relationships (if, as Skogan puts it, "*you can't win, you can just cut your losses*"), then the opportunities for police leaders to pursue strategies that actively build trust, confidence and working relationships appear limited.

Various explanations have been put forward for asymmetry. Skogan cites Weitzer and Tuch (2004) who suggest that positive experiences might be dismissed as the exception rather than the norm (for instance, by those with pre-existing negative views), while others (with a more positive outlook) may expect good service and react negatively if their expectations are not met. Bradford et al. (2009) reflect on the way scholars have characterised policing as a 'tainted', taboo or intrinsically status-challenging profession (Bittner, 1970; Smith, 2007; Waddington, 1999) with which *any* contact, for many citizens, will be discomforting and unsettling. Perhaps most usefully, Skogan (2006), linked his findings to 'negativity bias' (Baumeister et al. 2001; Rosin and Royzman, 2001): the well-evidenced innate and learned psychological tendency to attach more weight to everyday negative experiences as a 'rational' human strategy for avoiding future risk.

While it is empirically clear that police contact often results in more negative overall views, others have found more reason than Skogan for optimism. Bradford et al. (2009) also demonstrated asymmetry in citizen reactions to police contact

within a survey sample of Londoners, but, using a more granular model of confidence, found that positively received police contact *could* improve perceptions of police *fairness* and *community engagement/alignment* by a statistically significant (although modest) amount – although (as predicted by the negativity bias thesis) unsatisfactory contact still did more damage.

In the same study, however, perceptions of police *effectiveness*, were found to be negatively impacted by *any* police contact (whether negatively or positively received or self or police initiated). This is a stark and sobering finding, reflecting (Bradford and colleagues suggest), the often-inherent impossibility of the police task, for instance in providing crime victims with timely redress, reparation, return of stolen property, or those reporting local disorder with ‘quick fixes’ to entrenched problems. Nonetheless their analysis does suggest that well-handled contact can produce a modest ‘confidence dividend’ when it communicates fairness and community engagement/alignment.

Both Bradford et al. and Skogan’s accounts of asymmetry assume a specific-to-general causal ordering, within which contact experiences impact and shape more abstract ‘background’ sentiments. But (as they acknowledge) these cross-sectional, correlation-based analyses do not preclude a more complex explanation, whereby pre-existing attitudes might also have a bearing on the way specific encounters are experienced, interpreted, and assessed.

Brandl et al. (1994) provide evidence of this more nuanced relationship and, drawing on multi-wave surveys of predominantly black lower/middle-income residents in one US town, conclude that *“citizens’ global attitudes towards the police affect their assessments of specific contacts with the police, and citizens’ assessments of specific contacts affects their global attitudes, but the former effect is stronger than the latter”*. In other words (for this sample at least) a form of ‘stereotyping’ was in operation such that citizens’ ‘background’ confidence influenced their perceptions of specific contact, more than their reaction to contact influenced overall confidence.

Myhill and Bradford (2012) also used panel survey data (from the National Reassurance Policing Pilot) to investigate the causal sequencing of attitude formation in the UK context, again revealing a complex and (to some extent) asymmetric picture. While negative pre-existing opinions of police were found to predict negatively received contact, pre-existing positive views did not predict well-received contact. However, once pre-existing views were accounted for, experience of contact – whether positive and negative – was predictive of subsequent attitudes. It appears, in other words, that although negative background views affect how contact is received, and that those with positive views can be ‘let down’ by negative contact, the contact experience itself – whether negative or positive – can also have an effect on future attitudes. Again, it seems there is cause for optimism: good contact can improve confidence, even where the starting point is low.

The most recent and sophisticated examination of links between contact experiences and general attitudes (Oliveira et al., 2021), presents a much more symmetrical and, for police policymakers, more encouraging picture. Using a two-wave Australian panel survey that (uniquely) compared citizens who had experienced police contact between waves, with those who had not, the authors found that police contact that either exceeded or fell below expectations had the following effects:

1. Impacted *trust in procedural fairness* in a symmetrical way (i.e., positive and negative experience affected views on police fairness to the same degree).
2. Impacted *trust in effectiveness* slightly asymmetrically (i.e., negative experience affected views on effectiveness a little more severely than positive experience).
3. Impacted *duty to obey police* (associated with legitimacy) asymmetrically but in the opposite direction (i.e., positive experience impacted obligation more than negative experience).

In summary then, while these studies indicate that it may be difficult for police to convince citizens of their effectiveness during contact, it does seem that where they can demonstrate aligned

motives, inclusivity and respect, there can be a positive pay-off in terms of trust, confidence, and legitimacy. If citizens are left with the opposite impression however, relationships can be damaged, potentially, to a greater degree

## 2.6 THE POWER OF ENGAGEMENT

The studies considered so far have generally focused on police/public contact that occurs in the course of 'police business', (e.g., while reporting and investigating crime, during police law enforcement activity etc.). However, some also contain hints of other less formal, categories of contact that appear to have more positive outcomes in terms of public attitudes. For example, Bradford et al. (2009) note a 72 per cent satisfaction rate among respondents who had experienced 'other' (i.e., non-enforcement) forms of police-initiated contact.

It seems likely that this reflects contact arising from police 'community engagement' work, undertaken for the specific purpose of improving community relations, understanding public concerns and "*enabling the participation of citizens and communities in policing*" (Myhill, 2012).

Although contexts and practices vary considerably, there is consistent evidence that contact activities by police agencies that engage citizens in this way, can have positive impacts on public confidence, legitimacy, and related attitudes (Myhill, 2012), particularly when it involves dialogue that is 'infused' with procedural justice (Mazerolle et al., 2013).

Interactions of this kind often occur within the context of community or neighbourhood policing strategies. The National Reassurance Policing Programme, for instance, (a community policing trial in 16 English sites between 2003 and 2005), involved substantial community engagement work, particularly in relation to local priority setting and problem solving, and delivered a significant improvement in confidence compared to control sites (Tuffin et al. 2006). Reviewing this and more than 30 other (mostly US) community policing studies, Gill et al. (2014) concluded that policing

strategies that involve consultation or collaboration between police and local citizens, to define, prioritise or solve problems: "*have positive effects on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and police legitimacy*". One recent American study on the impact of door-step engagement, notable for its robust randomised methodology, concluded that a "*single instance of positive contact with a uniformed police officer can substantially improve public attitudes toward police, including legitimacy and willingness to cooperate*", and furthermore that, "*the largest attitudinal improvements... occurred among racial minorities and those who held the most negative views toward police at baseline*" (Peyton et al., 2019).

## 2.7 SECTION SUMMARY: DISTILLING ANALOGUE LEARNING

How then should we think about the links between police contact and public attitudes as we transition to a more 'digital' contact age? Research and theory, produced in more analogue times, provides the following lessons:

- Citizens care about *procedural justice* in their dealings with the police: that is, *fair process* in decision-making and the quality of *treatment* they receive. These qualities tend to matter more than outcomes.
- The significance of these factors lies in their value as signals of shared group membership and aligned interests, i.e., they convey to people that powerful social representatives (police officers and the institutions they embody) afford them inclusive status and are 'on their side'. Aspects of police action, such as responding quickly, showing interest, taking the matter seriously and offering opportunities for agency, help to convey these messages.
- Perceptions of police procedural justice are closely linked to judgements about police legitimacy and cooperative behaviours. They are also linked to trust and overall confidence in the police, although more instrumental views about effectiveness and local disorder also play a role in the latter.
- Although findings are nuanced, there is some evidence that negatively experienced police contact does more damage to general attitudes than positive contact does good (asymmetry), indicating a degree

of ‘negativity bias’ (i.e., that confidence and, in particular, (dis-)trust are in a sense “self-protective”: they dispose people against voluntary vulnerability during future ‘risky’ encounters).

- Asymmetry appears to be stronger in relation to views on police effectiveness than for police fairness and alignment; police rarely seem able to convince citizens of their effectiveness during direct contact, while trust in fairness can be impacted both negatively and positively.
- General background attitudes and specific contact experiences interact with each other. Citizens with negative pre-existing views are more likely to experience contact negatively but, net of this, positive contact can ‘cut through’ and where it does, this can have a positive impact on general attitudes.
- ‘Engagement’ contact that takes place away from the (often) fraught business of crime and disorder reporting/investigation/enforcement, tends to have a positive impact on general attitudes. This is particularly clear where the contact involves consultation, collaboration, and co-production – again, reinforcing the importance of procedural justice factors such as voice, quality decision making, inclusion, and status affirmation.

## 2.8 EXEMPLAR: CONTACT AND CONFIDENCE AMONG CRIME VICTIMS IN LONDON

Finally, we test and illustrate several of the lessons outlined above using contemporary survey data, relating to public experiences of relatively traditional, ‘analogue’ police contact.

Our data is drawn from MOPAC’s User Satisfaction Survey (USS), a rolling follow-up survey of Londoners who had experienced contact with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in the course of calling for assistance/reporting a crime. The sample includes almost 9,000 adults who were the victims of either residential burglary, robbery, hate crime, or an assault between April

2021 to March 2022, and who received some form of in-person police deployment in response to their call. In line with MPS procedures, investigations following crimes that are attended in this way, are conducted by the relevant local Basic Operational Command Unit (BOCU).<sup>6</sup> Respondents’ assessments relate to their whole experience of the matter, which may well include interactions with several police representatives, over an extended period.

For this analysis we are interested in responses to three of the survey’s questions:

1. **Overall satisfaction:** Respondents are asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service provided by the police in relation to the matter, on a seven-point scale from 1 (completely satisfied) to 7 (completely dissatisfied). We have condensed responses into three groups: those *satisfied* (scores of 1, 2 or 3), those *dissatisfied* (scores 5, 6, or 7) and those giving *other responses* (score of 4, don’t know or refused etc.).<sup>7</sup>
2. **Change of opinion:** Respondents were then asked whether, as a result of this contact, their opinion of the police became *better*, *worse*, or was *unchanged*.<sup>8</sup>
3. **Prior opinion:** Respondents are also asked whether, prior to this specific contact episode, their opinion of the police was, *generally high*, *generally low*, *mixed* or whether they had *no opinion*.

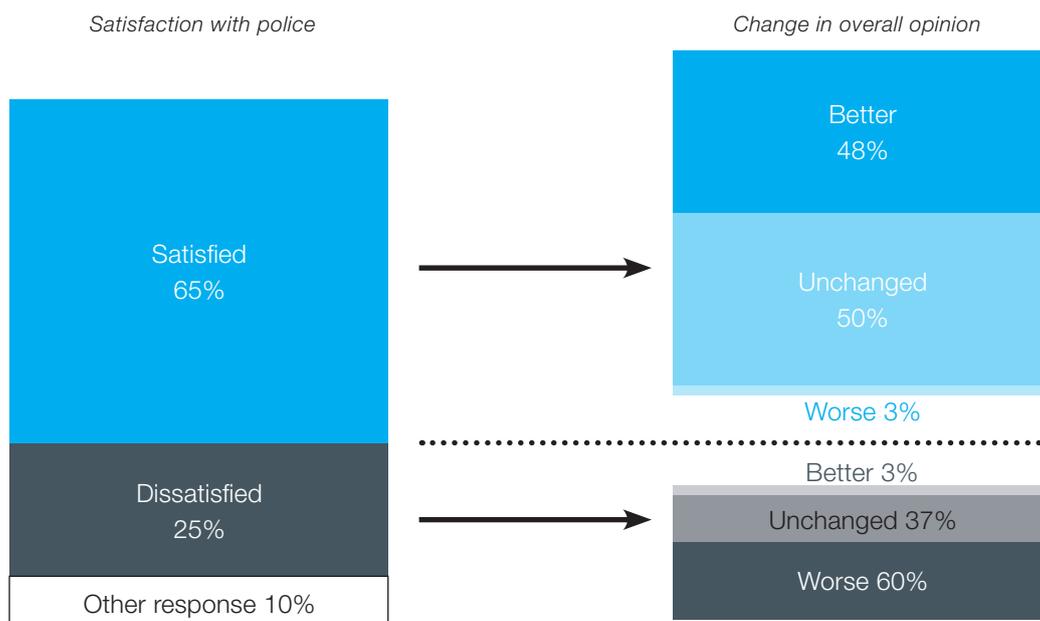
As Figure 5 illustrates, very nearly two thirds of respondents (65 per cent) were ‘satisfied’ with the service provided by police in these circumstances, while a quarter were ‘dissatisfied’ (with the remainder giving ‘other’ responses). Of those satisfied, just under half said that the experience had improved their overall opinion of the police, with nearly all of the remainder saying their opinion was unchanged. Among those dissatisfied with the experience, 60 percent said that their overall opinion had worsened, with nearly all others reporting no change.

6. As we explain in more detail later, this contrasts with some other MPS crime reports where a deployment is not deemed necessary, and subsequent investigation is handled by the centralised Telephone and Digital Investigation Unit (TDIU).

7. MOPAC report on these response options slightly differently, and for different time periods, so published MOPAC data may be marginally different than those reported here.

8. We cannot say for sure how these *post-hoc* self-reports of opinion change might map on to the way respondents would answer survey questions before and/or after contact. It would seem intuitively plausible, however, to credit these introspective reports as valid accounts of attitude change.

**Figure 5:** MOPAC User Satisfaction Survey (USS): Proportion of respondents satisfied and dissatisfied with service provided by police, and self-reported change in opinion resulting from contact



Base: 8,872 adults who reported selected crimes to the MPS between April 2021 and March 2022, with response and investigation handled by MPS operational command units.

In other words, citizen reactions to this form of police contact appear slightly asymmetrical (and are indicative of modest ‘negativity bias’); i.e., negative contact experiences are a little more likely to damage general opinions than positive experiences are to improve them. But the most notable conclusion here is that it is clearly possible for police to improve their overall standing in the eyes of citizens, through the service they provide during contact – in fact, this occurred in almost a third (32 per cent) of all cases, compared to 17 per cent in which overall opinions worsened.

Extending this analysis further, Figure 6 shows contact satisfaction and the resulting (reflectively reported) impact on overall opinions, broken down by (reflectively reported) prior opinion of police.

First, we can clearly see how prior opinion is predictive of contact satisfaction. Three quarters (74 per cent) of those who said they had a high opinion of police before the contact experience, were satisfied, compared to just four in ten (38 per cent) of those with low existing opinions. In other words, people clearly “bring their priors” into police contact and, to some extent, get what they expect.

Second, it is also clear that, irrespective of prior opinion, where contact is experienced positively, this can have a positive impact on general

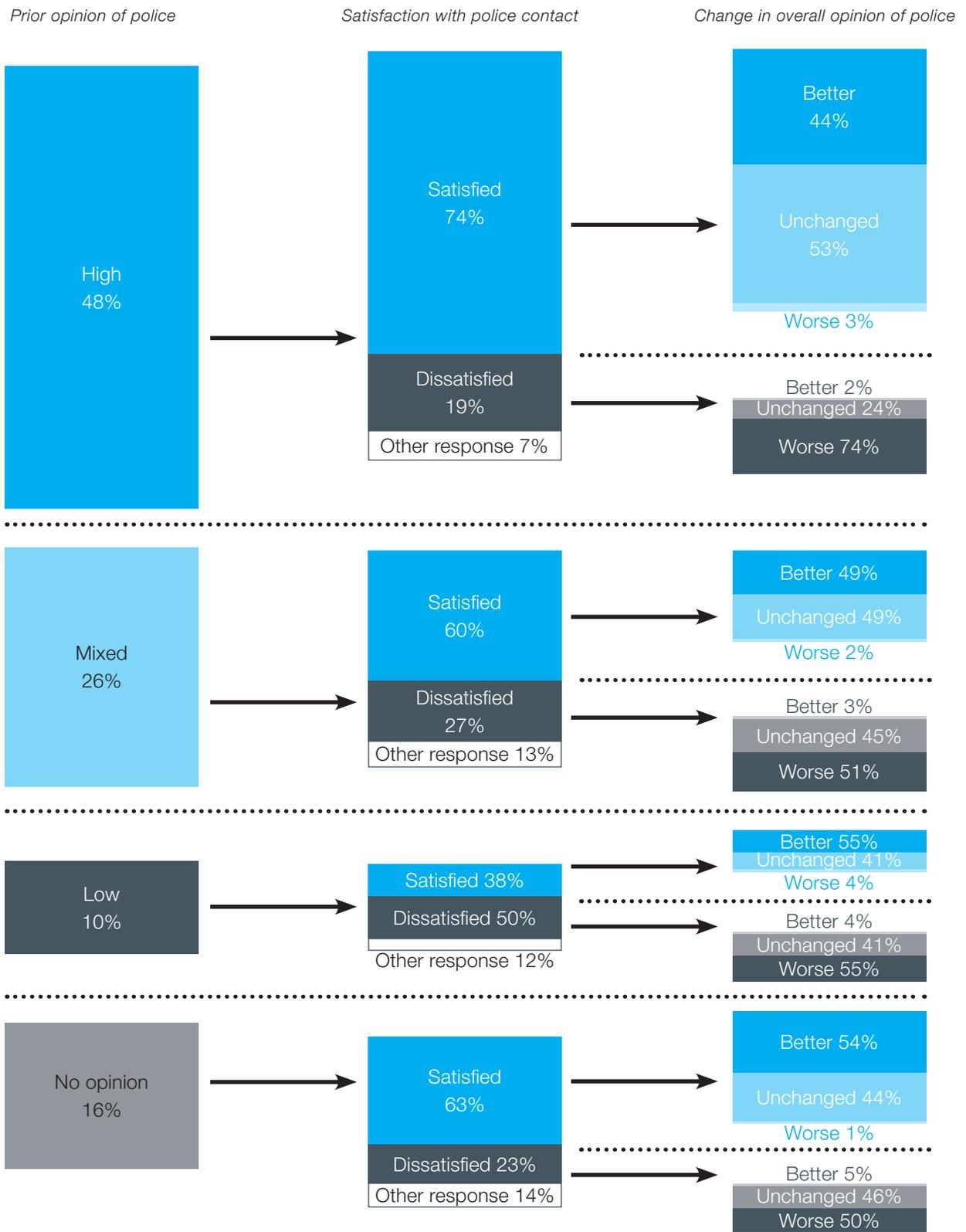
opinions: more than half (55per cent) of those with low starting views, who had a satisfactory contact experience, said their view of the police improved (the equivalent proportion for those with high prior opinion was 44 per cent - presumably because, for this group, satisfactory service is more likely to confirm than to boost overall views).

Third, in this case, it appears that asymmetry only applies to those with pre-existing high opinions: negative contact for this group is much more likely to damage overall opinions than positive contact is to improve it, but for those with low, mixed, or no prior opinion the impact is much more evenly balanced (symmetrical).

In summary then, and in line with the evidence base, this analysis provides a set of largely optimistic messages to take forward into more digital contexts:

- Police/public contact experiences can, and do, influence overall opinions.
- While there is a degree of ‘asymmetry’ in the relationship, this appears relatively modest: good contact often has a positive impact on general views.
- People bring their prior opinions and expectations into contact, and it is more difficult to satisfy someone if they already hold negative views, but it is not impossible and where this does occur, overall opinions often change for the better.

**Figure 6:** MOPAC User Satisfaction Survey (USS): Proportion of respondents satisfied and dissatisfied with service provided by police, by prior opinion of the police and self-reported change in opinion following contact



# 3. THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON POLICE CONTACT EXPERIENCES AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

We should carry forward then, from the previous section and more analogue times, some optimism about the potential for well received police contact to impact positively on public confidence, as well as a warning that poorly received contact can be equally, and probably more, damaging. We should also hold in our minds what has been learned about procedural justice and the mechanisms (*respect, neutrality, transparency, voice* etc.) through which police contact can convey or undermine the sense of inclusion and alignment that seem particularly important for promoting supportive citizen views, as well as research findings about the value of collaborative/consultative public engagement.

In this section we examine what is known, what is promising, and what can be hypothesised, about how this learning may transfer to more digitally and technologically ‘suffused’ contact contexts. We begin with a set of preliminary points.

## 3.1 PRELIMINARIES

First, it should be clear from the discussion so far, that technology *in and of itself* cannot improve (or undermine) citizen contact experiences or public confidence: it is the *police* that do these things through the quality of services and interactions they provide. Technology should best be seen as an *enabler* of (or constraint on) service provision, along with multiple other factors including resources, demand, ambition, imagination etc. Our main focus here is on technology, but in reality, we are looking at *what it is used to do*. Relatedly, we should keep in mind that technology (and the way

it is used) also enables and constrains the police in achieving other objectives, including efficiency, risk management/mitigation, bureaucratic compliance etc. and the tensions and interdependencies between these ends are just as apparent in relation to these innovations, as they are in general.

Second, we should note that our evidence-base here is rather limited. Relatively few studies have directly considered the impact of technologically mediated contact on public confidence, trust, or legitimacy (perhaps *surprisingly few*, given the ubiquity of developments like online crime reporting), and therefore we additionally draw on a set of case-studies of promising and/or interesting practice, chosen in part to illustrate the breadth of possibilities and relevant applications.

Third, this lack of direct evidence also provides scope for framing some theoretically guided hypotheses about where the relational opportunities and risks associated with police contact innovation may lie. This process has recently been initiated by the INTERACT research collaboration,<sup>9</sup> whose work seeks to address the gaps in procedural justice theory arising from modern contact contexts, particularly those (such as online crime reporting) where assumptions about the co-presence of two humans no longer necessarily apply.

The INTERACT group’s output to date (Wells et al., 2022; Aston et al., 2022; Bradford, et al. 2022) considers the possibility that technology may transform police contact to such an extent that procedural justice principles no longer apply. In increasingly ‘virtual’ contexts where the inter-

9. See <https://www.college.police.uk/research/projects/interact-investigating-new-types-engagement-response-and-contact-technologies-policing>.

personal, ‘human’ aspects of contact are delayed, diminished, or entirely absent, might outcomes (arrests, charges, returned property etc.) become more salient to attitude formation, relative to process factors? Or, if fairness retains value, might virtual contact experiences lose potency as means of message transmission, with the possible implication that media and wider cultural resources take on greater significance (Bradford et al., 2022)? Or, if algorithmic automation reduces the possibility of bias and discrimination in police decision making (effectively guaranteeing *neutrality*), might it be that the more intrinsically ‘human’ aspects of procedural justice (*politeness*, *respect*, opportunity for *voice* etc.), that appear more difficult to transfer to virtual contexts, in fact take on greater importance (Wells et al., 2022)? These and other unanswered questions illustrate how fundamentally current trends and trajectories may affect the relational dynamics of policing in its social context, but as we explore in this section, (and as the INTERACT group also describe), there are also plausible continuities, that help us think through where opportunities and risks are likely to lie.

Fourth, (and as the INTERACT researchers also note) shifting contexts raise definitional questions of what counts as police ‘contact’. As noted already, procedural justice research, with its emphasis on the quality of personal treatment, has tended to assume the physical (or at least temporal, in the case of telephone contact) co-presence of (at least) two humans – at least one of whom serves as a ‘representative’ of the police organisation or institution. Modern contexts, however, dictate that we must now also consider forms of ‘contact’ involving an institutional ‘*representation*’ that is not a person, but maybe (e.g.) a web-form, chatbot or (not inconceivably) some form of avatar (Wells et al., 2022). This poses difficult questions about, for instance, what it means for a machine to be *polite*, or for a citizen to be given *voice* if there is no human there to listen.

Social media presents further definitional challenges. While myriad platforms now provide opportunities for police/citizen interactions and

exchanges that are functionally similar to ‘contact’ via other channels (e.g., online reporting or email etc.), much police social media activity is more ‘ambient’ and functionally more similar to one-way ‘broadcast’ communications (e.g., newsletters, press coverage or public place ‘visibility’ than with ‘engagement’ contact as traditionally understood). Additionally, there is some dissonance between the way ‘contact’ is conceptualised in victim satisfaction surveys (and studies that rely on them), where respondents tend to reflect on their *whole experience* of dealing with the police over a matter (which could potentially comprise multiple interactions, with different personnel over an extended period) and ‘contact’ as it pertains to what police do in Contact Management Centres, where the focus is on receiving and routing (or potentially resolving) ‘contacts’, that may often form relatively minor opening exchanges in a more involved citizen experience.

It is beyond our scope to resolve all these ambiguities here, but, for clarity, we state our working definition of ‘contact’ is orientated towards *interactions between citizens and the police, as they relate to particular matters, mediated by its representatives or ‘representations’*. I.e., we do not limit ourselves to human-to-human encounters but do require some ‘back and forth’ dialogue or interaction between the two parties (i.e., not just passive receipt of ‘broadcast’), and we are more interested in whole experiences than with episodic fragments.

Finally, we have chosen to structure the discussion in this section around three categories of contact – *citizen-initiated*, *engagement*, and *enforcement* contact – while acknowledging that the distinctions between these maybe blurring (for example where police ‘engagement’ activity is in response to citizen-initiated social media comments) this provides a convenient frame for organising the range of activity within our scope.

Across these categories we set out six promising mechanisms through which technology might enable police to build citizen satisfaction, trust, and confidence, alongside one risk.

## 3.2 CITIZEN-INITIATED CONTACT, CONFIDENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

### **Mechanism 1: enabling prompt, attentive, remote police responses.**

As we saw in Section 2.3, research provides a clear steer on the aspects of the police response to (at least some kinds of) citizen-initiated contact, that are likely to generate satisfaction and enduring positive opinions. Studies by Bradford et al. (2009) and Myhill and Bradford (2012) show that it is the sense that police *take the matter seriously, show interest* and (to some extent) *respond quickly* that matter most to those who report being the victim of crime. We saw how a procedural justice lens suggests these factors are important because of the way they affirm social status and convey shared group membership with symbolically salient representatives of society, while outcomes (although not wholly irrelevant) do not seem to carry these meanings in the same way. In short, demonstrations of attentiveness, effort, empathy, and ‘the right attitude’ (what Skogan (2006) referred to as police “*bedside manner*”) often seem to matter more than results.

We should also note the realities of the modern operating context, where the resources available to policing, set against the volume and complexity of citizen-initiated (and other) ‘demand’, routinely necessitate extensive risk-based triage and prioritisation of incoming contact, which in practice, makes in *systemically* difficult to convey these impressions in some (perhaps many) cases.

In looking at the potential contribution of technology to mitigating this dilemma, it seems important, therefore, to begin by identifying applications that enable police to demonstrate qualities of attentiveness (alongside fairness, respect, neutrality etc.), within a resource constrained context. Our first case study is an example of exactly that.

### **Case study 1: Rapid video responses to domestic abuse victims in Kent**

*Kent Police has become the first police force in the UK to respond to calls for service from domestic abuse (DA) victims using live video calls. The Rapid Video Response (RVR) service means that appropriate victims (without injury and where the suspect is no longer present), who call 999, can choose either to wait for a ‘business-as-usual’, in-person visit from police officers, (which could take several hours or even days), or receive a video call from a trained officer within minutes. During the call, victims can report crimes and receive safeguarding advice, and police can assess risk and begin an investigation. Any investigative or safeguarding steps that cannot be completed via video are carried out subsequently by other officers. The initiative has been in place since May 2022 and has dealt with more than 2,000 calls. Victim satisfaction is high, with most users rating the service as excellent.*

*RVR was implemented following a successful randomised controlled trial (Rothwell et al, 2022a), during which half of the eligible 517 domestic abuse victims, presenting during the trial period, were randomly allocated to the optional RVR response, while half received the usual ‘in-person’ service. Analysis showed that RVR was, on average, 656 times faster in responding to victims than business as usual, taking an average of just three minutes for the caller to be connected to an officer, compared to 1,969 minutes (approx. 33 hours) for business-as-usual attendance. Efficiency benefits were also achieved, as RVR took on average, two hours two minutes of officer time per case, versus three hours and 21 minutes for the control group (the result of reduced travel time and requiring only one officer to respond via video, compared to the usual two). Suspect arrest rates were 50 per cent higher in the RVR group (24 per cent) relative to the control group (16 per cent), with three times more arrests during follow-up investigations on RVR cases.*

*When looking across all categories of victims, those who received RVR were equally satisfied with service compared to the control group. But when focusing specifically on female victims of intimate DA (who made up 69 per cent of callers) there was a statistically significant improvement in satisfaction in the RVR group*

– 89 per cent versus 78 per cent in the control group. On ratings of trust and confidence in Kent police, more RVR recipients reported an improvement, and fewer reported a reduction, compared with the control group. Victims in the RVR group also reported lower anxiety levels.

When asked why they felt RVR had improved satisfaction, the lead practitioners/researchers (interviewed for this study) attributed success to the speed of service. Reduced anxiety was put down to victims being able to see a police officer and receive reassurance quickly, rather than waiting while anxiety levels built. But most importantly, positive victim experiences were felt to be related to the provision of choice about the service received. As the practitioners commented: “In policing, normally the victim tells us the problem, we tell them the solution. This is different, they are the one making the choice”, adding: “this takes into account the victim’s wants and needs and delivers what they actually want”. For example, RVR enabled callers to report a crime in a space they felt safe, without the inconvenience of travelling to a police station, or the sense of breached privacy that can accompany a police visit to their home. Although the technology dramatically improved service efficiency, practitioners commented that this was never the main goal, and they would have considered the trial a success if satisfaction had improved and efficiency stayed the same.

The potential benefits of ‘remote’ police responses are amplified by a similar study, also conducted in Kent, which found positive impacts on satisfaction, trust, and confidence when medium priority (non-DA) callers were offered immediate ‘FAST’<sup>10</sup> telephone responses from a police officer, rather than wait for a ‘business-as-usual’ attendance (which in some cases never arrived) (Rothwell et al., 2022b). The evaluators’ observation that “officers... were able to devote time and attention to the victim and were not distracted by their personal radios or diverted to a more urgent call”, appears to capture the essence of the mechanism: technology here is creating the time, space, and opportunity for officers to provide attentive, timely responses to citizens’ needs, in line with procedural justice principles. Smaller scale experimentation with live

10. An acronym for Finding Alternative and Speedier Tactics.

11. Developed by Futr AI, discussed further under Mechanism 2.

chat<sup>11</sup> response options for vulnerable victims has also been encouraging (Jones, 2022).

These studies challenge the assumption that in-person, face-to-face police responses are always ‘better’, and raise questions about recent service pledges, (e.g., to attend all burglaries (NPCC, 2022a)). They also suggest a public readiness (and perhaps sometimes, preference) for remote forms of police response, and raise the possibility that similar options in other contexts could offer cost-effective alternatives, that also alter the impressions that citizens take away from police contact in positive ways.

### **Mechanism 2: removing barriers to communication and information provision – and demonstrating attentiveness and commitment**

A strong theme to emerge in feedback from those working in and around digital police contact, is that new contact channels – particularly those with a text-based interface – are eliciting crime reports, information provision and disclosure from members of the public who would not otherwise have interacted with police via traditional channels. As one contact management lead put it:

*“We are starting to understand that it’s not just the [practical] circumstances but cultural, health and social issues [that] impact on the channel people select. The digital channels... have no need for any voice-to-voice transactions, the contact is controlled by the citizen, so any issues around speech, hearing, [or] language do not become barriers”.*

The additional ‘control’ alluded to here is also widely felt to be enabling reports of sensitive and under-reported crimes, such as domestic abuse and sexual offending, including historic offences, while social media reporting (in particular) is attracting citizen reports of concerning online behaviour. These behaviour changes have been linked to an increase in incoming contact demand as digital provision has expanded (NPCC, 2019a) but are generally being embraced and valued within policing, in terms of improved public accessibility and enabling responses to otherwise hidden harm and vulnerability.

These control and accessibility benefits were evident during a recent trial of live chat response options for domestic abuse callers in Suffolk Constabulary (Jones, 2022), where the discretion and privacy enabled by a text-based interaction (compared to telephone or in-person attendance), was felt to have led to better quality interactions, greater officer rapport, more thorough risk assessment and better signposting to third party support.<sup>12</sup>

Whether mediated by greater privacy, the implicit auditability of the contact record, the ability of the service-user to draft and review content before submitting, or the removal of visual and verbal interpersonal cues (so that, as an interviewee from a survivor support organisation put it: “they can’t see the whites of my eyes” while recounting traumatic experiences), it seems clear that text-based options are enabling important communication between police and citizens, in ways that seem relevant to previous discussions of trust and “willingness to be vulnerable”.

Whether, and exactly how these affordances translate into public trust and confidence is less clear cut, however. Removing barriers to citizen reporting is unlikely, *in itself*, to change public attitudes unless the police response to the information received is also of a high quality (as it appears to have been in the above example).

Our next case study examines a mechanism through which the additional citizen control over information provision, afforded by digital channels – which in this case amounted to full anonymity – might plausibly feed through into greater public confidence. In this instance we emphasise research evidence on the links between measured confidence and perceptions that the police *understand* and are *dealing with* what matters in local communities (Stanko and Bradford, 2009).

### **Case study 2: StreetSafe patrols in Norfolk Constabulary**

*StreetSafe is a digital tool developed by the NPCC Police Digital Contact Portfolio on behalf of the Home Office. Launched in late 2022, and available online and via an app, the service allows members of the public to anonymously tell police about public spaces where they feel unsafe due to environmental or behavioural factors. While available to anyone, the service is particularly aimed at women and girls, reflecting a recognition of the need to remove barriers to reporting safety concerns, including ‘lower level’ predatory behaviours such as harassment and indecent exposure, as brought into focus by the murders of Sarah Everard and Libby Squire. As of May 2023, the service has been used by the public more than 27,000 times.*

*While in essence a ‘one-way’ contact tool,<sup>13</sup> the way the information submitted by the public is used by police forces, and the way this activity is communicated back to public audiences, provides opportunities for conveying messages about community alignment (i.e., understanding and acting on local concerns) that are known to be associated with confidence.*

*Norfolk Constabulary has used StreetSafe as part of a concerted campaign to tackle violence against women and girls and restore public trust. Data from public StreetSafe responses, was combined with crime data and intelligence, to generate locations for more than 700 targeted, high-visibility, StreetSafe ‘branded’ foot patrols during winter 2022/23 – largely conducted around the night-time economy, as well as in shopping centres, parks and alleyways.*

*Police engagement activity during patrols was specifically focused on women’s safety and included distributing wallet cards that advertised the StreetSafe portal and promoted ‘active bystander’ messages, linked to the Home Office Enough campaign. Organisers reflected on the way the specific focus of the patrol activity engaged officers (drawn from across force functions) around a culturally positive purpose and promoted extra attention to potentially predatory behaviour and vulnerability. It also allowed for more targeted public communications, in particular through*

12. The Live Chat solution in this example was provided by Futr AI, a co-funder of this project.

13. And thus, pushing the boundaries of our working definition of ‘contact’.

social media, which went beyond general 'reassurance' messaging and focused on demonstrating a specific response to expressed public concerns. As a force representative put it: "We did think of it as two-way engagement tool because it gave us an opportunity to hear what the public were saying were the areas of concern for them, and for us to say, 'we've listened to you and are doing something about it'."

The direct impact of the activity on public attitudes has not been measured, and the mechanism remains hypothetical, however organisers noted a correlation with local survey findings on feelings of safety.

We suggest then that there are affordances of digital communications, in terms of privacy, discretion, control, and anonymity that can remove barriers to reporting and public information provision. An associated impact on trust and confidence, however, is likely to be contingent on police demonstrating that they are responsive to this information, both through attentive, procedurally just treatment of those who disclose via online channels, and through visible activities that communicate local understanding, alignment and that the police are using the information they received to keep communities safe.

### **Risk: Removing friction or preventing traction?**

Other technologically enabled developments in citizen-initiated police contact, however, may be more problematic from a procedural justice perspective. Bradford et al. (2022) contrast the theoretical potential for algorithmic automation to improve the *quality of decision-making* dimensions of procedural justice (e.g., by reducing the potential for human bias and prejudice) with the reduced opportunities to demonstrate *quality of treatment*, that seem inevitable within 'virtual' contexts, such as online-crime reporting, where human interactions are substantially abstracted, delayed, or removed completely.

Wells et al. (2022) hypothesise that within these contexts, opportunities for known trust antecedents like *politeness* and *voice* (the

opportunity for citizens to put 'their side of the story', in their own words, to be listened to, and to exercise a degree of 'decision control') may be substantially diminished. Similarly, while ease of contact might convey *respectfulness* in analogue contexts (Bradford et al., 2009), an easy-to-access webform, that distances or removes any human responder may not convey the same messages of concern or attentiveness: feeling one has to *talk to the machine 'cos the cops ain't listening'* – however 'frictionless' that experience may be – is unlikely to convey respectfulness or be socially status-affirming.

These concerns resonate with the broader thesis of Abstract Policing (Terpstra et al., 2019; Aston et al. 2022; Bradford et al. 2022), which argues that police efficiency and effectiveness reforms (including those enabled by technology) are having unintended and underexamined consequences, specifically in terms of increasing the distance, formality, and impersonal nature of internal and external police relationships.

As one recent public opinion survey indicates, these concerns are not just theoretical. Watson et al., (2022) report that 58 per cent of a representative sample of respondents expressed concern that their matter would not be *treated as a priority* or with sufficient *urgency* if they reported crime online, while 54 per cent said they feared it would get *lost in the system*. One respondent's verbatim comment that to feel comfortable reporting crime online, they would need to be: "*Assured of a response, and that the response was personal, human and detailed*" seems to capture the central issue well.

The risk that virtual contact technologies, such as online crime reporting, might lead to an increasingly 'abstracted' relationship between citizens and police, with reduced opportunities for demonstrations of procedural justice, are explored below, through further analysis of survey data from London.

## Public experiences of online crime reporting and telephone investigation in London

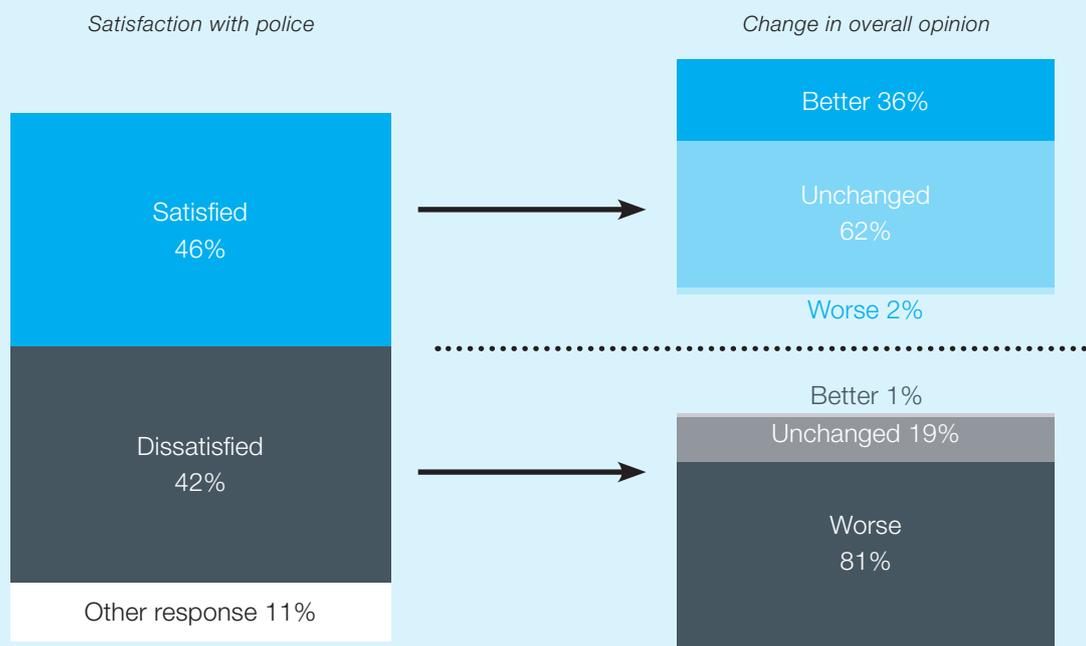
We saw in Section 2.8 that two-thirds (65 per cent) of MOPAC’s sample of crime victims, who had received a relatively traditional police response after contacting the Metropolitan Police to report certain crimes (i.e., an initial officer deployment followed by locally handled crime investigation), were satisfied with the service received. We also saw that half of these satisfied victims (32 per cent of the whole sample) reported an improved overall opinion of the police, compared to 17 percent whose overall opinion worsened: a net-positive confidence dividend.

Figures 7 and 8 (below) show responses to the same questions for further samples of London crime victims who a. (Figure 7) reported a subset of crimes<sup>14</sup> by telephone, but were not deemed to require an officer deployment, and

whose crime was subsequently investigated by the MPS Telephone Digital Investigation Unit (TDIU),<sup>15</sup> and b. (Figure 8) completed an online crime report (for the same subset of offences) before having their crime investigated by the TDIU in the same way.

In this case, data are drawn from telephone surveys conducted between April 2020 and September 2023, with bases of approximately 14,100 for the telephone reporting sample (Figure 7) and 8,800 for the online reporting sample (Figure 8). The two samples are similar to each other demographically, and in terms of the type of crime reported, but both differ in notable ways from the ‘traditional’ (USS) sample, (previously reported in section 2.8),<sup>17</sup> meaning that we must be cautious in attributing the marked differences in

**Figure 7:** MOPAC TDIU survey (telephone sample) proportion of respondents satisfied and dissatisfied with service provided by police, and self-reported change in opinion resulting from contact



14. Burglary, assault, vehicle crime, hate crime and robbery.

15. A centralised unit that liaises with the public, records crime allegations, conducts primary investigations and decides which require further follow up.

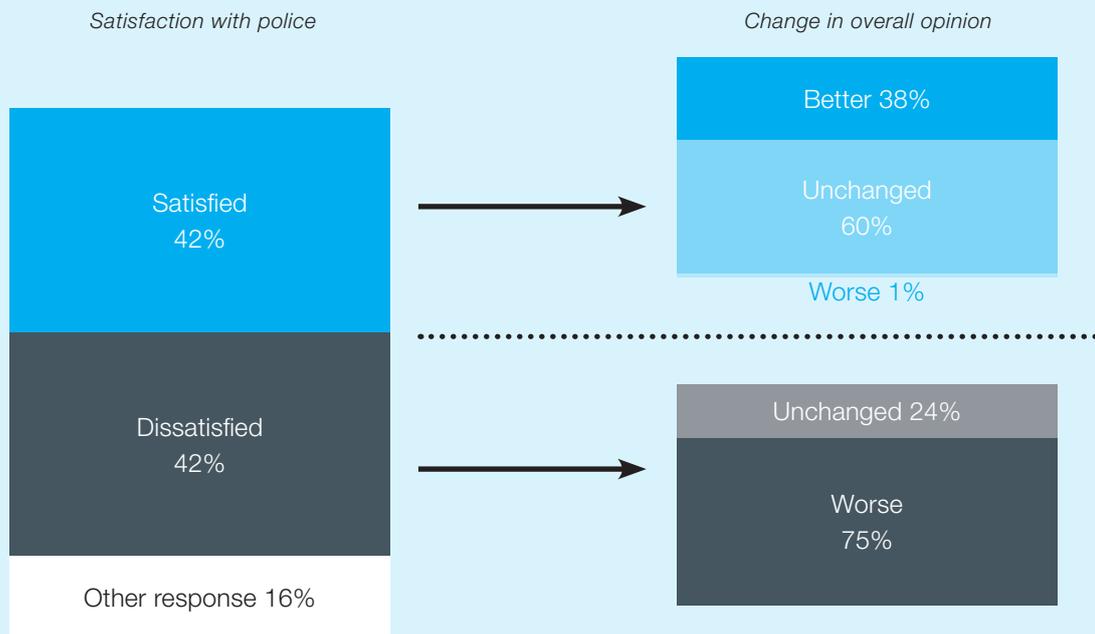
16. The USS sample does not cover vehicle-crime victims and includes proportionally more assault victims than the other samples. It also contains more non-white respondents, more under 25-year-olds, and more with a self-disclosed disability. Some of these differences reflect the risk-based deployment decisions which determine eligibility for the various samples.

17. Z=5.9, P<.00001.

satisfaction levels and overall opinion change between the USS and TDIU (telephone and online) samples, solely to quality-of-service factors. Several salient observations can, however, be made:

- London crime victims whose cases were handled by the TDIU, (whether they reported by telephone or online), are much less satisfied than those who receive an officer deployment and local investigation.
- More telephone reporters are satisfied (46 per cent) than online reporters (42 per cent), (although the difference is not large, it is statistically significant<sup>18</sup> and is consistent over time (MOPAC, 2023)). The similarity between samples means that this is likely to reflect different experiences between the two groups.
- Both TDIU and online samples appear to react to police contact in a markedly more asymmetric way than the USS group: a negative experience following online reporting or telephone investigation is much more likely to result in damage to overall opinions than a positive experience is to improve them.
- These factors, together, result in a *net-negative confidence dividend*, for both telephone and online samples. 17 per cent of all telephone reporters said their overall opinion of police improved as a result of the service received, while 35 per cent said their opinion worsened. For online reporters the equivalent figures are 16 and 32 per cent.

**Figure 8:** MOPAC TDIU survey (**online reporting** sample) proportion of respondents satisfied and dissatisfied with service provided by police, and self-reported change in opinion resulting from contact



These findings ask some challenging questions of current police practice, in the context of a renewed focus on public trust and confidence. Citizens who report being the victim of (a subset of) crimes in London, via telephone, and whose case is then handled by the TDIU, are just as likely to be dissatisfied with the service received as they are to be satisfied, while reporting online is *even more* likely to result in dissatisfaction. In both cases citizens are about twice as likely to come away from the experience with a worse overall view of the police than to have their opinion improved. MOPAC's own analysis (MOPAC, 2022b; MOPAC, 2023) links these deficits to factors consistent with a procedural justice reading, noting unmet public expectations of further follow-up contact (whether by email, telephone or in person), a failure to convey that police were taking time and effort to treat the matter seriously, or to reassure victims, as key drivers.

Isolating the particular role of the 'virtual', technologically mediated, contact interface (i.e., of online contact *specifically*) in generating these deficits is not straightforward. Although online reporters are consistently less satisfied than telephone reporters – suggesting that the removal of 'human' factors may be significant – this does not appear to carry through into overall opinions of the police (both types of contact erode general opinions in almost equal measure).

What is clear, however, is that many citizens expect more from their police contact – more attention, interest, empathy, and 'humanity' – than they often feel they receive. While the police demand and resource profile may make this (to some extent) unavoidable, using technology as the front-end for what can appear to be a cursory, impersonal, and indifferent service, presents a risk to public confidence, that policing clearly needs to mitigate and avoid.

### **Mechanism 3: Reducing citizen effort – reinvesting police attention**

How then can the police find a way out of this seemingly intractable situation? Incoming public contact demand continues to rise in volume and complexity, against a backdrop of constrained resources. In addition to its 'surface' content

(requests for assistance, resolution, information, redress etc.), many police/public interactions come laced with deep psychological needs for social recognition, affirmation, and reassurance, that seem (perhaps intrinsically) to require resource intensive 'human' time and attention to satisfy, while also reflecting the elevated expectations of convenience, speed, and smooth process, the public have come to expect in other sectors.

Existing digital 'fixes', (such as the online crime reporting example examined above), may have helped to avert total service overload, but can easily end up as guttering for unmet need; channelling incoming demand to its bureaucratic resolution, without satisfying the underlying affective requirements of the citizens involved, and thus failing to trigger the dividend of confidence and support, that accrues when it is met.

It is fair to say that there are no simple solutions, but there may be multiple incremental gains to be made via two promising mechanisms, both of which are significantly enabled by new technology and analytics. The first centres on the principle of *reducing citizen effort*. It is the more direct of the two but remains to be validated in the policing context. The second, revolves around the logic of *attention re-investment*; re-engineering business processes to release capacity that can be 'cashed in' as attentive, interpersonal citizen services elsewhere. This second mechanism is more robust in terms of procedural justice evidence and the known drivers of trust and confidence but requires caution around what one police interviewee described as the promise of "*indirect benefits to the public...[that] never actually materialise*": in other words, it is a two-part process for improving public confidence, and both need to fire for relational benefits to accrue.

Both of these mechanisms are brought into focus by the concept of 'failure demand'. It has often been observed that a large portions of incoming police contact – anything from 30 to 80 per cent, (Walley and Jennison Phillips, 2018; Seddon, 2009) – is the avoidable product of previous errors or badly designed processes, (for example when crime victims call police switchboards for overdue case updates, or where issues that might easily

have been resolved, have not received attention and reoccurred). Similarly, the comparative accessibility of police contact channels, compared to other public services, can attract ‘misdirected’ demand that takes time and resource to signpost elsewhere.

The public experience in such cases is likely to be poor, generating frustration, uncertainty and requiring additional citizen effort to resolve, and thus process changes that remove or mitigate these sources of failure and friction, seem to hold promise for improving satisfaction, with potential follow-on implications for trust and confidence.

Technology has much to offer in this space. The logic of effort-reduction features heavily in the design of online police reporting and information services, such as Single Online Home. Interviewees involved in service design described the potential for greater process transparency, for instance allowing members of the public to automatically track case progress online, see scheduled appointments and provide additional information to investigators as key to future progress (in ways already common in many private sector service areas), although we were also told that the interoperability with existing cCrime management systems is often a barrier.

The potential for AI to reduce the time and effort that citizens need to expend during police interactions is also considerable. Chatbots are being used to provide automated and semi-automated responses to many simple or transactional enquiries that arrive in police contact centres<sup>18</sup> and, as the case study (below) illustrates, are also being used in other high-risk sectors, to deal with challenging patterns of contact demand. Instantaneous translation between multiple languages makes it easier for non-English speakers to access services, and Natural Language technologies that can sort, triage, direct and provide initial responses to either free-text or voice content – or even identify stress, fear, or other relevant sentiment in callers’ voices – are being talked about and trialled, and clearly hold potential to help many people get what they need from the police more quickly and easily.

### **Case study 3: Using chatbots to prevent suicide**

*Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is a UK-based suicide prevention charity that provides accessible, 24/7 support services to people in need. In recent years, CALM has made significant strides in expanding its reach and improving the effectiveness of its services through the innovative use of technology. This has included implementing an AI-powered self-service chatbot provided by Futr AI.*

*This offers a low-risk approach to assisting users, in the critical and sensitive field of suicide prevention. The chatbot not only reduces telephone helpline wait times but can also provide immediate assistance, while callers wait for further support from trained staff.*

*Key benefits from the use of this technology include:*

- *A 72 per cent reduction in queue times due to in-queue self-serve: The chatbot’s ability to engage with users while they wait for human assistance has dramatically reduced wait times.*
- *An increased number of people served: the chatbot can handle many initial enquiries and offers immediate support on the website as well as by WhatsApp, which means CALM can assist more people and reach a broader audience than before.*
- *Enhanced overall user satisfaction: The chatbot’s responsiveness and effectiveness has resulted in higher user satisfaction.*

*CALM has embraced a multi-channel approach to its life-saving work, integrating chatbot technology throughout its services and resources to address different aspects of mental health need. These include:*

- *CALM Webchat: For those who prefer written communication, CALM provides a webchat service that allows users to engage with trained professionals in real-time. The chatbot helps manage user interactions, allowing professionals to focus on providing personalised support and addressing specific concerns.*

18. See, for example, the way Norfolk Constabulary is using chatbots designed by Futr AI to answer non-urgent queries and escalate calls to live agents where necessary (Businessfirst, 2022).

- *CALM Helpline: A free, confidential helpline is available to anyone in the UK who needs support. Trained staff and volunteers, assisted by the Futr AI chatbot for initial enquiries, are available to talk and offer guidance on a wide range of issues related to mental health and suicide prevention.*
- *Support resources: CALM's website features a wealth of information, articles, and self-help resources designed to educate and empower individuals struggling with mental health issues. The chatbot can direct users to appropriate resources based on needs, reducing the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, and encouraging open conversations about crucial topics.*
- *Campaigns and partnerships: CALM collaborates with various organisations, media outlets, and influential figures to raise awareness about mental health and suicide prevention. By incorporating chatbot technology into their campaigns, such as Project 84 and #BeTheMateYoudWant, CALM can engage with a broader audience and provide immediate support, emphasising the importance of mental health and encouraging individuals to seek help when needed.*
- *Community engagement: CALM fosters a sense of community and solidarity among those affected by mental health issues, by organising events and participating in local initiatives. The chatbot can be utilised during these activities to provide information, direct attendees to resources, and facilitate connections between individuals who wish to share their experiences and support one another in their mental health journeys.*

*In summary, CALM's use of technology has significantly improved its ability to provide accessible, responsive, and effective support to those at risk of suicide. The chatbot has reduced queue times, increased the number of people served, and boosted user satisfaction.*

Despite the considerable potential for technologies like these to improve citizen service in policing, gaps remain between the logic of *effort reduction* as a driver of customer satisfaction – which draws heavily on private sector models and research on consumer loyalty (Dixon et al., 2013; Pemberton Levy, 2019) – and the extant body of police procedural justice research, which (as previously summarised) places emphasis on relational rather than instrumental factors. It is unclear, for instance, whether any satisfaction gains made through increased convenience and reduced process friction, would feed through into general attitudes in the same way that procedural justice factors have been shown to. Neither do we know, in a policing context, if convenience factors might plausibly be subsumed within a more relational model: in modern contexts, might the provision of smooth, effortless contact processes stand as a marker of respect and decent treatment, while perpetuating avoidable frustration demonstrates the opposite? These ambiguities also draw attention to the comparative invisibility of more 'transactional' police service users within public attitude research.

There is considerable scope to address these questions and omissions through future research. In the meantime, harnessing technology to remove citizen effort and frustration from police contact remains attractive from a relational perspective, particularly where it enables a process of *attention reinvestment*.

Failure demand is not only a driver of avoidable user frustration but can also consume considerable amounts of agency resource and capacity. Identifying and mitigating it, including for example by applying Natural Language Processing analytics to administrative datasets (e.g., Birks et al., 2020), or in the ways already described, can offer marked demand management benefits and free up precious police capacity. Doing so offers an indirect but currently more evidentially robust route to contact satisfaction and public confidence, if some of that freed capacity can be redirected to provide more attentive, citizen-focused personal interactions.

Something like this appears to be in evidence in the RVR and FAST policing examples discussed above: some of the police capacity clawed back, in terms of reduced officer travel time and double crewing, was put to better use dealing promptly and attentively with crime victims, with a resulting ‘pay out’ in terms of satisfaction, trust and confidence.

There is therefore a second, and evidentially more solid route from business process transformation to public confidence, but it involves finding ways to invest capacity gains back into quality human interactions.

### 3.3 ENGAGEMENT CONTACT, CONFIDENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

#### **Mechanism 4: Supporting, deepening, and targeting community engagement and participation.**

There are well evidenced links between police engagement work that seeks to involve, consult, and collaborate with citizens and communities around local policing issues, and positive changes in public attitudes (Myhill 2012; Mazerolle et al. 2013; Tuffin et al., 2006; Gill et al. 2014. See Section 2.6). It is also well documented, however, that British policing has found it difficult to sustain this vein of public facing activity, and the community policing strategies associated with it, in the context of austerity, shifting priorities and changing patterns of demand,<sup>19</sup> and that police local knowledge and community connectivity have suffered as a result (HMIC, 2017; Higgins, 2018). Additionally, there are long standing critiques around the inability of traditional engagement methods to connect with all sections of communities (Bullock and Sindall, 2014).

Our survey of police community engagement leads indicated that forces are currently seeking to develop more ‘plural’ processes for structured neighbourhood-level engagement, priority setting and community feedback, that are less reliant

on traditional community meetings. Online digital communication channels are a key part of this, with Covid having accelerated the depth and breadth of local digital reach. Humberside Police, for example, was recently praised by HMICFRS (2022b) for the way it uses *Humber Talking*, an innovative community survey tool, delivered both in-person or online, to provide officers with granular, hyperlocal insights that inform priority setting and problem solving. Humberside’s local policing teams have conducted more than 180,000 house visits to promote public use of the tool. The format, however, relies on residents’ willingness to opt-in to a police-owned portal and might potentially therefore struggle to generate insights from ‘harder to reach’ demographics. Our next case study shows how some US police agencies are using online survey methodologies to go beyond engaged (or ‘engageable’) citizens, and benefiting from timely, representative insights into community sentiment and concerns.

#### **Case study 4: Using digital survey tools in the Chicago and San Diego Police Departments**

*The Chicago Police Department (CPD) has been at the forefront of leveraging real-time, representative survey data to gauge and prioritise public safety concerns. A cornerstone of this is Zensity Blockwise,<sup>20</sup> a technology platform designed to continuously capture and analyse localised survey data. The product serves digital advertisements within a specific ‘geofenced’ area to recruit anonymous survey respondents, then tracks and adjusts the ad targeting to ensure a sample that looks like the underlying community. The resulting data is available in real time, for tracking and understanding priorities, continuously – not just at a single point in time.*

*The result: police commanders get a larger and more representative sample of opinion, and they get it much, much quicker, enabling faster deployment of responses to community concerns – particularly from difficult to reach demographic groups.*

19. CSEW data, for example, shows that the proportion of adults reporting no engagement contact with local police increased from 68 per cent in 2015/16, to 74 percent in 2019/20 (ONS, 2022a)

20. Zensity are a co-funder of this research project.

*The approach has allowed the CPD to tap into the 'collective consciousness' of the city's diverse communities, gaining insight into immediate safety concerns. These real-time surveys have given the department a valuable tool for understanding the distinctive public safety needs of each neighbourhood, enabling them to design and implement tailored, data-driven public safety strategies.*

*The power of this new technology has been highlighted in community meetings, which have evolved from being information-sharing sessions to strategic planning discussions. Rather than starting from a blank canvas, CPD officers now enter meetings equipped with granular, real-time data about the specific concerns of each community. This has allowed for a more targeted approach to addressing safety concerns and has streamlined the process of developing strategies and solutions.*

*In Chicago's Austin district, for instance, where survey data highlighted growing concerns regarding gang-related violence, the department was able to call a community meeting, inviting local leaders, educators, and youth workers to design a focused strategy session. The outcome was a multi-pronged plan, involving increased police patrols, youth engagement programmes, and community initiatives aimed at violence prevention.*

*Similarly, in the South Shore neighbourhood, real-time data revealed rising concerns about home burglaries. In response, the CPD launched a localised campaign on burglary prevention, which included community workshops on home security and a coordinated neighbourhood watch programme.*

*Elsewhere, San Diego Police Department (SDPD) partnered with Zensity to deploy similar technology, rapidly and representatively, to gauge public sentiment around a potentially contentious new technology – Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR).*

*The survey, made available in multiple languages to ensure inclusivity, was created, disseminated, and concluded within just one week, securing nearly 1,000 representative responses.*

*The results provided an interesting narrative, finding broad support for ALPR in three specific instances: to investigate missing persons or children, respond to acts of terrorism and to*

*look into violent crimes. Despite mixed overall opinions, the exercise revealed that the public was comfortable with deploying the technology in situations with immediate and high-stakes repercussions. This finding proved pivotal for SDPD, illuminating a way to selectively incorporate ALPR into their operations, while still respecting public opinion.*

*These examples underscore the potential of digital surveys to gauge public sentiment quickly and accurately, both as part of a continuous public safety strategies, and on specific subjects that maybe technically complex and politically sensitive.*

These examples suggest plausible mechanisms for police agencies to build local community relationships, by using digital engagement and survey tools to enable consultative, collaborative, responsive local policing, in ways that demonstrate shared concerns and aligned values.

#### **Mechanism 5: enabling discourse and dialogue**

Away from the specific community policing context, the potential for police to use social media to improve public perceptions and relationships is a matter of some debate. While some evidence has been presented that these platforms can enable public assistance in police investigations and provide space for police to explain their actions (O'Connor, 2017; Procter et al, 2013), other research has questioned the extent to which meaningful dialogue occurs through these channels, and whether police are inclined to move beyond one-to-many 'broadcast' into deeper forms of engagement (Dekker et al., 2020). Kudla and Parnaby's (2018) analysis of Canadian police-related Twitter content (for instance) found little evidence of police social media use that moved beyond superficial 'image work', and even less of police willingness to engage citizens with more critical views.

Grimmelikhuisen and Meijer's Dutch population study (2015) did find a limited (although not necessarily causal) association between passive consumption of police Twitter feeds and public perceptions of police legitimacy (mediated by perceptions of police effectiveness and modernity, rather than procedural fairness), but found

insufficient evidence that *participative* interaction via social media was even taking place, to assess any population-level impact.

Ralph's (2021) qualitative study of police and public perceptions of police social media use in Scotland, focused on the dynamic or 'dialogic' nature of police legitimacy (the way it is constantly being formed and reformed through claim, challenge, and revision, (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012)). Linked to broader trends in citizen journalism and the public sharing of photo and video material (especially of contentious police contact episodes), social media presents a potent source of influence on public opinion, and a growing arena of challenge to police legitimacy (College of Policing, 2020).

Similarly, the public nature of the medium provides opportunities for police to transform individual responses to citizen questions, comments, and challenges into mass-engagement opportunities: a process one informant referred to as *amplification through transparency*.

Ralph's insights relate to the importance of authoritative information ownership for police representatives' sense of their own legitimacy, the interconnections in citizen assessments between online and offline encounters, and the way police (selectively) decide to respond to online challenges and reassert/reconstruct their legitimacy online.

Attending to the dialogic potential for social media in this way, highlights the value (perhaps even *necessity* for police in modern contexts) of maintaining an appropriate social media presence and involvement, to inform, engage citizens in dialogue around contentious issues, demonstrate procedural justice values, explain police actions, and challenge misinformation – in ways that go well beyond promotional 'broadcast'. Our next case study is a promising example of just such an approach, targeted at a crucial audience often considered 'hard to reach'.

### Case study 5: @YourPolice.UK

*The Instagram account @YourPolice.UK is a police social media channel, run by the NPPC Digital Public Contact team, that seeks to build better relationships with children and young people. By posting content on policing issues relevant to young people, responding to comments, and engaging via direct messaging, its operators are able to listen and respond to young people's concerns, while helping to keep them safe, informed and engaged with policing as they move towards adulthood.*

*The account aims to enhance the reputation of English and Welsh policing and build young people's confidence by being a "factually accurate, trusted source that incorporates pastoral care and with a broader remit than just legislation".*

*As the project lead (interviewed for this study) explained: "Traditionally, police use social media as a broadcast channel which does nothing to engage with people or build trust and confidence. Our approach is to challenge negative opinions of the police in a procedurally just way, by letting young people know what they should expect and what they can do if things go wrong. We have many encounters which start off confrontational and end in them thanking us for listening and answering their questions."*

*Sentiment data, compiled by the channel's operators suggests some success, with half of direct messaging exchanges that began with negative or neutral sentiments, becoming more positive during the course of interaction.*

*Every month the channel reaches the accounts of one million children and young people (91 per cent of the engaged audience is under 18), has over 98,000 'meaningful interactions', and answers 2,000 questions. It helps 500 children and young people to report crime annually and helps connect others with appropriate non-police resources (for example, running a pilot project which has referred 100 children to Barnardo's using direct messaging).*

*The account reflects a recognition that the way young people interact and connect is radically different from previous generations, with many unlikely to speak on the phone, even to peers, and with less separation between digital and physical spaces. Reflecting on shifting societal expectations, project staff commented: “Everything these days is about digital contact, most people will want to report online, policing needs to be that way, this is where this fits in.”*

*As a national service, the account aims to post content relevant to young people wherever they are in the country, (for example about staying safe online, exploitation, violence against women and girls, knife crime and antisocial behaviour, livestock worrying and fox hunting). It also helps police forces with engagement around specific incidents and reinforces messages about the importance of reporting crime and how it helps communities. However, only 30 per cent of their work is in posting content, most is about responding to comments and answering direct messages. The team aims to respond to every comment and message, even those that could be seen as critical, abusive or ‘trolling’, in order to correct misinformation and counter content that could be leading young people down dangerous routes. Staff reflected on the surprise often expressed by young people that someone on a police account was “engaging with them, having a bit of fun and being human”.*

*The channel was launched four years ago after consultations with 5,000 young people, 80 per cent of whom said they wanted to interact with the police on social media as a source for information. The account currently operates between 9.00am and 9.00pm seven days a week, but there are plans for a 24-hour service now that the project has found a home within the NPCC Digital Strategy and has received Home Office funding.*

## 3.4 ENFORCEMENT CONTACT, CONFIDENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY

### Mechanism 6: Demonstrating organisational accountability

It has long been recognised that the autonomy and discretion inherent in frontline police work can make it difficult for supervisors to oversee street-level practice, including ensuring that more procedurally just policing styles are implemented. Body Worn Video (BWV) appears to offer a promising technological solution: when used correctly, BWV can visually and audibly record events from a police officer’s vantage point, providing an additional and (arguably) more objective record of public encounters than written reports or witness statements alone. In theory at least, the technology provides a mechanism for enhancing the scrutiny and transparency of police practice, and strengthening the accountability of officers for their decisions, actions, and behaviour, with potential pay offs in terms of public trust and confidence.

The first randomised controlled trial of BWV, by Ariel et al. (2015), found significant reductions in police use of force and public complaints where the devices were used – hastening widespread adoption in the US and UK. However, while the authors attributed the findings to behavioural restraint by officers and citizens, others have since questioned whether a deterrent effect on reporting (rather than a change in officer behaviour and interaction quality) might better explain the results (Lum et al., 2019; see also Lum et al., 2020).

Early studies assessing public attitudes towards BWV suggested citizens were generally supportive of the technology. For example, a 2015 US survey found 80 per cent of respondents believed BWV would make police officers act more respectfully towards citizens, and 61 percent believed it would lead to greater trust in the police (Sousa et al., 2015). Similarly, in the UK, a public survey following trials on the Isle of Wight, showed high confidence that BWV cameras would have a positive effect on police efficacy (Ellis et al., 2015). But the public view is likely to be more nuanced:

Sousa et al. (2018) analysed results of a US attitude survey and found that while there was public consensus that BWV could increase police transparency and reduce excessive use of force, there was less agreement on whether it could improve trust in police or repair community and police relations.

It also seems likely that while some communities may feel protected by BWV, marginalised groups, such as those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, might see it as extra surveillance, and a sign that the police do not trust them, with potential to further alienate police from communities (St Louis et al. 2020; Ray et al., 2017; Sousa et al. 2018). Wright and Headley, (2021) draw attention to the “*lack of citizen input, involvement and engagement*” often carried out, into the way the technology is designed and implemented, so that it is often *imposed* on communities rather than being implemented in a way that works for them.

Current evidence of the impact of police BWV on community–police relations is mixed. Ariel et al. (2016) found that crime reporting increased in districts where police officers were equipped with BWV compared with comparison sites, explaining the finding in terms of an increase in public confidence. However, the effect was only found in low crime areas, and not in the crime hotspots where community relations tend to be more challenged. Another randomised controlled trial (PERF, 2017) found no significant differences in satisfaction or confidence between control and treatment groups, while White et al. (2018), showed that an initial reduction in complaints and police use of force dissipated over time, possibly because police became used to the technology and no longer moderated their behaviour. Miller (2016) also demonstrated that positive public perceptions were short lived, suggesting the public may lose confidence (after an initial boost), when they do not see long-term changes in police behaviour. Henstock et al. (2019), found that citizens who had experienced BWV were actually *less* likely to agree that it enhanced their feelings of safety, increased their confidence in police or influenced their behaviour, compared to those

who had not, instead considering it annoying and intrusive.

These inconsistent findings draw attention to substantial variation in the ways the technology has been used across police agencies (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2017) and the numerous examples of incorrect or questionable practice that have come to light (such as cameras being turned off before crucial events, or footage lost, (St Louis et al., 2020; IOPC, 2022)).

Based on an extensive meta-analysis of these and other studies, Lum (2020) argues that merely mandating officers to wear BWV cameras is unlikely to improve public confidence. Police agencies also have to demonstrate that they are using the technology to “*strengthen organisational accountability and functioning*” – a conclusion that resonates with the *transparency* dimensions of procedural justice. Citing evidence that public confidence in BWV is linked to footage being shared and published transparently (St Louis, 2020), the authors conclude that improvements in police-citizen relations are likely to require clear policies and practices for releasing videos in ways that appear transparent, rigorous, and fair to the community. An experiment by Saulnier and Sytsma (2023) further indicates the potential benefits of sharing footage in this way. Participants with low pre-existing trust, who were played BWV footage of a positive police traffic stop, alongside reading a vignette, reported increased confidence in police and willingness to cooperate, compared with those who read the vignette only.

In the UK context, despite NPCC and government support for a “*proactive approach to considering the release of body-worn video to increase transparency, build public confidence and correct misleading information*” (NPCC, 2022b; Hansard HL Deb., 7 July 2021), practice is still evolving. However, in the light of the above discussion, examples of the way BWV is beginning to be used to support community scrutiny processes (as described in the next case study) appear to be heading in a promising direction.

### **Case Study 6: Body Worn Video and community scrutiny**

Work is ongoing across UK policing, and internationally, to identify ways in which Body Worn Video (BWV) can be used to promote transparency, officer learning and procedurally just policing. This case study reviews examples of developing practice relating to community scrutiny of stop and search. Stop and search can be one of the most intrusive interactions that citizens have with the police and there is ongoing debate over the way the power is exercised and the potentially harmful impact it can have on individual attitudes and wider community relations. Despite weak evidence that it acts as a deterrent, the police tend to see stop and search as an important tool in the fight against violence and street level crime (Nickolls and Allen, 2022).

Following the MacPherson report (The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1999) there has been a requirement for community scrutiny of stop and search in order to, as the BWV Code of Practice puts it, “promote public confidence in the use of the powers” (Kalyan and Keeling, 2019). But, as a recent report from the Criminal Justice Alliance notes, the use of BWV alone will not satisfy the needs of effective community scrutiny; it is the process of allowing the public to access, review and ask questions about the footage that results in transparency (Kalyan and Keeling, 2019).

Currently, the way this scrutiny operates is left to individual forces, and the standards vary hugely across the country, with only some forces having effective, independent groups, or allowing them to randomly dip sample footage (Kalyan and Keeling, 2019). Some forces restrict access to footage due to concerns around data protection and confidentiality. Often technical problems mean the footage cannot be viewed, which impedes effective scrutiny. A minority of forces have policies in place that allow scrutiny groups to work effectively (Kalyan and Keeling, 2019).

West Midlands Police has been using BWV in scrutiny panels for some years, and research suggests that the introduction of BWV in that force has had an impact on how effective panel members feel they are (Murria, forthcoming). Panel members report that access to BWV

enables them to hold officers to a higher standard of accountability than viewing the search record alone, by enabling them to examine how the officer conducted the search, and whether the grounds recorded on the stop form matched those given by the officer. This means they can go beyond scrutinising legality, to looking at wider questions of legitimacy and procedural justice (Murria, forthcoming).

Bedfordshire Police has been cited by HMICFRS as one of the forces using BWV most effectively. The force has use-of-force and stop and search scrutiny panels, made up of local residents, which are “important in making sure officers act with integrity and maintain public confidence”. The panels provide “robust scrutiny, and the force is “very open” to the feedback and uses it to support the learning of officers as well as chart trends (HMICFRS, 2022c).

The Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group, in North London, is currently in the process of implementing a similarly rigorous feedback structure in its community monitoring groups. One of the panel members explained how the new process enables panellists to view BWV, record their feedback in granular detail, grade encounters based on legality and procedural justice, and, using a traffic light system, ensure officers are praised for good practice, given training and guidance when needed and held to account when poor practice is identified. In addition, the feedback process provides data that will enable the force to better determine areas of improvement and train officers accordingly.

## **3.5 SECTION SUMMARY: OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS**

We began this section with cause for optimism that improvements to the way police/public contact is conducted, across citizen-initiated, community engagement and law enforcement contexts, could make an important contribution to the renewal of public confidence and trust, as we transition to an ever more digitally saturated society. We also brought forward learning about the qualities of police contact – demonstrable fair process and decency of treatment, playing-out (roughly) as *attentiveness* in police responses, and *consultation/collaboration* in local policing

approaches – that are likely to be effective in achieving this.

Acknowledging that there are fundamental social changes accompanying the technological revolution, that mean our existing theories need to be held in review, the evidence we do have points tentatively to a set of mechanisms through which technologically enabled changes to police practice may serve to improve public attitudes and police/public relations. In summary:

1. The growing public acceptability of remote forms of service provision provides an opportunity for police to use live video, text-based and telephony channels to provide more **timely, attentive, victim-focused remote response options** to calls for service (in appropriate circumstances), resulting in better citizen experiences – and leaving a better attitudinal legacy – than traditional (often delayed) physical police attendance.
2. The additional control, discretion, privacy, and anonymity afforded by digital (in particular text-based) contact channels appears to **remove barriers to disclosure, reporting and information provision**. If police can demonstrate that they value and are responsive to this information, in the way they deal with those who come forward, or in publicly visible and community-aligned follow-up activity, there is good reason to believe improvements in trust and confidence will follow.
3. Reducing avoidable failure demand and freeing police capacity, by **re-engineering business processes and appropriately introducing elements of automation and self-service**, to better manage incoming public contact (including by using AI) offers two potential routes to user satisfaction and public confidence. Reducing friction and citizen effort promises greater user convenience and less frustration. While it is not currently clear whether these instrumental improvements translate *directly* into trust and confidence, reinvesting capacity gains in attentive personal interactions, provides a less direct but more robustly evidenced route.
4. Given strong evidence on the value of consultative, collaborative community policing and engagement

for improving police/public relations, it seems highly likely that technologies that support and enable that work can be beneficial. This could include enhanced **data analytics that enable the community engagement work to be targeted more precisely and effectively, and community messaging platforms or social media work, that facilitates local dialogue, information exchange and co-production.**

5. Social media now represents an important space for the negotiation of police legitimacy. **Appropriate participation by police in online conversations and dialogue around policing issues, that is publicly helpful, informative, responsive to challenge and demonstrates procedural justice values**, is likely to be a necessity in current and future conditions.
6. Finally, technological advances mean that more police activity, including previously 'opaque' enforcement contact, that can be a source of controversy and distrust, is now recordable and auditable. The emerging evidence around Body Worn Video suggests that there may be routes to trust and confidence if these records are used to **demonstrably strengthen accountability and improve police practice, in ways that are open and actively involve citizens.**

These opportunities, however, are accompanied by risk. The most obvious is that technological mediation of police/public contact contributes to an increasingly abstracted and distanced police service, where web forms, chatbots and automated self-service portals remove rather than enhance, opportunities for police to demonstrate procedural justice qualities such as attentiveness, politeness, listening and provision of voice.

It is a stark fact that most people who report crime online in London come away from the overall experience with a less favourable opinion of the police. It is not necessarily the online interface that is the problem here, but the service to which it acts as a gateway: using technology to deflect or channel away public need (albeit often 'low risk' need) that policing cannot currently muster the capacity to meet, will only serve to further erode public confidence and support.

# 4. STRATEGIC DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In our introduction, we identified the need to attend to the interdependencies between two significant social shifts: the recent deterioration in the relationship between the public and the police, and the radical disruption to the way communication takes place across society, precipitated by the digital and technological revolution. In Section 2, we revisited the ‘analogue’ evidence and theory, on the way citizens’ direct experiences of police contact affect public confidence (and related attitudes and judgements), highlighting the potency of these moments – and the perceptions of *procedural justice* that arise from them – to convey messages about social alignment and inclusion. In Section 3, we began to apply this framework to a more digitally ‘suffused’ context, drawing on research evidence and promising practice to posit a set of six mechanisms through which technologically enabled practice change might plausibly strengthen police/public relations, alongside one pressing risk. We conclude by considering the strategic implications that emerge for British policing, and present eight recommendations.

## 4.1 A SPECIFIC STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE, THROUGH HIGH QUALITY CONTACT

The recently published Policing Vision 2030 (APCC, College of Policing and NPCC, 2023) recognises the imperative on the police service to rebuild its relationship with the public, setting out a headline objective “*to be the most trusted and engaged policing service in the world*”. Similarly, the Metropolitan Police Turnaround Plan (MPS, 2023) leads with a commitment to deliver “*More Trust*” (along with “*Less Crime*” and “*Higher Standards*”). The potential risk, however, of placing trust or other relational concepts at the apex of these over-arching strategies, is that they lose

their specificity, becoming (as one interviewee put it) “*buzzwords*” for any and all organisational improvement efforts that have a potential ‘read-through’ to public facing service delivery, while losing sight of what we know *specifically* about the things that underpin and undermine these positive public judgements and attitudes. There is a need for structures and strategies that bring this knowledge to the forefront of practice development.

In *The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* (2022) the Police Foundation recommended that the police service (the NPCC, APCC and Home Office) should devise and implement a national plan for improving police legitimacy as a crucial enabling *capability*. Underpinned by procedural justice theory and wider research, we argued that the strategy should include a programme of work to improve the quality of police/public interactions, reinvestment in neighbourhood policing, new mechanisms for public dialogue and reform in areas such as police conduct, stop and search and workforce diversity.

Despite the reframing of police mission statements and the multiple ‘thematic’ reform efforts currently underway, there seems little sign of any *overall strategy* of this kind emerging. It is notable, for example, that across the NPCC’s myriad coordination committees, portfolios and working groups (NPCC, 2022c) none have a clear national remit for improving public confidence (or trust, or legitimacy). Neither (restricting ourselves to a more manageable remit aligned with our current focus) is there clear ownership, nationally or in many forces, for the overall *citizen experience of policing*. Given what we know about the way peoples’ direct experience of policing feeds through into trust and confidence, this seems to be a significant strategic deficit.

At the police force level our survey did identify some potentially promising developments, flowing from a recognition of the need to look

at the quality of police contact in a more holistic way. One force described their draft ‘Quality of Service Strategy’, aimed at delivering a ‘*whole system*’ approach to citizen experience, by drawing together new and existing workstreams relating to public contact innovation, investigative standards/victim focus, community engagement and local problem-solving, procedural justice training, and ‘service recovery’ – underpinned by a single ‘*quality of service*’ mindset, brand, and charter. Another told us about their force User Insights Board, recently established to provide organisational governance for public-facing work across multiple force functions. This suggests that senior level attention to day-to-day citizen contact in policing is beginning to grow, but this needs to become the sustained norm.

To catalyse and coordinate this, we suggest that greater strategic focus is required at the national level, to:

1. Reflect the commitment to improving public trust and engagement made in the Policing Vision 2030.
2. Develop and operationalise the evidence base on the links between police contact and public attitudes.
3. Recognise the multiple ways in which police/public contact now occurs, particularly in the context of digital technology.

### Recommendation 1

The NPCC should establish a *Citizen Experience of Policing Co-ordination Committee*, working across police forces and functions to embed learning about the drivers of trust and confidence into practice. The Committee’s remit would span all forms of contact (citizen-initiated, engagement and enforcement-based; in-person and digital) and would cut across multiple police functions including contact management, neighbourhood policing, corporate communications, digital contact, investigative standards, learning and development (and others). The Committee should develop an *Improving Citizen Experience Strategy* to align delivery across forces and focus on developing, testing, and then mainstreaming innovative practices.

## 4.2 DEVELOPING THEORIES OF CHANGE

There is a tendency for police strategies in the technology and public contact space to cite improved public trust and confidence as intended outcomes, without specifying exactly how these benefits are expected to accrue. For instance, considerable emphasis is currently being placed on the potential for technology to deliver slicker and more convenient user interactions – “*seamless citizen experience(s)*” as the Police Digital Strategy (NPCC and APCC, 2020) puts it – and there are undoubtedly public benefits to these efforts, as well as a strong imperative for policing to keep up with public experiences and expectations in other sectors. Whether, and exactly how, these ostensibly *instrumental* improvements might translate into more *relationally* grounded trust and confidence, however, is under-theorised and remains to be empirically validated in the policing context. We suggested (in Section 3.3) that a strategy of *attention reinvestment* would be prudent, at least while further testing is undertaken.

The broader point here is that, if trust and confidence is the (or even one of several) significant aim(s) of public contact innovation, then policing needs to get better at specifying and articulating its Theory of Change. Working back from the intended outcome (greater trust and confidence), what causally connected conditions need to be in place for improvements to occur, and what interventions or process modifications are likely to be needed to bring these about?

The good news is that technology substantially expands what is possible, but the onus is on policing to clearly state *what it wants to do with it*, and *why*. This is a rational, methodical, exercise, that needs to be informed by evidence, but it also needs imagination. It is rarely sufficient to replicate existing analogue police processes in digital formats, nor or is likely that simply lifting and dropping products designed for other sectors into a policing’s complex context will prove effective. Rather, it is for policing to understand and articulate what it needs to do to differently to improve public trust and confidence, and for

technology providers to deliver solutions that enable that to happen.

We believe the six mechanisms set out in Section 3 would prove a useful starting point for this process. If public trust and confidence are the intended outcome, then it currently seems most feasible that technology can assist by:

1. Enabling prompt, attentive, 'remote' police responses to public calls for service.
2. Removing barriers to communication, public disclosure, and information provision, enabling police to then respond in a procedurally just/ community-oriented way.
3. Reducing failure demand and introducing appropriate self-service automation that reduces citizen frustration and effort and (noting the caveat above) frees capacity to reinvest in high quality, attentive interpersonal interactions.
4. Supporting, enhancing, and targeting community engagement and citizen participation.
5. Enabling and amplifying appropriate police participation in public discourse and dialogue, (most obviously on social media).
6. Demonstrating organisational accountability and involving the public in scrutiny and improvement of police activity.

### Recommendation 2

Police forces should seek to improve public contact experiences, trust, and confidence, by developing and adopting technologically enabled processes and capabilities, in line with the six promising mechanisms set out above. All innovations should be based on an explicit theory of change and subject to appropriate evaluation and review. The national Coordination Committee would provide an overall framework for this work, collating and owning the developing knowledge base and sharing practice learning.

## 4.3 DEVELOPING EVIDENCE AND INSIGHT

There are clearly substantial gaps in the evidence base about the connections between police/ public contact and confidence, in the context of an increasingly digital society. Testing and refining theories of change and developing the provisional framework offered above, will require a programme of systematic research and analysis. Three main areas seem particularly worthy of attention.

First, the most methodologically robust studies of the impact of police contact on public attitudes come from panel studies, that compare survey responses given by respondents before interaction episodes, with those the same individuals provide afterwards. Such studies, however, are few and far between, and none have looked at digital forms of police contact.

The Office of National Statistics is currently developing a panel component to the CSEW, specifically to provide more granular data on crime victimisation (ONS, 2022c). However, this also presents an opportunity to gather high-quality data on the impact of various forms of police contact on public attitudes, with significant implications for knowledge development and practice.

### Recommendation 3

The Home Office should ask the Office of National Statistics to include questions on police contact and public perceptions of the police within the new panel component of the Crime Survey of England and Wales and make data available to researchers to study the impact of various forms of between-wave police contact on public confidence (and related attitudes).

Second, recent randomised controlled trials of Rapid Video Responses and FAST policing (rapid telephony responses) in Kent (Rothwell, 2022a, 2022b) are stand-out examples of how robustly evaluated practice can quickly develop thinking across the sector and catalyse wider adoption. There is significant scope for much greater use of randomised and quasi experimental evaluations (including public survey components) in trials of contact innovations.

#### Recommendation 4

In conjunction with the Home Office, the College of Policing and universities, police forces should seek to conduct robustly evaluated trials of new contact technologies including their impact on public satisfaction, confidence, and related attitudes.

Third, as noted already, a particularly pressing research question emerges about the extent to which a strategy of citizen ‘effort-reduction’ might plausibly lead to gains in public trust and confidence (alongside its other public benefits). Relatedly, it has become apparent how little research attention has been paid to ‘transactional’ users of police services. Efforts to better define and quantifying this group, understand their needs and impact on police demand, and the extent to which their experiences have a lasting legacy in terms of trust and confidence, would have significant potential to inform practice.

#### Recommendation 5

The Police Digital Service/NPCC Digital Public Contact programme should work with the College of Policing to commission research on the links between citizen convenience and ‘effort’ during police contact, and public trust and confidence, and to gain a greater understanding of ‘transactional’ users of police services.

## 4.4 RECONNECTING WITH THE ‘EXCLUDED MIDDLE’

The emerging practice and thinking we have reviewed in this report seem most promising at the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ ends of the need/risk/vulnerability spectrum. Despite well documented issues with the way police deal with rape victims and those who report other forms of abuse, it seems clear that new forms of contact technology are breaking down barriers to reporting and disclosure, including by those at risk of ongoing harm. While this places a greater onus on the police to respond, there is a palpable desire within the service to embrace this newly surfaced ‘demand’, as part of a commitment to keeping vulnerable people safe. At the opposite end,

there seems significant potential for greater automation and self-service options to route the most ‘transactional’ users of police services to the outcomes they need, in a satisfactory and resource efficient way.

Between these poles, however, there is a sizable middle group of police service users – exemplified by the dissatisfied victims of ‘neighbourhood’ and similar crimes we encountered in MOPAC’s online reporting and telephone investigation surveys – who may not present with significant risk, but nonetheless enter into police contact with relational as well as transactional needs for social affirmation and reassurance.

If they are to take away a positive attitudinal trace from the experience, these citizens need to feel that the police are interested and engaged in their matter, and are taking it seriously (Bradford et al., 2009; Myhill and Bradford, 2012); if they contact the police online, they need to be *“assured of a response, and that the response was personal, human and detailed”* (survey respondent quoted in Watson et al., 2022). The risk, that we set out in Section 3.2, is that when the follow-up they receive does not meet these needs, then technology can appear as an additional barrier: an impediment to demonstrations of procedural justice qualities such as politeness, listening and voice that – for all that it may remove process *friction* – stands between the citizen and any sense that they are gaining *traction*. New solutions to this core problem are urgently needed.

#### Recommendation 6

Police forces should use feedback surveys to identify groups of service users with the poorest outcomes in terms of satisfaction and confidence and carry out research and analysis to understand the drivers. They should convene working groups, including procedural justice scholars, psychologists, and technologists, to devise ways that processes might be reconfigured to generate a better citizen experience and a more favourable attitudinal legacy.

## 4.5 BUILDING A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION AND UPSCALING

It is beyond our scope here to address the significant legacy issues affecting police IT infrastructure. However, it is clear that the ability to innovate in digital contact and to quickly adopt and scale-up positively evaluated practice across police forces, is hampered by outdated and incompatible core systems. We were told, for instance, that it is currently difficult for many forces to develop public access portals for tracking case progress, because of interoperability issues with Crime Management Systems. The forthcoming revision of the *Police Digital Strategy* will provide a blueprint for longer-term transition to more agile and sustainable technology base. It is incumbent on policing to recognise the read-through from implementing this strategy to opportunities for improved citizen contact and, ultimately, to promote trust and confidence.

### Recommendation 7

Police chiefs should implement the renewed Police Digital Strategy, recognising its value as an enabler of improved citizen contact experiences and, ultimately, public trust and confidence.

## 4.6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN CHANGE

Finally, during this research we have encountered several good examples of efforts to involve the public in the process of contact innovation, including consultation with survivor groups during the design of online reporting services, and digital surveys to gauge public sentiment around new surveillance technologies. Equally, however, it would be fair to say that previous developments have sometimes been driven more by what technology can do for the police, than their intended benefits for the public. We have also encountered critiques of the way technologies like Body Worn Video have sometimes been imposed on communities, rather than implemented with them (Wright and Headley, 2021; St Louis et al., 2020).

Additionally, despite the considerable potential for digital contact to improve public access to policing, credible concerns remain about digital exclusion (Yang et al., 2021; Age UK, 2023).

Technology also sits at the centre of important ethical debates about surveillance and privacy, around which informed public discourse is often limited, and the balance of societal opinion far from clear.

All of this reinforces the importance for policing of continuous dialogue and consultation with the public and its diverse constituent sub-groups, about the way the service embraces technology, and changes its public interface, over coming years, and decades. It is also important not to lose sight of the police workforce, who are perhaps most intensely impacted by these innovations, and the way technology can change their experience of work, dealings with the public, peers and leaders, and their own sense of professional efficacy and legitimacy (Aston et al., 2022).

A procedural justice lens suggests that *how* policing adapts to the digital age – for instance whether it gives its varied stakeholders a voice in the process of change, listens and responds to what they say, whether it makes decisions transparently and in an even-handed way – will have an important bearing on its ability to secure public confidence, trust, and support, as we transition to an increasingly digital society.

### Recommendation 8

Police agencies should use a varied portfolio of public consultation methods – including surveys, product testing, qualitative research, scrutiny panels and deliberative practice – to understand and engage with the public and key internal and external stakeholder groups around its use if technology and the ways that it connects and transacts with the public.

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