

Report to: Policing Plan Group
Agenda : 2.1
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Subject: Police communications as a driver of confidence
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For: Information

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1. Purpose of paper

- 1.1 To provide members with a short summary of the headlines emerging from a review of research into the impact of communications on public confidence in policing.
- 1.2 To invite the Group to discuss the implications of these headlines on the range of tactics available to the British Transport Police (BTP), and its partners, to achieve its strategic objective to increase confidence by 10% by 2019; and how these options could be captured in targets to be captured in the 2015-16 Policing Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the last meeting of the Group, attendees began to explore the range of tactics available to BTP, and its partners, to increase the confidence of those travelling and working on the railway. One of the options discussed was the use of direct communications with the public to improve confidence in policing - for BTP the equivalent is measured via the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS¹) in terms of satisfaction with personal security.
- 2.2 This tactic was proposed due to the body of academic research available on the impact of police communications as a driver of public confidence. While there are clear differences in the day-to-day interactions between BTP, rail passengers and staff and the resident population interacting with territorial forces - there

¹ And equivalent via a rail staff survey

is learning to be captured from this body of research which may be relevant to the security operations on the railway.

- 2.3 This paper provides a very brief overview of two key sets of readings on this topic. The first is a summary of existing evidence on ‘what works in improving public confidence’ carried out by the Home Office in 2009²; the second relates to a study carried out on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) between 2008 and 2010³ which looked specifically at the use of leafleting as a direct communication method but considered the impact of police communications more generally. Members who wish to read further are referred to copies of the 2009 Home Office summary and the 2010 MPS paper attached to this paper at Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.
- 2.4 Members will note that while this paper is specifically focused on communication as a key method of driving up confidence, both the key readings referenced here cite a number of other tactics that could be considered over the remainder of the Strategic Plan. These are captured in section 3.2 below.

3. Key findings

- 3.1 The 2009 Home Office review was a rapid assessment of the available literature on public confidence in the police and local practise schemes to identify those strategies and tactics that were effective in driving up public confidence. The report categorised its findings into three groupings as follows according to the level of evidence gathered that an initiative could deliver an improvement in confidence;
- **What works** – strong evidence that improvements in public confidence can be delivered
 - **What looks promising** – some evidence that benefits will be delivered
 - **Potential pitfalls** – proposed approach has associated difficulties
- 3.2 Local-level communications was one of four tactics assessed as being an example of ‘what works’ by the 2009 review (others were embedding neighbourhood policing, high quality community engagement and restorative justice). For the

² Andrew Rix, Faye Joshua, Professor Mike Maguire and Sarah Morton (2010) Improving public confidence in the police: a review of the evidence. Home Office Research Report 28. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115848/horr50-report.pdf

³ Hohl, K., Bradford, B. & Stanko, E. (2010). Influencing trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police: results from an experiment testing the effect of leaflet-drops on public opinion. British Journal of Criminology, 50(3), pp. 491-513. Available at <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/4738/>

purposes of the review, effective local-level communications was defined as;

- Telling people clearly what the local agencies in a neighbourhood are doing
- Ensuring communication is;
 - Area specific
 - Gives detail of what is being delivered including agency responses to problems
 - Provides information on actions that are planned
 - Includes contact details of how to access services

3.3 In addition to improving overall levels of confidence in local policing,⁴ the effects of local level communications had varying impacts on a range of other elements that contributed overall confidence. These included driving up perceptions of the criminal justice system, improving knowledge of actual crime levels, improving perceptions of 'being kept informed' and lessening the likelihood that an area would be perceived as being problematic.

3.4 Members may wish to note that the other tactics reviewed by the Home Office and which seemed to demonstrate some benefit included;

- Reassurance mapping (similar to BTP's Problem Solving Plan approach)
- Communications by the governance body in support of the police
- Public education/information programmes
- Equipping officers with a range of skills to enable them to engage more effectively
- Multi-agency working
- Physical improvements to the local environment

Many of these approaches have been captured either explicitly or implicitly in the 2013-19 Strategic Plan and implementation plans.

3.5 The 2010 MPS study specifically explored the impact of leafleting/newsletters as a tactic for communicating with the public and there appears to be strong evidence that this can be

⁴ Of between 8-9 percentage points in the studies reviewed (Home Office 2009, p8)

a driver of overall confidence in policing and improving perceptions of police-community engagement. While the paper notes the limitations of the study in terms of its short duration, its geographic reach, and the likely sustainability of its impacts without further communication activity; at the time of the study the positive impacts were assessed as real and significant compared with no overall change at the control sites (p13). In a related paper on the same study⁵ the authors report the impact of leafleting as follows;

- Confidence (i.e. perception that the police are doing a good job) + 8 percentage points
- Feeling informed +11 percentage points

3.6 Key to the apparent success of these communications is their ability to convey to the audience that the police can listen to, understand and effectively address that audience's concerns. Whilst newsletter leaflets may not be the most appropriate vehicle for BTP to employ on the railway, posters and social media could also be considered as a means of communicating the same information.

4. Recommendations

4.1 That Members note the summary above and consider its implications for the achievement of the strategic objective to increase confidence by 10% by 2019.

⁵ Wunsch, D., Hohl, K.(2009). Evidencing a "good practice model" of police communication: The impact of local policing newsletters on public confidence. *Policing: A Journal of Policy & Practice*, 3(4):331-339.