Background to the Study
Public confidence in the police is measured by the British Crime Survey (BCS), which has shown a recent rise in the level of public confidence shown in the police, from 48% in 2003/04, to 53% in 2007/08; though it still remains lower than it once was. A number of factors are thought to influence public confidence in the police, such as, the legitimacy of the police, public fear of crime and socio-demographic factors. For example, gender, race and age. Clearly, it is important to the police, if they are to help the public in assisting in the prevention of crime and to comply with the law, if that public has confidence the service provided by the police. As an operational priority, the Bolton Be Safe Strategic Partnership aims to improve public confidence through a framework for improvement based on community engagement and, specifically, through the provision of information to the public via the distribution of community newsletters. This study explored the effectiveness of the strategy in association with a number of socio-demographic factors.

Research Rationale
Recent indications suggest that such a strategy may be effective in the enhancement of public confidence in the police. However, there is a significant lack of evidence to substantiate its general effectiveness. Furthermore, how robust the strategy might be when other socio-demographic factors are taken into account has not been explored. This study therefore aims to evaluate the efficacy of community newsletters on public confidence in the police relative to a number of socio-demographic factors, with a focus on newsletter distribution in a high crime community within the Bolton area (Deane and Willows). Comparisons will be made between the confidence levels of those who are engaged (receive community newsletters) and those who were not engaged (not in receipt of newsletters). In addition, the ‘confidence’ outcome of the strategy will be compared relative to ethnicity, age and gender. Greater Manchester Police (GMP) also conducts Quarterly Neighbourhood Surveys, which allow for monitoring of public confidence in policing by neighbourhood community. However, GMP does not examine confidence within specific communities. Therefore, a further consideration of this study will be to compare the GMP Neighbourhood Survey with this study’s self-designed community questionnaire in order to illuminate differential effects on public confidence as administered at local and regional levels. Moreover, it is not sufficient to consider overall public confidence in the police. Thus, a final aspect of this research will be to help to establish and thus inform priority police operations guided by public beliefs around the major problems beset in the neighbourhood, and recommend how the police should work with the public to resolve these issues. These elements of the research will be investigated through a mixed methods approach; a) the qualitative analysis of emergent themes from focus groups, and b) the statistical analysis of a questionnaire distributed into the local community (constructed using emergent themes and some previously used items from pre-existing questionnaires.

The Research
Based on the above, two studies were conducted; 1) Exploring qualitative understandings of the local public relative to policing and confidence, and, 2) The effectiveness of a strategic information strategy on public confidence.

Study 1
A focus group was conducted to encourage public opinion of community policing in the Deane and Willows community. Thematic analysis examined the pattern of meanings which subsequently emerged from the data; emergent themes assisted in the construction of the questionnaire.

Study 2
The ‘Community Confidence’ Survey (‘CC’ Survey) was constructed to assess community confidence in the police in terms of level of engagement and socio-demographic variables: ethnicity, gender and age. The ‘CC’ Survey included items that related to main themes and sub-themes generated from Study 1 and selected items from the GMP Neighbourhood Survey to allow for local and regional comparisons.
The Findings
Study 1- Qualitative Analyses
A number of main topics were discussed in the focus group such as Perceptions of law enforcement, Crime in the local area and Perceptions of policing strategies. Within these topic areas several themes emerged from the thematic analysis.

Perceptions of law enforcement
The main themes emergent from this area were ‘Liabilities’ and ‘Assets’. ‘Liabilities’ refers to the drawbacks the community attributed to the police whilst ‘Assets’ refers to some of the beneficial aspects relating to the police.

On examination of ‘Liabilities’ it is evident that a number of sub-themes emerge, such as: ‘Neglect’, ‘Isolation’ and ‘Perception of Incompetence’. ‘Neglect’ indicates that people feel abandoned by the police because they are either not prioritising resource nor focussed on the main concerns of the community. ‘Isolation’ refers to people feeling ‘cut off’ with limited contact with the police. This enhances feelings and perceptions of law enforcement as a liability; thus, a lack of public confidence in the police. The ‘Perception of Incompetence’ is surrounds feelings of Unprofessionalism, where the public believe that, on occasion, the police tend to act disrespectfully and in an inexpert manner.

The most notable aspect of the theme ‘Assets’ was ‘Trust’ in the police; largely underpinned by ‘Reinforcement of belief’. Hence, the public are reinforced by positive actions taken by the police and in turn assures the public the police share community concerns and priorities. This reinforces their belief in the police and hence their trust.

Crime in the local area
The predominant theme emergent from this topic was ‘Fear’ of crime. The majority of participants in the focus group research felt intimidated and vulnerable. There were also instances where people reported actual fear of crime. This illustrates that some community members consider the police to be neglectful of the issues important to them. This has resulted in fear of crime and lowered public confidence in police ability to deal with problems. A large number of quotations were received on this particular highlighting its significance and relevance for the people living in this area.

Perceptions of policing strategies
Within this topic, two strategies were mainly noted within this topic area. The ‘Informing’ strategy and the ‘Engagement’ strategy. These appeared as two distinct areas within the topic of police strategies and therefore were analysed separately for any emergent themes.

Within the ‘Engagement’ strategy, the most significant apparent sub-theme was ‘Cohesion’. The ability of the public and police to interact well together to represent shared morals and values seems an important factor in raising public confidence in the police. Within the focus group, participants discussed the successfulness of the public in co-operating with the police. However, the downside was a failure to indicate role reversal between the police and the public; this suggests the public may feel that there exists a one-way communication system between the parties. Clearly, that can impact negatively upon community confidence in the police.

Under the ‘Informing’ strategy one of the main themes that emerged was that of ‘Primitive’. Quotations given by the focus group suggest that while people are keen to receive information, conversely they also feel there is a lack of information. This leads to a feeling of detachment from the police. This isolation, as noted above, can present in lack of confidence. Thus, it appears that the strategy is seen as rather a primitive tool requiring improvement.

To conclude, Study 1 uncovered an array of attitudes towards the police held by those engaged and those not who were not. As one might expect, those who were engaged produced the majority of statements contributory to themes such as ‘Trust’ and ‘Cohesion’ which play a large role in public confidence levels in the police. However, they also voiced a number of negative statements subsumed into themes such as ‘Neglect’. This shows that although these participants are engaged with the police and strategies employed by the police are contributing towards improved confidence, they still recognise negative aspects of policing. On the other hand, those who were not engaged largely contributed toward the themes such as ‘Isolation’ and ‘Fear’ which would most likely impact upon reduced levels of confidence in the police. Overall, these perceptions suggest that community policing in this area is not fully operational and further adjustments and refinement is required to develop and increase confidence amongst all community members. Nonetheless, as community confidence in policing cannot be fully inferred from this study, a further study was undertaken to provide a fuller picture of confidence in the community more generally.
Study 2-Quantitative analysis

The ‘Community Confidence’ Survey was quantitatively analysed to investigate the effectiveness of the strategic informing strategy currently employed in the Deane and Willows community. A number of potentially relevant factors were explored, and include age, gender, and ethnicity.

First, to examine the effectiveness of the informing strategy it was essential to compare confidence levels between those engaged (in receipt of newsletters) and those not engaged (not in receipt of newsletters). Results showed a significant difference between the confidence scores of those engaged and those not engaged; those members in receipt of newsletters showed higher levels of overall confidence in the police. This finding supports other recent research that suggests how well informed people feel in their local area is associated with higher opinions of effectiveness and confidence. Therefore, we can say with some confidence that the information strategy implemented in Deane and Willows is effective when compared with those who do not receive information.

The socio-demographic factors were examined relative to levels of engagement in order to examine influences on public confidence in the police. Age, gender and ethnicity had no significant bearing upon reported public confidence in the police. For example, in relation to ethnicity, findings illustrated that both White and Asian groups had similar levels of total confidence in the police and is inconsistent with other research outcomes in this respect. It is possible then that police treat ethnic groups within the community equally and thus the observed main influence on confidence is engagement between police and community. However, upon closer inspection, the Asian group when compared with the White group, within the non-engaged condition alone, showed higher levels of confidence in the police. As a result, it is necessary for the police to consider targeted strategies for fuller engagement within the community.

One of the aims of this study was to compare the ‘CC’ Survey with the more expansive GMP Neighbourhood Survey. This ‘CC’ Survey measures public confidence levels at a specific ‘community’ level, whereas the GMP Neighbourhood Survey measures confidence at a ‘neighbourhood’ level, and collates neighbourhood data up to a general ‘force’ level. Not surprisingly, some outcomes from the comparison analysis were similar in both Surveys. For example, in the GMP Neighbourhood Survey (Quarter 4), 74% of respondents agreed that the police treat them with respect on contact, and similarly 62% of respondents agreed and 15% strongly agreed with this statement in the ‘CC’ Survey (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1

![Figure 1](image1.png)

However, there were many instances when findings were disparate. For example, results show from the ‘CC’ Survey (see Figure 2 below) that 41.2% of respondents agree and 5.9% strongly agree that the police seek people’s views about issues that matter in the community. Only 32% of respondents agreed with this statement in the GMP Quarter 4 Survey.

Figure 2

![Figure 2](image2.png)

In the ‘CC’ Survey respondents were also asked how confident they were in Bolton police as rated on a scale from ‘extremely confident’ to ‘not at all’. 51.5% of respondents reported that they are ‘confident’, 9.1% reported they are ‘very confident’ and 9.1% stated they are ‘extremely confident’. This totalled a 69.7% total confidence in Bolton police from this sample. Moreover, no respondents indicated that they were ‘not at all’ confident. This illustrates a huge differentiation between the two Surveys with GMP respondents indicating 53.3% confidence in the police in Quarter 4.
In Conclusion
Towards more representative of public attitudes toward the local police, it assesses a smaller target area. As a consequence, the analysis of confidence at a community level is recommended as a strategy to be employed all services as it has the advantage of a more accurate local account of public confidence.

A final aim of this study was to consider the questions contained within the ‘CC’ Survey previously developed from emergent themes derived from the focus group. This would allow for more comprehensive quantifiable insight into public attitudes towards subject matters. Analyses revealed that some of the themes support approaches towards increased public confidence in the police. However, a number of contradictory findings between themes leave us unable to draw firm conclusions. It could be, for example, that those engaged produced high confidence scores and those not engaged produced the high fear of crime scores; this might distort connections to themes. Therefore, additional analysis is required to examine each individual theme more thoroughly to uncover how they relate to the confidence dimension in a more logical sense.

Conclusion
In summary, current findings of this report suggest that the distribution of newsletters in this community is effective and shows increased community confidence in the local police, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, and age. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Bolton continues to use the strategy to effectively engage with communities, perhaps even rolling the strategy out to more areas within its jurisdiction. Emergent themes illuminate for the police those issues the community has and thus enables the service to tackle those that might impact negatively upon public confidence.

Recommendations

- Despite the effectiveness of the information strategy, it is recommended that the process continue to be further embedded within a wider framework of citizen focus to achieve maximum impact on public confidence in policing.
- Police authorities need to improve on the provision of meaningful engagement via other information strategies to the public. For example, informing and raising public awareness through local newspapers or television with local focus would be an additional means of communicating to residents.
- Stringent efforts should be made to involve those members of the public who are least likely to be engaged; i.e. other minority groups. Some positive indications have been shown in this respect within the findings of this research.
- Police authorities should place greater emphasis on marketing and publicity opportunities that engage public participation. They should also provide more feedback to the public to develop a more positive two-way relationship between the police and the community.
- There is a need for further research into what has become an increasingly important topic for sustainable communities.

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