

BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

FINDINGS FROM CONSULTATION WITH OPINION PANEL MEMBERS

JANUARY 2004

Background:

The Home Office recently published a green paper entitled 'Policing: Building Safer Communities Together'. The paper focuses on how the police service can work together with other agencies, partners and members of the community to build safer communities. The paper raises critical questions relating to options for reform of the police service, which need to be addressed via public consultation and feedback.

Lancashire Police Authority wished to gather the opinions of residents of Lancashire in order to feedback up-to-date views on the issues presented in the paper in the 'Increasing Community Engagement' section. Therefore consultation was carried out with 400 members of our Opinion panel (made up of over 4000 Lancashire residents) via telephone interviews. Research was conducted between 8th – 19th December 2003 and 5th – 9th January 2004.

Sample Profile:

411 interviews were achieved in total, which can be broken down as follows:

Gender		%	N
	Male	51	209
	Female	49	202
Age			
	18-24	3	13
	25-44	36	149
	45-59	30	122
	60+	31	127
Ethnicity			
	White	97	398
	Other ethnic origin	3	13
SEG			
	ABC1	51	210
	C2DE	49	201
Division			
	Eastern	27	113
	Western	14	56
	Northern	18	76
	Southern	20	81
	Central	9	36
	Pennine	16	66

1. Policing Services:

The government believes that there are certain standards of service that all communities are entitled to expect. They are working with the police service to develop a common set of commitments to the public about the quality and accessibility of policing services they provide. This would ensure that the quality of service received is the same every time you use a particular service.

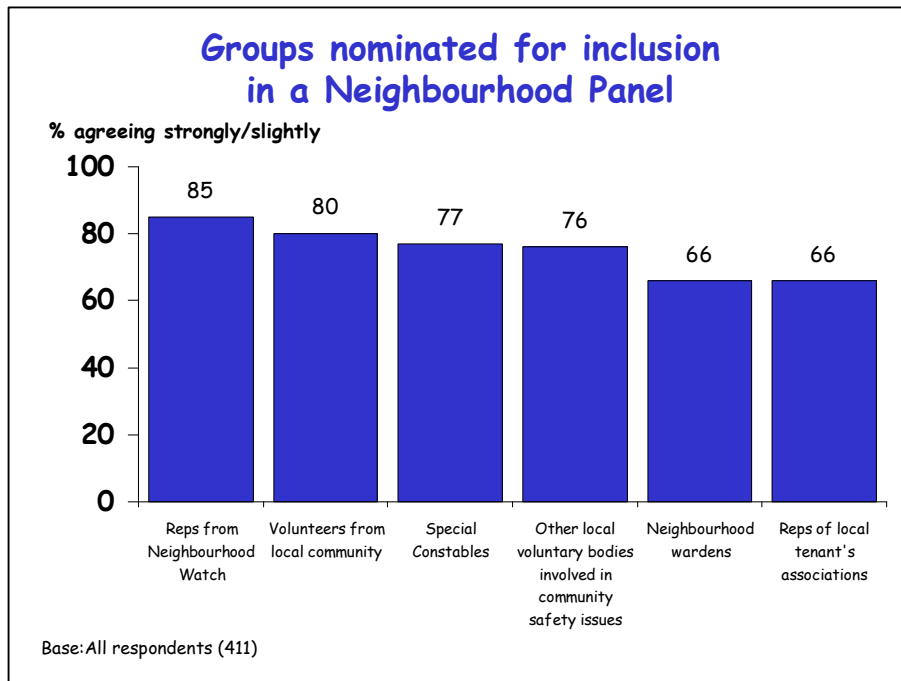
71% of all respondents believe that there should be additional local service standards setting out the quality of local police services on top of the national standards, with the main reason for this belief being that 'different areas generate different problems' (41%). The group most likely to agree with this proposition are those who would prefer a publicly elected Police Board (78%).

2. Neighbourhood Panels:

The government are considering developing 'neighbourhood panels or forums' to help develop closer contact with communities with regard to safety issues.

These panels might be made up of various groups from the local community. The panels would not only focus on police business but on other things affecting the anti-social behaviour and crime problems in the area.

Respondents were asked which groups from within the community should be included in such a panel. The chart below shows that the most popular groups for inclusion are Neighbourhood Watch and volunteers from the local community. However, all proposed groups were considered necessary for inclusion by over two thirds of respondents. Results were similar across all demographic groups.



There were a few suggestions made of other groups who could be included:

- Youth people and youth workers (7%)
- Parish council/councillors (5%)
- Religious organisations (5%)

3. Partnership Work:

Currently, different bodies oversee the work of the different agencies involved in community safety, such as local councils, the emergency services and the police.

It is a possibility that in the future there could be one body that oversees all of these agencies to ensure delivery of a completely co-ordinated approach to community safety.

58% of respondents considered this proposal to be a good idea, 25% thought it was a bad idea, 4% did not have an opinion and 12% did not know what they thought of the idea. Similar findings were apparent across all demographic groups, although those who disagreed with the idea of a Police Board and Community Advocate were also more likely to disagree with this proposal, as would be expected.

The main reasons given for considering one overseeing body to be a good idea were:

- One body is more accountable (29%)
- Better co-ordination/communication (17%)
- Things would be better/a good thing (12%)

And the main reasons given for believing the proposal to be a bad idea were:

- Would be too large/unmanageable/more bureaucracy (8%)
- Keep things as they are/no benefit to change (6%)
- Risk the loss of specialised departments/knowledge (6%)

4. Accountability:

Currently Police Authorities across the country are responsible for overseeing the work of their local police forces and holding the police to account over use of funds and provision of services. The Police Authority is currently made up of 17 members, the County Councils elect 9 of these, 3 are magistrates and 5 are independent members.

There are proposals for changing this and introducing a 'Police Board' in place of the Police Authority. 44% of respondents felt that this was a good idea, 10% considered it a bad idea, 25% were not bothered which was in place and 19% did not know what they thought of this proposal. Those aged 60+ were most likely to think the introduction of a Police Board is a bad idea (17%).

The main reasons for considering the Police Board to be a good idea were:

- More representation of community/local issues (25%)
- Wider variety of opinions/people (19%)
- Allows a greater say in what's going on (11%)

And the main reasons given for considering the proposal a bad idea were:

- Things are alright as they are (8%)
- Would need to be accountable (8%)
- Waste of money/another layer of bureaucracy (2%)

There are two proposed options for who should be represented on the Police Board and respondents were presented with each of the options below and asked which would be their preferred option:

OPTION ONE:

Proposes that board members are drawn from amongst various groups, such as local councillors, local magistrates, people locally selected by the Police Authority, some people nominated by neighbourhood panels and some people elected directly by members of the public.

OPTION TWO

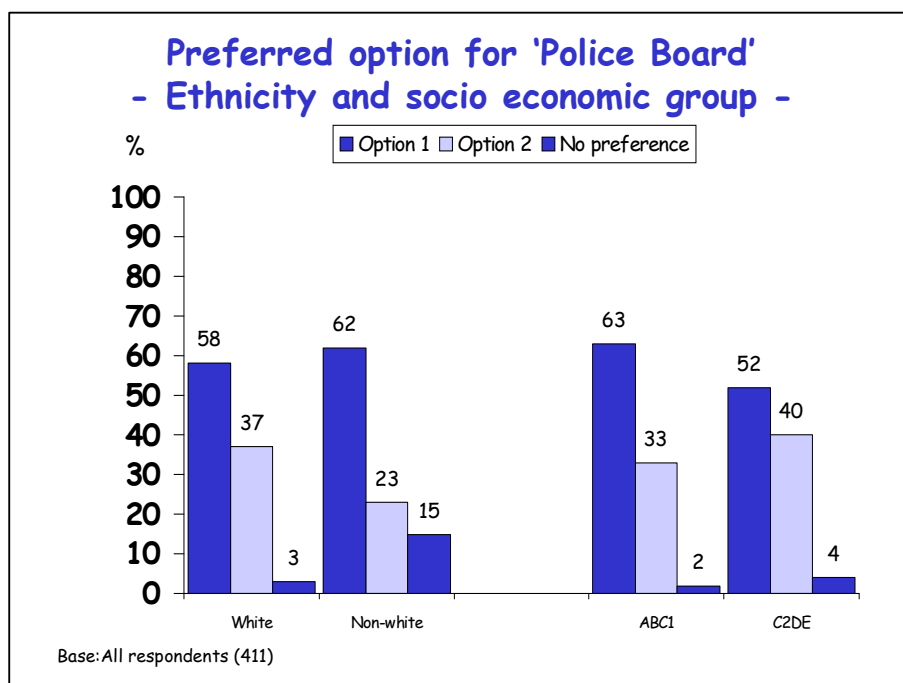
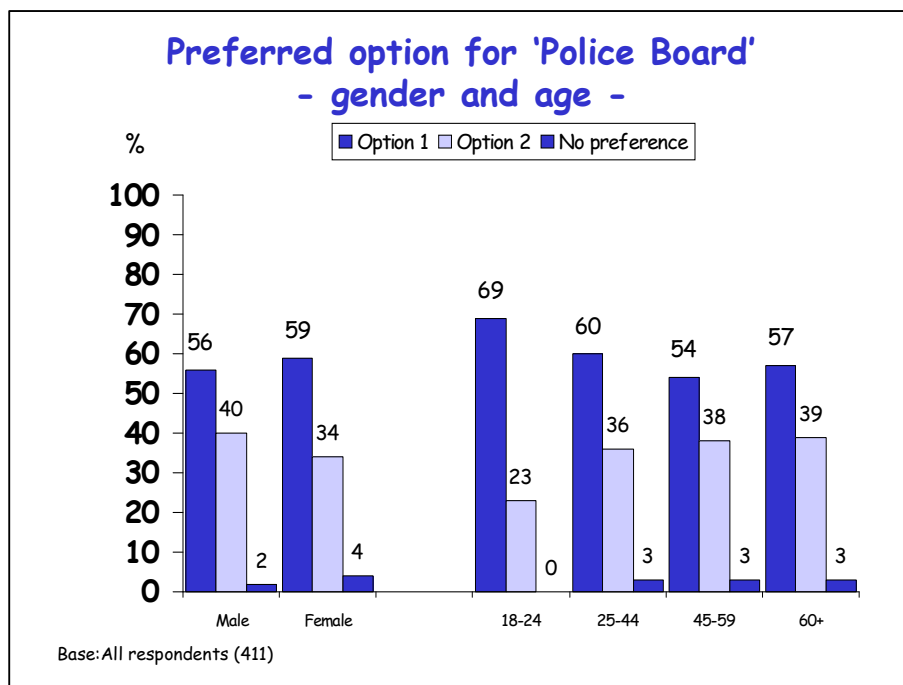
Proposes that ALL board members are directly elected by members of the public, so that there are no restrictions on which groups should be included or excluded.

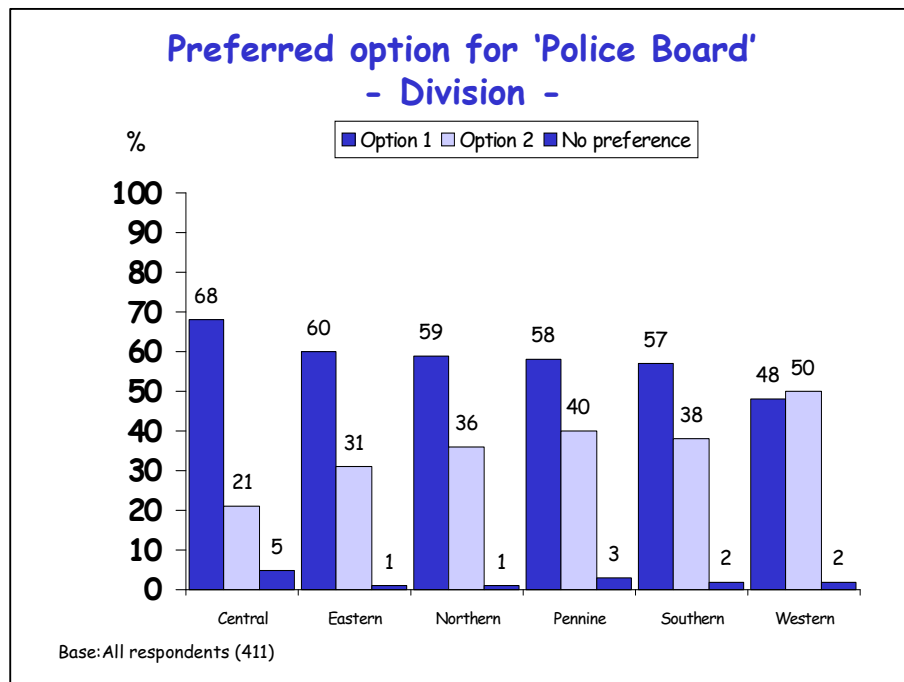
Option 1 is the overall preferred option for most groups, with the exception of those in western Division, where a slight majority are more in favour of Option 2.

Respondents were also asked about their opinion of the perceived risk of Option 2 (board members being directly elected by the public) being too political or focussing on inappropriate issues. The majority did considered this option to be medium/high risk for this reason.

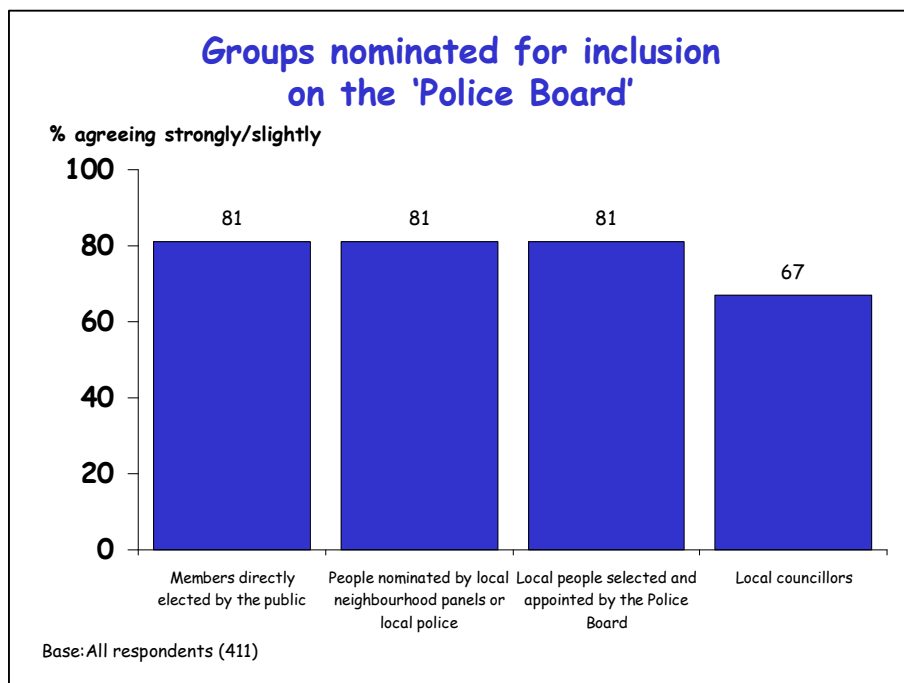
- 22% considered the risk to be high
- 46% considered there to be a medium level risk
- 21% considered there to be a low risk
- 2% considered there to be no risk at all

The charts below show preferences for each demographic group:





Respondents were asked which groups from within the community should be included on the Police Board if Option 1 (which proposes that board members are drawn from amongst various groups) should be chosen. The chart below shows that the majority are in favour of all proposed groups being included, with the least popular (although still highly favoured) being Local councillors. Results were similar across all demographic groups.



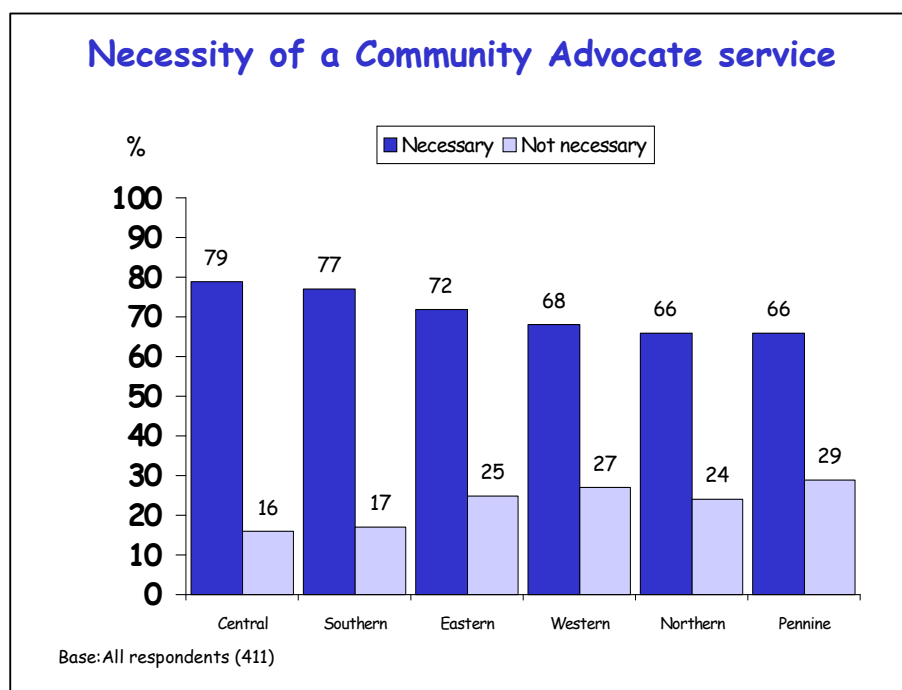
Respondents were asked if there were any other groups that should be included but there were no suggestions made which were supported by over 4% of respondents.

5. Community Advocates:

The government are also considering setting up an independent service to help resolve complaints on peoples' behalf. This may take the form of a Community Advocacy Service, with someone working on behalf of communities and individuals and acting as their voice.

Respondents were asked to consider whether the service of Community Advocates was necessary in their local community. 71% agreed that there was a necessity for this service. Results were similar across all demographic groups, although those who are not bothered about accountability and have no preference regarding the introduction of a Police Board were less likely than other groups to consider a Community Advocate service as necessary.

There were some slight differences between divisions as can be seen in the chart below. Central Division are most likely to consider the services of a Community Advocate to be necessary and Northern and Pennine Divisions are least likely to consider this a necessary requirement – although the majority view across all divisions is that this service is necessary.



The main reasons given for considering a Community Advocate service to be necessary were:

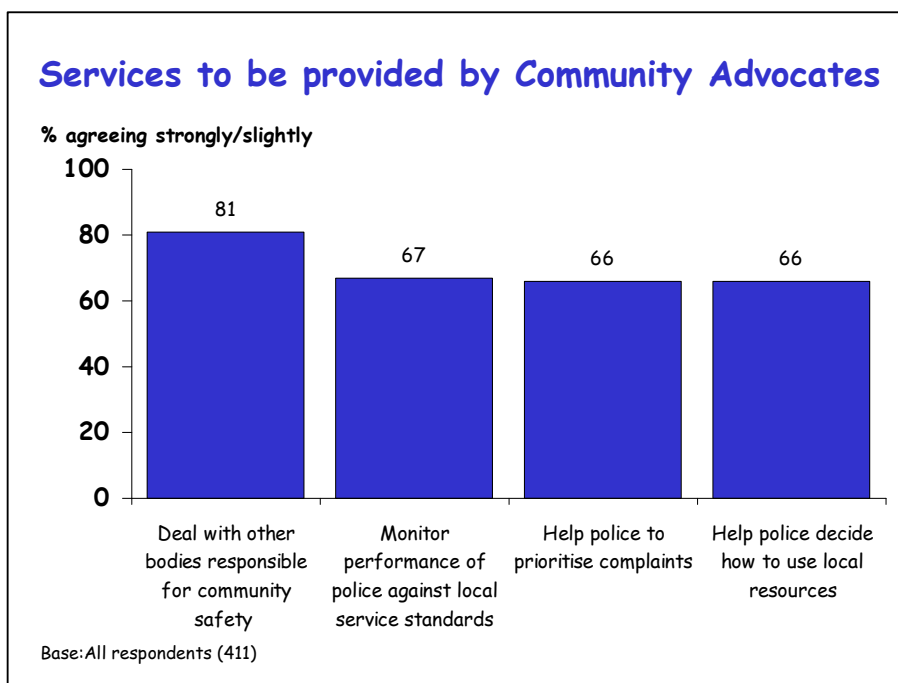
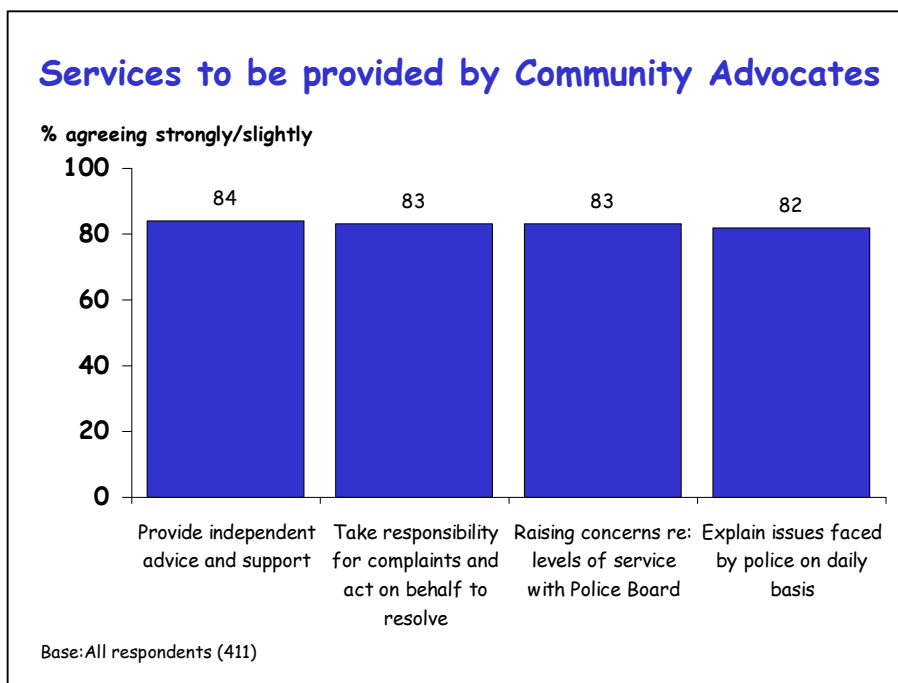
- Someone to speak to when police are unavailable (9%)
- Advice should be available (9%)
- Live in a problem area (9%)
- Independent/a go-between/liaison (8%)
- Would help with local issues (8%)
- Necessary/a good idea (8%)
- Police not helpful (6%)

And the main reason given for considering a Community Advocate service unnecessary were:

- Low crime area (11%)

When asked whether they agreed with the suggestion that local councillors should undertake the role of Community Advocate only 26% agreed and 57% disagreed. This result was reflected across all demographic groups.

Respondents were provided with a list of possible services that could be provided by a Community Advocate. The chart below shows levels of agreement with the provision of these services:



In summary, the findings suggest that:

- There is a majority view (71%) that there should be local service standards set in addition to national standards
- Neighbourhood Panels should be made up of members from all groups within the community proposed in the Green Paper
- One body to oversee the work of the different agencies involved in community safety would be favourably received by over half of respondents to ensure more accountability and better communication/co-ordination
- Just under half of all respondents were in favour of replacing the Police Authority with a Police Board, with the majority of these preferring that the Board members be drawn from various groups within the community
- The option for a Police Board which was directly elected by the public was considered by the majority to be open to the risk of being too political or focussing on inappropriate issues
- The Police Board should be made up of members of all of the groups put forward in the Green Paper
- Community Advocates are considered a necessity and the proposed service provision is considered appropriate