UNIVERSITY OF THE
WEST *of* SCOTLAND

UWS

Evaluation of the Introduction of a Revised Armed Officer Operational Deployment Model

Final Report

Professor Ross Deuchar
Dr Liz Frondigoun
Dr Catherine Davidones

The Scottish Institute
for **Policing Research**

POLICE
SCOTLAND

Contents

Executive Summary

The aim of this study was to evaluate Police Scotland's revised Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) deployment model. It was focused around the following key objectives:

1. To explore and examine the pre- and post-change perceptions of police officers, key members of stakeholder groups and community representatives regarding the changes to the ARV deployment model, *with a specific focus on*:

   a. the extent to which perceived resilience, confidence and personal safety among officers is enhanced as a result of ARV officers being deployed to more 'routine' incidents.

   b. the perceived impact of the changed armed policing deployment model on public reassurance and safety, and the perceived benefits and risks.

2. To identify any remaining challenges with the new deployment model and make recommendations for the future.

A mixed methods approach was adopted. The research team firstly developed an online questionnaire, and invitations were sent to all officers dedicated to ARV duties in Scotland (n=368) (this excluding instructors, close protection officers, specialist firearms officers and those management staff who are ARV trained) to complete the questionnaire immediately prior to, and (in some cases) during the very early stages of, their new deployments. The questionnaire survey was designed to capture the ARV officers' perceptions about the changing deployment model, the perceived projected advantages and drawbacks of this, the extent to which they anticipated any perceived impact on police resilience and confidence and any potential benefits and risks in terms of public safety and public opinion. The team also sought ARV officers' willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, and subsequently conducted these (either in person or by telephone) with a representative sample of 16 officers from different geographical areas across Scotland. Secondly, the research team established access to a representative sample of staff from the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) and the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) in order to establish wider views and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (either in person or via the telephone) with six individuals from these stakeholder groups. Thirdly, an attempt was made to access local Community Councillors from a spread of Local Authority areas. However, given that this initial fieldwork was being conducted during the summer of 2018 (ie. during summer recess), it proved extremely difficult to gain access to a meaningfully sized sample of Community Councillors. Given the very limited insights that the team gained from the few individuals who were sampled, a decision was ultimately made not to pursue this further and to focus instead on gaining wider access to the views and perspectives of the general public. Hence, fourthly, in order to garner the views of the latter the research team also identified and accessed local community groups across a range of urban and rural areas in Scotland, who each participated in focus groups. In total, a sizeable sample of 69 members of local communities participated, including those from youth and adult groups, members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community, those with physical and mental health issues and the elderly. Interviews and focus groups at this stage sought to explore early perceptions about the changing ARV deployment model in terms of anticipated impact on public confidence and reassurance, the potential benefits and risks for officers and in terms of community safety and resilience.

Baseline survey data was then analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to

identify distribution of perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the focus group and interview data was also conducted, with the use of NVivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

Between 4-5 months after the initial survey and interview data had been gathered, a second questionnaire survey was sent out to all ARV officers across Scotland. The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to identify any changes in officers' perceptions, following the initial 16-20 week period of the changing deployment model. The survey was designed to capture officers' follow-up views in relation to the extent to which they could now identify any specific perceived impact on police resilience and confidence and any potential benefits and risks in terms of community safety. However, it was also designed to explore the extent to which officers believed that the changed deployment model had thus far actually led to officers being deployed in a wider policing role and (if it had) which type of incidents officers had most commonly deployed to and how often. Finally, the survey sought to identify whether or not officers' workloads had changed as a result of the revised deployment model, and to identify why this may not have been the case where relevant. The follow-up survey included opportunities for both closed and open-ended responses from officers, with the latter providing a rich source of follow-up qualitative data. In addition, the research team also conducted a follow-on focus group with a small sample of Initial Tactical Firearms Commanders (ITFCs) from the north, east and west of the country. The purpose of this focus group was to explore some of the perceptions raised by ARV officers in the follow-up survey and to gain additional insights into the revised deployment process and these officers' views about how it was being operationalized. In total, seven officers participated in the focus group. The research team also re-established contact with each of the local community groups who had participated in earlier focus groups by email. Each of the group members were asked to indicate whether their views had changed since the research team had last met them and were given the option to participate in follow-up focus group discussions about these changing perceptions. In reality, none of these participants opted to re-engage in discussions, with all indicating that their earlier views had remained unchanged.

Follow-up survey data was again analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of changing perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the follow-up open-ended qualitative survey data and the follow-on focus group data was also conducted, with the use of Nvivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

The main findings can be summarised as follows:

Pre-deployment revisions, the vast majority of ARV officers believed that the widening deployment model would enhance the resilience, confidence and personal safety of officers. Officers generally believed that the decision to revise the deployment model had emerged against the backdrop of an increase in violent incidents, unpredictable behaviour among certain members of the public as a result of drug misuse, mental ill-health and vulnerability and the increased terrorism threat. They also believed that the revised deployment model had emerged against the backdrop of police resources having become more stretched because of the huge increase in issues of mental ill-health and vulnerability that officers were now having to deal with, and the recognition that the skills and capacity of ARV officers had hitherto been under-utilised.

Participating officers believed that their presence at a wider range of incidents would enable them to defuse potentially volatile incidents where threat to life had become an issue much more quickly, but also felt that their enhanced skill-set would be helpful in terms of

4

supporting officers in a range of situations. Officers believed that their enhanced toolkit and military appearance could provide an important signal that a particular incident had been assessed as high-risk as well as enabling suspects to comply, but that their enhanced levels of first aid, negotiation and dynamic entry skills would also help to reassure the public and keep people safe. Officers were very strongly of the opinion that they were first and foremost police officers and felt able to deploy at a wide range of incidents beyond those requiring the immediate use of firearms. Their extensive training and strong ability to draw upon the national decision-making model in each and every incident meant that officers felt well able to make informed judgements. However, during the early stages of the changing deployment model many responding ARV officers identified a perception that some hesitancy and reluctance existed among ITFCs to allow them to deploy to routine incidents due to apparent fear and anxiety associated with any potential public backlash, political scrutiny and unwanted media attention that may emerge as a result.

Police stakeholders expressed a perception that ARV officers had historically been under-utilised and that this was not a good use of public resources. They raised concerns about the potential de-skilling and de-motivation of ARV officers that had been emerging, and were of the opinion that the visible presence of firearms could act as a strong deterrent in some situations involving violent disorder. While they identified the slight risk that might emerge if ARV officers became tied up with routine incidents at a time when specialist firearms resources were needed elsewhere, they also believed that the benefits of the revised deployments outweighed the risks.

Members of local communities had mixed and contested views about the current levels of crime and public safety within communities, but many recognised that police officers could often feel potentially threatened and could have their lives put at risk. Many felt that officers needed to be armed with firearms within urban areas, but many also felt that although they did not mind officers *having* guns, they did not want to *see* them. Some members of the public felt that arming officers with visible firearms could lead to more gun-carrying within local communities and potential for accidental shootings. These insights raise significant issues for Police Scotland to consider, given its current policy of visibility and transparency and the implications that suggest that the general public may have a preference for the concealment of firearms possession among ARV officers – which could ultimately reduce their potential for deterrence. Members of local communities who participated in focus groups were evidently concerned about the symbolic message that may be sent out if children and young people became exposed to seeing guns, and this raised questions about the potential need for a robust communications strategy around ARV deployments as a public reassurance tool.

Following the initial 4-5 months of the amended deployment model, responding ARV officers appeared less convinced about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on both community safety and their own confidence, resilience and safety. Although over half of the participating officers indicated that they had on occasion deployed to wider incidents (including those involving vulnerable and missing persons, road traffic incidents and incidents involving violence), the majority expressed a view that they believed that their workload had largely remained the same as it was. Some officers in the east of the country believed that they had always been deployed more fully but were now being more protected from administrative duties in order to enhance their levels of proactivity. However, among a majority of ARV officers there was a perception that there had been a continuing and prolonged reluctance on the part of ITFCs to allow them to deploy. Many of the officers had the perception that this was leading to Specially Trained Officers (STOs) being deployed ahead of ARV officers and/or mainstream response officers approaching those who were potentially violent and/or threatening self-harm. This was leading to the perception among ARV officers that ITFCs had no faith in their ability to show restraint and that public impression was valued over unarmed officers' welfare. It seemed that these despondent

officer views about their continuing under-deployment across the majority of the country helped to explain why survey results indicated that respondents were less convinced than before about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on both community safety and on officers' own confidence, resilience and safety. In short, there was a perception among many ARV officers that the policy rhetoric around changing ARV deployment had thus far failed to hit the ground.

Contrary to the views of many of the sampled ARV officers, it was very clear that ITFCs who participated in a follow-on focus group believed a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of ARV officers was now taking place across Scotland. That said, it was evident that ITFCs had to be focused in terms of the decisions they made about ARV deployments, ensuring that the incidents officers deployed to were regarded as priorities, that they did not detract from these officers' ability to deploy to their 'core' functions and that the risk to vehicle security was minimised. Their collective view was that any varying practice in terms of volume of deployment patterns in different parts of the country tended to arise because of wider environmental factors rather than as a result of any differing values, principles and attitudes associated with ITFCs themselves. However, in spite of this, ARV officers' beliefs regarding the policy rhetoric around changing ARV deployment failing to hit the ground were still passionately held. Members of the ITFC forum clearly believed that a more frequent coming together of officers and ITFCs would be a beneficial means of facilitating shared understandings and that in the future ARV officers should gain experience of the challenges associated with the ITFC role and vice versa.

The remaining challenges associated with the revised ARV deployment model and the relevant recommendations for the future can therefore be summed up as follows:

1. The levels of concern expressed by some members of the public about the potential increased visibility of firearms on officers' possession, and their expressed fears about the potential for increased conflict, retaliatory weapon-carrying and accidental shootings in local communities.

Recommendation: Police Scotland should first consider launching a robust communications strategy around ARV deployments as a public reassurance tool, focused on informing the public about the wide skill-set of ARV officers beyond firearms capacity and educating the public about the rationale underpinning the current policy of firearms visibility and transparency. Second, Police Scotland should consider implementing further community-based focus groups that seek to explore the perceptions of local citizens who have been exposed or become a witness to ARV officer interventions and seek their views in terms of benefits and risks.

2. The perceptions among a majority of ARV officers that there is a reluctance among ITFCs to allow them to deploy to routine incidents, that there is disparity between regions within Scotland in terms of deployment patterns, and the apparent impact on officer morale.

3. The counter-views of ITFCs suggesting a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of officers, that decision-making on ARV deployments was based on a robust model of pragmatism and proportionality and that geographical disparities arose due to wider environmental factors rather than any reluctance on the part of ITCFs to task, dispatch and deploy.

Recommendation: Drawing on the views and perceptions of both officers and ITFCs, Police Scotland should seek to ensure a more frequent coming together of ARV officers and ITFCs within the context of officer professional development, in order to break down misunderstandings and barriers and establish shared understandings and greater collegiality.

Specifically, Police Scotland should consider creating opportunities for ARV officers to visit overview control rooms and experience 'life of a call' tours and for ITFCs to gain experience of ARV training and thereby a fuller understanding of and appreciation for ARV operationalization, practicalities and tactics.

Recommendation: In addition to the other recommendations made above, Police Scotland should consider commissioning additional, follow-up independent research to fully explore the progressive impact of the changing deployment model over time and any related impact emerging from the recommended public reassurance and officer professional development strategies. The research should focus on exploring both officers' and local citizens' longer-term views and experiences through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Introduction, Background and Research Methods

Contextual Background

In late 2014, the final report from the review of Standing Firearms Authority for Armed Response Vehicle Crews within Police Scotland was published by HMICS. Part of the focus of the review was to examine and reflect upon the written deployment criteria in place for Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) officers in respect of both firearms-specific and non-firearms-specific duties (HMICS, 2014). The review recognised the previous political and public debate over armed policing in Scotland, the questions it had raised in terms of legality, legitimacy and police accountability and the need for greater transparency and improved engagement by Police Scotland. The review findings reiterated that the overt carriage of the side arm by ARV officers is the 'best and safest method of carriage', and recognised the important contribution that ARV officers can make to local policing through 'attending appropriate non-firearms-related incidents' (HMICS, 2014, p.7). As such, one of the key recommendations emerging from the review was that Police Scotland and the SPA should 're-engage with local authorities and other stakeholders and develop criteria for ARV officers to undertake non-firearm duties which are understood and accepted by local communities and allow ARV officers to meaningfully contribute to local policing priorities' (*ibid*, p.9).

Following a subsequent period of consultation, in December 2017 formal proposals for a limited extension of the role of ARV officers to allow them to be deployed to non-firearms incidents were presented to the SPA. It was suggested that such incidents would be the responsibility of the ITFCs in the three regional control centres who, using their professional judgement, would support local policing as and when required (Scottish Parliament, 2017). The revised deployment model was subsequently approved and commenced in early summer 2018, with ARV officers potentially becoming deployed to routine incidents from this point onwards.

Aims and Research Methods

The aim of this study was to evaluate the revised ARV deployment model. It was focused around the following key objectives:

1. To explore and examine the pre- and post-change perceptions of police officers, key members of stakeholder groups and community representatives regarding the changes to the ARV deployment model, *with a specific focus on*:

   a. the extent to which perceived resilience, confidence and personal safety among officers is enhanced as a result of ARV officers being deployed to more 'routine' incidents.

   b. the perceived impact of the changed armed policing deployment model on public reassurance and safety, and the perceived benefits and risks.

2. To identify any remaining challenges with the new deployment model and make recommendations for the future.

A mixed methods approach was adopted. The research team firstly developed an online questionnaire, and invitations were sent to all officers dedicated to ARV duties in Scotland (n=368) (this excluding instructors, close protection officers, specialist firearms officers and those management staff who are ARV trained) to complete the questionnaire immediately prior to, and (in some cases) during the very early stages of, their new deployments (see p.11 of this report for further details). The questionnaire survey was designed to capture the ARV

officers' perceptions about the changing deployment model, the perceived projected advantages and drawbacks of this, the extent to which they anticipated any perceived impact on police resilience and confidence and any potential benefits and risks in terms of public safety and public opinion. The team also sought ARV officers' willingness to participate in follow-up interviews, and subsequently conducted these (either in person or by telephone) with a representative sample of 16 officers from different geographical areas across Scotland. Secondly, the research team established access to a representative sample of staff from the SPA, HMICS and the SPF in order to establish wider views and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted (either in person or via the telephone) with six individuals from these stakeholder groups. Thirdly, an attempt was made to access local Community Councillors from a spread of Local Authority areas. However, given that this initial fieldwork was being conducted during the summer of 2018 (ie. during summer recess), it proved extremely difficult to gain access to a meaningful sized sample of Community Councillors. Given the very limited insights that the team gained from the few individuals who were sampled, a decision was ultimately made not to pursue this further and to focus instead on gaining wider access to the views and perspectives of the general public. Hence, fourthly, in order to garner the views of the latter the research team also identified and accessed local community groups across a range of urban and rural areas in Scotland, who each participated in focus groups. In total, a sizeable sample of 69 members of local communities participated, including those from youth and adult groups, members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community, those with physical and mental health issues and the elderly. Interviews and focus groups at this stage sought to explore early perceptions about the changing ARV deployment model in terms of anticipated impact on public confidence and reassurance, the potential benefits and risks for officers and in terms of community safety and resilience.

Baseline survey data was then analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the focus group and interview data was also conducted, with the use of NVivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

Between 4-5 months after the initial survey and interview data had been gathered, a second questionnaire survey was sent out to all ARV officers across Scotland. The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to identify any changes in officers' perceptions, following the initial 16-20 week period of the changing deployment model. The survey was designed to capture officers' follow-up views in relation to the extent to which they could now identify any specific perceived impact on police resilience and confidence and any potential benefits and risks in terms of community safety. However, it was also designed to explore the extent to which officers believed that the changed deployment model had thus far actually led to officers being deployed in a wider policing role and (if it had) which type of incidents officers had most commonly deployed to and how often. Finally, the survey sought to identify whether or not officers' workloads had changed as a result of the revised deployment model, and to identify why this may not have been the case where relevant. The follow-up survey included opportunities for both closed and open-ended responses from officers, with the latter providing a rich source of follow-up qualitative data. In addition, the research team also conducted a follow-on focus group with a small sample of Initial Tactical Firearms Commanders (ITFCs) from the north, east and west of the country. The purpose of this focus group was to explore some of the perceptions raised by ARV officers in the follow-up survey and to gain additional insights into the revised deployment process and these officers' views about how it was being operationalized. In total, seven officers participated in the focus group. The research team also re-established contact with each of the local community groups who had participated in earlier focus groups by email. Each of the group members were asked to indicate whether their views had changed since the research team had last met them and

were given the option to participate in follow-up focus group discussions about these changing perceptions. In reality, none of these participants opted to re-engage in discussions, with all indicating that their earlier views had remained unchanged.

Follow-up survey data was again analysed through the use of QuestionPro software in order to generate frequency of perceptions and cross-tabulations that enabled the research team to identify distribution of changing perceptions across key respondent groups and according to demographic variables. A thematic analysis of the follow-up open-ended qualitative survey data and the follow-on focus group data was also conducted, with the use of Nvivo software, and salient themes identified and used to supplement the statistical results.

In the sections that follow, pre- and post- survey results and qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups with each of the participating groups will be reported, with salient quotations used to support discussion. To preserve the anonymity of participants, a system has been used to identify individual participating officers (A1-16/AA1-17), stakeholders (S1-6), community member focus groups (P1-12) and ITFCs (F1-7).

Pre- and Emerging Revised Deployment Perceptions

Perceptions of Officers

Officer Survey Results

Immediately prior to and also during the very early stages of the implementation of the revised armed officer operational deployment model, ARV officers in Scotland were invited to participate in the online questionnaire survey, supported by QuestionPro. In total, 78 officers completed the initial survey (an overall response rate of just over 35% from the initial sample of 220). Subsequent consultation between the evaluation team and Police Scotland revealed that, due to a technical oversight, only some geographical areas had been covered by the initial survey and therefore some officers who are dedicated on a full-time basis to ARV duties had not participated. A second survey was therefore created at a later date, which covered both pre- and post- perceptions, and was issued to all ARV officers with a request for responses from only those officers who had been missed during the first survey sweep. An additional 71 officers completed this survey, meaning that the total number of officers responding to the pre-deployment questions was 149 (an overall response rate of 40% from the full sample of 368). Of these, almost all (97%) were male (with only four female respondents), and the most common age-ranges were 31-40 and 41-50 (40% and 36% respectfully). The majority (87%) were Constables, and a large proportion (74%) had been in service either between 5-10 years or 11-20 years within Police Scotland. Relatively equal numbers of the responding officers served in the north, east and west geographical areas of Scotland. For those ARV officers who participated in the questionnaire survey later than planned, they were asked to respond to the statements in the questionnaire with their views as they were when the deployment model first changed, thus providing retrospective views.

Officers were asked to indicate whether they believed that the widening of armed response deployments would increase the resilience and confidence of officers. As Table I illustrates, the vast majority of officers either strongly agreed (33%) or agreed (42%) that this would be the case, while around 12% of officers in the sample disagreed.

Table I: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will increase the resilience and confidence of officers'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	32.65%
2.	Agree	41.50%
3.	Neutral	14.29%
4.	Disagree	6.12%
5.	Strongly disagree	5.44%
	Total	100%

In terms of anticipated public reaction, Table II illustrates that just over 70% of respondents believed that the widening ARV deployment model would enhance public confidence and reassurance, while just over 21% remained neutral.

Table II: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will enhance public confidence and reassurance'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	28.57%
2.	Agree	41.50%
3.	Neutral	21.09%
4.	Disagree	6.12%
5.	Strongly disagree	2.72%
	Total	100%

As Table III illustrates, when asked if the widening deployment of ARVs would enhance community safety, just over 80% of respondents agreed, with less than 10% disagreeing with this sentiment.

Table III: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will enhance community safety'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	42.18%
2.	Agree	39.46%
3.	Neutral	9.52%
4.	Disagree	6.80%
5.	Strongly disagree	2.04%
	Total	100%

Finally, officers were asked to reflect upon the extent to which the widening of armed response deployments would potentially improve their own and other officers' safety at work. Table IV illustrates that just under three quarters of the sample believed that this would be the case, while just over 11% disagreed.

Table IV: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will improve officers' own personal safety at work'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	39.04%
2.	Agree	34.25%
3.	Neutral	15.07%
4.	Disagree	8.22%
5.	Strongly disagree	3.42%
	Total	100%

Accordingly, the pre-survey results seemed to suggest that the majority of officers believed that the widening of armed response deployments would have a positive impact on both community safety and the confidence, resilience and safety of serving officers. The young-to-middle-aged, almost exclusively male sample of officers clearly believed that local people would feel reassured by their presence, while respondents also believed that the revised deployment model would improve their own personal safety at work.

Officer Interview Findings

Those ARV officers who indicated a willingness to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews were contacted by the research team throughout the summer of 2018. Individual interviews were subsequently conducted with these officers, either in person or by telephone, depending on personal preference and availability. In total, 16 officers participated in follow-

up interviews. Of these, 14 were male and two female, with eight officers serving in the north, two in the east and six in the west of the country. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for ease of data analysis and data was anonymised. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes, as outlined below.

Key Drivers, Anticipated Benefits and Risks

Many of the officers in the sample believed that one of the key drivers for the new deployment model was the changing nature of violence in Scotland. Although evidence suggested that the volume of violent incidents in general had dropped, there was a perception among the interviewees that the severity of those incidents that did occur had increased. For instance, officers described how they believed that some citizens were increasingly willing to use weapons. They also had commonly-held perceptions about an increased presence of firearms and alluded to the rising terrorist threats across the country:

> I think violence, overall, what the police class as violence overall is probably on the down. However, the severity of violence is on the up, ie. weapons, people's willingness to use weapons I think is definitely on the rise within Scotland. – *Male Constable A3*

> There's certainly more firearms kicking around, with the people we've dealt with and the information [we get]. It does feel like there's more firearms, they're more readily available to kind of the bad guys, organised criminal gangs in Scotland … there's obviously the kind of terrorist threat as well. – *Male Constable A1*

ARV officers also perceived that there had been an increase in the risk of violence towards themselves in recent years, with several citing the escalating prevalence of mental health issues and the way in which ARV officers could play an important role in supporting response officers with these increasing risks:

> I think mental health's a huge thing that we're starting to see and … I don't like saying it, but your bog-standard response officer has no longer got the ability to deal with these sorts of incidents where people are willing to pick up weapons through either mental health issues or anything like that. Definitely that is on the rise, and I think the need for what I do as an ARV officer is required … I think that's where we need to step in and to be able to bolster … the response officers. – *Male Constable A3*

In these situations, officers believed that the presence of firearms could represent a more effective tool. For instance some officers referred to the fact that, if there was a house fire, it would be foolish to send someone in with only a fire extinguisher to deal with it. Similarly, they felt it was inappropriate and inadequate to send officers equipped only with batons and PAVA spray to deal with incidents involving offensive weapons. In many ARV officers' opinion, the presence of firearms could help to quickly de-escalate potentially volatile situations involving weapons and the threat of violence, and they believed that the range of other equipment they carried could help to protect conventional officers being put at risk:

> Recently, just the other week, we were sent to a call and as soon as the boy saw that it was cops that were armed, he gave up immediately, not wanting any confrontation or nothing at all, despite giving unarmed cops a good bit of hassle beforehand. – *Male Constable A6*

> You can deal with things that the conventional police officers can't or that you don't want to put conventional police officers at, due to the risk associated with it. Whether it be somebody in a house, you know, for a domestic incident, threatening officers outside the house or right up into a, a terrorist attack, you know, which obviously you don't want to be sending … conventional officers into that. One, they don't have ballistic body armour and two they don't have anything to protect themselves with from gunfire certainly and knife, even knife attacks. – *Female Constable A12*

Officers additionally cited the wider, spiralling volume of incidents related to issues of vulnerability that their response colleagues were now having to deal with and the way in which resources 'on the ground' were limited due to financial cuts in Police Scotland. Against this backdrop, ARV officers believed that they had an important role to play in plugging

perceived 'gaps' and supporting their frontline colleagues:

> We are actively trying to push the boundary so that we can assist our conventional officers because they're under such overwhelming workloads – both calls coming in and their own investigations. – *Male Constable A5*

Perhaps most commonly, however, the officers expressed a common view that the changing deployment model had been motivated by a realisation that the skills and capacity of ARV officers had hitherto been under under-utilised, that pressure on officers had now reached a critical stage and ARV officers were needed more 'on the ground'. The following represent the views and perspectives of the majority of the officers sampled:

> [Under] the old deployment model we werenae very, didnae do very much tae be honest. I mean we, we drove around a lot and we were a visible presence but we coudnae get involved with very much. So as I say there was, you werenae really getting much money's worth from … well it's a financial constraint on the service and you werenae getting very good return for it. – *Male Constable A8*

> I think possibly pressure on numbers. You know, there's just, there's not enough police really to tackle all, you know the police are picking up the slack from every other agency that's under pressure. You know, social services probably being one of the biggest. You know, a lot of what police officers do really now are to do with vulnerable persons now and there just isn't the numbers of officers available. So I think yeah there was definitely pressure from the bosses within decisions that they can't have this number of officers in, you know, swanning about in the ARVs, not being used. As I said before, we're police officers first and foremost. You know, we've just got a few extra tools on our belts and a bit extra training so not to use us is crazy. – *Male Constable A9*

In terms of risks, officers acknowledged the security issues that surrounded the storage of firearms equipment in armed response vehicles and the very remote potential for members of the public to grab firearms from officers' person should they come into close proximity with volatile suspects. However, officers were unanimous in their view that the training they had received and the robust retention levels of the holsters they used meant that these risks were easy to mitigate against. Accordingly, within the increasingly pressurised context that wider officers found themselves under, ARV officers believed they brought enhanced levels of operational tools and skills to support their colleagues during routine incidents and an ability to minimise any potential risks that may arise.

Enhanced Operational Toolkit and Skill-base

ARV officers referred to the vast array of tools they had at their disposal, including stab vests, PAVA spray, handcuffs, batons, Tasers and sidearm glocks. In addition, they referred to the wider equipment carried in each Armed Response Vehicle such as carbine and ballistic shields. Officers believed that the additional tools they carried enabled them to have a much-enhanced operational tool kit compared with other mainstream officers, and often cited the limitations associated with the tools that response officers had, including Tasers:

> I've used PAVA spray, or CS at the time. They are effective, however they … will only work in specific circumstances. Your CS, your Tasers, if it's windy, confined spaces, they won't work. A Taser will not work if you're wearing heavy clothing. If it's windy it won't work. – *Male Constable A3*

As above, the officers all expressed a commonly-held perception that the mere sight of a visible sidearm on an ARV officer's possession during deployments involving potentially violent situations could help to de-escalate volatility among suspects. For instance, some officers referred to the aggressive, military appearance that their enhanced deployment kit enabled, which included not only the presence of firearms but also Tasers, stab vests and ballistic helmets or balaclavas which could signal to suspects that an incident had been assessed as high risk and that police use of force could be likely.

However, during interviews officers vocalised their very strong perceptions about the way in

which their operational toolkit extended way beyond the presence of guns and military-style equipment. In particular, officers cited the way in which their enhanced training in negotiation skills was a very important element of their work that enabled them to support response colleagues to get violent suspects to begin to comply. Further, many officers were keen to stress that they viewed themselves primarily as 'police officers', but recognised that they had a heightened capacity to deal with certain situations. For instance, the presence of enhanced equipment for dynamic entry to properties and a greater level of first aid skills meant that ARV officers believed that they could support their colleagues in keeping people safe in difficult circumstances:

> We're all police officers first and foremost. We also have the extra training and capability to deal with other issues. One of the items that we carry, for example in, in our … in our police vehicle is the ability to gain entry to properties. So we're, we would call that method of entry equipment so we can use that to assist our colleagues gaining entry. We also have enhanced first aid capability. So, you know, one example would be if an elderly person had collapsed inside the property and they were locked within, we could gain entry to that property quickly and then provide our enhanced first aid training to that, to that member of the public quickly. – *Male Constable A4*

> I think the ideal [is] for first aid … calls as well to help, you know, folk if there's a concern to a person in a house etc. Using equipment that we have in the cars. – *Female Constable A2*

> We've got guys who are higher first aid trained than your old beat cops … as part of the firearm deployment, we are happy to send these people, ARV cops, to assist your mum, whoever that's behind a door crying for help. – *Male Constable A15*

Thus, ARV officers believed that their enhanced toolkit and skill-base meant that they were more effectively equipped to deal with incidents that were viewed as carrying a greater risk of threat. They described the way in which they would routinely refer to the 'national decision-making model' to assess the level of risk, and that the training they had received enabled them to make informed judgements. However, as Constable F4 (above, among others) indicated, the officers in the sample fundamentally viewed themselves first and foremost as police officers, and felt ready and willing to deploy at many types of routine incidents. However, even within the context of the widening deployment model having been approved and supported by Police Scotland at senior executive level, they had some strong perceptions regarding the existence of barriers and obstacles that they felt often prevented them from doing this.

Frustration and Perceptions about Continuing Under-deployment
Traditionally, armed officers working within ARV teams in Scotland have deployed primarily to firearms incidents and incidents where threats to life become apparent. In such cases, ARV officers are commanded at all times by a trained ITFC within each of the three Police Scotland overview control rooms. Police Scotland's decision to widen the deployment model for armed officers in ARVs meant that, in principle, such officers would now be able to attend a greater volume of essentially routine incidents should the need arise.

However, during the very early weeks of the revised deployment model the officers in our sample vocalised their frustration. Although perhaps not fully recognising the support that ITFCs had for the revised model and willingness to task and deploy ARV officers where appropriate, the officers expressed a commonly and passionately held perception that they were at the mercy of ITFCs and found themselves unable to deploy due to perceived anxiety among the latter about potential public backlash:

> I don't see much change from the old working strategy to the new one. I can't tell what's different … I mean, we have seen with the number of calls, how much [pressure] that conventional officers are under with the number of calls, how complex each call is … I mean, they need to use us more, so that's why they've changed it … [but] there's not been an increase in us being sent to non-firearms-related incidents … Inspectors … are very reluctant to use us … there's a perception that, if we turn up to an

incident, we will use every part of our equipment in an instant which is absolute nonsense. We are police officers to begin with, we speak to someone [and] unless there's any information or intelligence or development in that incident, we're not even gonna consider using any of our equipment. *Male Constable A5*

You hear things happening that you think, 'I could assist with that', but we can't, because the ITFC, you know, wouldn't allow us to attend, or it's maybe not deemed as proportionate to have armed officers there, because, it's, because [they're] frightened of the public perception really, of armed officers turning up … we could be round the corner for something that is minor … but not be able to attend because of the fear of public perception and social media, armed officers being photographed, you know, speaking to a child that's thrown a stone at a window, you know that kind of thing. – *Male Constable A7*

Officers were generally of the view that, while there were some members of the public and those in particular sections of the political environment who were fundamentally opposed to the presence of guns, generally speaking most citizens who needed support from the police did not tend to care whether officers who deployed were armed or unarmed. In their opinion, what the general public wanted most was the ability of officers to turn up at an incident and keep people safe, and in fact some respondents believed that the sight of armed officers could be reassuring to much of the general public and was increasingly becoming normalised:

If your house is getting broken into and the closest person to you is a police officer that just happens to be armed, they really don't care. – *Male Constable A1*

Members of the public are, nowadays, put at ease seeing firearms officers out and about … if you're thinking about going on holiday to anywhere in Europe, as soon as you arrive in airports all the cops are armed and you don't even bat an eyelid. – *Male Constable A10*

For the officers in the sample, then, there was a commonly-held perception that commanding officers were concerned about potential repercussions associated with complaints, public and political scrutiny and unwanted media attention and that this prevented ARV officers' fuller deployments. The restrictions that ARV officers felt that they had placed upon them as a result sat uneasily with them and many believed that ITFCs would benefit from attending ARV training to demystify some of their misguided perceptions. This was summed up succinctly by Constable F4:

It doesn't sit comfortably with me sitting round the corner from an incident, knowing I could go there and deal with it safely. I think that perhaps some Commanders … are worried about the public perception of armed police officers being at an incident … I believe that … Commanders should come to training, to firearms training … I believe that they should be better sighted on the tactics we use as firearms officers. – *Male Constable A4*

Accordingly, in the early weeks of the revised model becoming operational, it appeared that there was still a great deal of frustration among ARV officers because they perceived that they were continuing to be under-deployed. A key priority within the subsequent stages of the current evaluation, therefore, was to explore the extent to which this frustration continued or subsided as the revised deployment model continued to be implemented.

Perceptions of Stakeholders invested in Policing

Members of stakeholder groups invested in policing were contacted to seek their willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. Specifically, email and telephone contact was made with the SPA, HMICS and the SPF to seek voluntary participation in semi-structured interviews. In total, six participants were accessed, with two participants from each of the three organisations participating in face-to-face interviews. Of these, five were male and one female. A summary of key insights emerging from stakeholders are presented in the following sections under three sub-themes.

Key Drivers, Anticipated Benefits and Risks
Members of stakeholders groups invested in policing were asked about what they perceived to be the motivation behind the widening of the armed response model. Two stakeholders commented that it was not a change as such, but a return to a model previously used within legacy forces, or more specifically within Strathclyde:

> The interesting thing was that they moved away from it because of the furore surrounding it via the press and media and politicians ... because that was the deployment model in Strathclyde before Police Scotland - *Male Stakeholder S1*

It was also pointed out by all of the stakeholders, however, that this was a highly trained resource, which was being under-used under the previous model. In the current climate of budget cuts, it was thought that this was not a good use of public resources, especially with an increase in the terror threat level, and within the context of the risk attached to de-skilling trained ARV officers:

> …obviously because of the media criticism and political criticism they were only to be used for firearms-related incidents. So a lot of the time they were sitting there doing nothing … inappropriate waste of, of police resources - *Male Stakeholder S3*

> It was a mess … armed police officers were going up the wall with boredom and they had nothing to do, and there was a real risk there in terms of de-skilling and they were a totally wasted resource. – *Male stakeholder S5*

Stakeholders highlighted the additional skill-base that ARV officers had, and although they believed that officers may still be under-utilised, felt that they were increasingly being deployed more efficiently:

> I think they're getting more stuff and things like missing persons and so on and advanced first aid which they've got is a helpful thing … as well as their kind of specialist role as well. So it's better, it's still not perfect because they've still got plenty of downtime. And, of course, everything is based upon the Initial Tactical Firearms Commander releasing them from that armed policing response role. – *Male stakeholder S5*

However, despite the above mentioned benefits with respect to public safety and deploying resources more appropriately, there were also some concerns expressed around potential risks. For example, one male stakeholder raised the issue of ARV officers potentially being tied up in something more routine when demand for a specialist resource emerged elsewhere; however, he also believed this would be resolved by simply ensuring that ARV officers were always commanded to drop what they were doing and re-deploy should a high-risk situation emerge that required a tactical firearms presence. Another concern was raised about the potential risks associated with being armed with a deadly weapon. This was not only expressed with respect to inappropriate use, but also the potential scenario where someone tries to access weapons stored within an armed response vehicle. It was, however, pointed out that:

> …this again comes back to risk management, and it comes back to, well actually the vehicle is locked, they're in secure cabinets, they're in a secure place - *Female Stakeholder S4*

Anticipated Public, Political and Media Reactions
Stakeholders had mixed opinions around how the widening of the armed response model might be perceived by the general public, politicians and the media in the longer term. One stakeholder thought there would be initial concern by the public, but as long as the police can justify it, then the public would get used to it – it would become the 'norm'; whereas politicians may 'become more intrusive with their questioning' *(Male Stakeholder S3).* However, another stakeholder expressed concern about it becoming the 'norm', stating:

> Well we'd never want it just to be the norm and it won't be because, you know, the number of armed officers against unarmed officers is, is quite distinct - *Male Stakeholder S1*

However, he did assert that the public would just be grateful for the assistance. This was a sentiment also expressed by another stakeholder:

> If you're … lone female, you're broken down at night, two o'clock in the morning, driving rain, middle a' nowhere on the road, there's an armed response vehicle coming past, do you want the officers to drive straight past or do you want them to stop and help you? - *Male Stakeholder S2*

Nonetheless, it was also pointed out that he thought some members of the public may react strongly against it; while others would not be so concerned. One stakeholder was completely convinced that the majority of the public would not even be aware of the presence of a visible sidearm:

> I think most people wouldn't recognise it … I wonder how many people … we see the armed protection group that follows Theresa May … at the moment you see them going into Westminster, Downing Street, constantly. I wonder how many people spot the gun … they're not that aware. – *Male Stakeholder S5*

It was also thought by another stakeholder that the media would report on policing in line with their agendas, but it was hoped that positive stories would be conveyed too. Two stakeholders articulated the view that, although they believed the media had become more sympathetic towards the police on the back of the Keith Palmer fatality in London, they also recognised the interlinked nature of politics and the media in Scotland and that one negative incident could potentially lead to negative backlash:

> I think there's a bigger sympathy towards the police … in the media, because of what's happened. I mean poor old Keith Palmer didn't have a chance … all over and done with after five seconds – *Male stakeholder S6*

> I mean, the reality is that the opinion-forming world is a very small one in Scotland. So you've got the Parliament where it is very tribal still, and you've got a media which is pretty tribal as well. And the two of them are linked in a way – so you just need one thing that sparks it off and that becomes an issue. – *Male stakeholder S5*

Deployment and Officer Safety

Stakeholders were cautious in expressing how the widening of the armed response model may impact on an officer's confidence or safety, but on the whole they thought that having a visible firearm may not only give officers more confidence, but had the potential to act as a deterrent - insofar as individuals may think twice about their actions if it was deployed appropriately:

> Well I, I think the potential for, for de-escalation's quite, quite marked depending upon the mental state of the individual ... But in … a situation … generally you think, might think, 'oh!' These issues that I was going on about that I thought were very important to me earlier on, maybe less so now – *Male Stakeholder S1*

One stakeholder used this as an argument for making guns more visible (as opposed to concealing them), in order to de-escalate situations more rapidly and act as a robust deterrent:

> So but I would think the, the impact on, well I would think the impact on the person waving a knife is that I mean they will see that officers are armed, you know. And I think my understanding is that armed officers will identify themselves as armed officers as well, I think - *Male Stakeholder S2*

However, this stakeholder also added some cautionary notes around armed policing. He believed that it could potentially make officers less safe if it led to criminals arming themselves in response to the wider presence of firearms officers:

> …I think wi' firearms potentially there's a counter argument that says, 'actually well if there's more armed officers, does that mean criminals are more likely to carry guns?'… Yeah if confronted with somebody with a firearm then obviously having a firearm yourself, I would argue, it's probably gonnae increase your safety … But I would think there's a broader issue that said, you know, certainly if you were gonna routinely arm all officers, potentially is that in some way in the longer term gonna have a detrimental impact on, on safety? Or might it fundamentally change, you know, change the job and the nature of it? I don't know – *Male Stakeholder S2*

However, one other stakeholder reiterated the point that he believed that the only change that would really impact on communities is that there would be better access to police officers, while also expressing a perception that there may still be a lot of risk aversion about deploying ARV officers because of the fallout that can occur if things go wrong:

> The only impact it will have is that people will have access to more police officers …[if their] mother with dementia goes missing they don't really care whether it's someone with a gun or not with a gun who's looking for her … [but] I think the challenge is, I think we're probably too risk averse for it. Still, in general I think … that probably comes from the fact that people are, you know, it's a world of pain for everybody to get it wrong. – *Male stakeholder S5*

Perceptions of Community Representatives

A total of eleven focus groups were held with various community groups - rural and urban - across Scotland. The sample included representation of age, gender, ethnicity, social and personal challenges including physical and mental ill-health. Focus groups were held with young people, adult community groups and with those from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. In total, 69 individuals took part in these focus groups - 37 males and 32 females. Their ages ranged from 16/17 year olds to those over the age of seventy. There was also a mix of ethnicity. As would be expected from such diverse participants there were some tensions in their perceptions but they did raise and discuss a number of interesting points. It was also interesting to note that, while the research questions were specifically worded to encourage discussion around the changing ARV deployment model, at times community responses focused on getting across the types of issues that were most concerning in relation to their local neighbourhoods and where they believed additional resources might be useful for the policing of specific incidents. Therefore, the community perceptions discussed immediately below were implicitly linked to participants' views about the potential impact that deploying ARV officers more widely may have on them. It is also important to recognise that community participants contextualised their perceptions and beliefs in relation to their experiences of living in and the policing of their communities. They did not differentiate, or compartmentalise, changes in policing practice but rather understood it in relation to their lived experiences. Most of the differences in perceptions in relation to policing at the community level were evident by age, place and ethnicity. The following sections give an indication of the main issues emerging from the analysis of this qualitative data.

Crime in the Community
This section of findings draws attention to the backdrop of community experiences that had informed and influenced participants' opinions about policing in their communities. A number of key points were raised in relation to crime and the changing nature of it locally in the participants' communities and in the wider context of Scotland and the UK. There were differing perceptions about crime and violence between rural and urban areas. In general the perception was that there was relatively little crime and violence in rural areas compared to that of urban spaces and in particular Scotland's bigger cities. For example, in rural areas there were repeated comments about the lack of crime:

> There's not that many incidents of violent crime …more smaller, less serious crimes. You don't have very many assaults or muggings or stuff like that. - *Community Focus Group P11*

> Yeah there is not much violence. - *Community Focus Group P6*

Conversely, in those areas that lie on the periphery of large urban areas there was a different perception articulated:

> Yous obviously 'hing about … [and] … there's reports of people coming down from [named city] and causing fights.
> There's a lot a' violence happening in the area. I feel really unsafe walking about in [named town] ….
> … it's a' schemes, a' different schemes … It's a' schemes I think that cause it.
> … but it was a lot worse when we were younger like wi' the territorialism than what it is now. - *Community Focus Group P12*

There were thus serious concerns articulated over crime and violence in the large urban cities and in particular in the central belt. Additionally, there was a perception that there were mental health issues that were becoming policing issues and that were perceived as a potential threat to the suspect, police and the public. In particular, the concern was with those who had become extremely agitated and potentially dangerous to themselves, the police and the public as they were not thinking rationally. However, overall both in rural and urban areas issues related to crime and violence were perceived as less prevalent than they had been in the past.

Nonetheless there was concern about the potential for crime rates to increase. For example, the BME participants expressed concern about a range of crime threats; there was a split by gender in the degree of significance they attached to this, and the quote below reflects the views of the men:

> I'm concerned about it because of the incidents and the crime rates going high, especially in this area particularly. We had a few months back two murders happened, one in the high street, in the town and one on Argyll Street, and there's a couple of incidents of rapes, and casual fighting is a normal thing, it's just very common. So, property damaging, like people's property gets really damaged, cars, windows get broken, that sort of thing. Drug use, drug stuff is going on. So, in general, it is a concern, yes. – *Community Focus Group P7*

The women who participated in the BME focus group reported initially that they felt safe in their community; but there were particular incidents where they felt a victim/victims of racism:

> Somebody try poking my door. I live in 13 floor. Me and two kids. My husband died after six year long …. I'm scared and call the police … I'm feeling so scared because I feel somebody inside the building doing that … some people in my building … stay downstairs in the garden, you drink alcohol, marijuana, something about that, and why? … The people sit down all the time downstairs, and no live in my building. This is a problem. Somebody live in building and somebody friend, you come and sit down and drink and, you know, cocaine or, I'm see that. And the bottle alcohol, all the time down in the street. Yes, this is a problem, you know, no good the kids sees this. - *Community Focus Group P8*

Another example given was that of an occasion where one of the women had intervened to help - as she saw it – to protect a child from a perceived danger:

> I see ladies with child is maybe one and half, you are walking so fast and you need to cross the street and come and catch him because I want help, and you come and shout me because maybe I am Muslim and you see scarf, you shout me and tell me some word no good, and all the people you see and me go crying and I'm just, I want to help you. Tell me 'don't touch my kids, don't touch my children'. I tell myself maybe no understand me, because no speak English good, and ask my friend come interpreter for the lady, tell her why you doing that, just the lady scared for the baby cross the street. And shout about my friend, and tell some word is no good. - *Community Focus Group P8*

These experiences were very specific to the BME communities. Their concerns about alcohol,

drugs and rising crime rates generally were, for the most part, shared by almost all of the participants in the focus groups. Age in particular seemed to be significant for dividing opinion over some of the issues raised at the local level. Only a few reported that they felt crime had been reduced significantly. This occurred in one of the housing schemes in the east end of Scotland's largest city, which hitherto had experienced extremely high levels of territorial gang-related violence. In particular, older adults living in this area were of the opinion that after years of investment by multiple agencies in their community alongside early and effective interventions and urban regeneration, the improvement was encouraging, but it should not be read as the problem having disappeared. Their perceptions were:

> I think it's quietened down a good bit because you don't hear so much fighting on the pitches and different things like that.
> Police are not coming up and down and a' that. I don't know about that but I think, you know, it has quietened down, this area anyway.
> We dae some committee work in the housing as well. The thing is we've took [name of community] up the road and there was a stabbing last weekend and the boy nearly died. And there is crime going on, no at oor doors, it's up there. Hooses getting broke intae, we've never heard a' that before, hooses getting broke intae. We never ever heard, but there's nae polis so the young yins know that's just a kid on shop up there. That's a' that is. They've no cells, no nothing. - *Community Focus Group P3*

Unfortunately, the younger people living in this area still talked about gang-related crime and about how it had not disappeared:

> It's calmed doon, but it's no', I don't think it's away. - *Community Focus Group P2*

Furthermore, some young people in this same community suggested that they 'scheme hop aw the time' *(Community Focus Group P2)* to avoid trouble. Word of potential gang-related violence got around the community and so they were able to, on occasions, negotiate ways to avoid it. They did, however, feel that this type of crime still impacted on the older generations 'cause o' aw the young yins walking aboot' *(Community Focus Group P2)* and the police whom they believed 'actually will feel threatened' *(Community Focus Group P2)* because 'they just get hurt aw the time'. Young people reported that knives, lock backs and choppers were the most common weapons carried by gang members/disaffected groups of young people. Unusually for a community that has hitherto most commonly been linked to knife crime, guns were also mentioned as an issue: 'A boy fae our school got took out of school wi' a gun.'*(Community Focus Group P2)*. On this occasion it turned out to be a 'gas gun, no' an actual gun,' *(Community Focus Group P2)*. Nonetheless it was concerning given that there are apparently an increasing number of gun-related incidents being reported across Scotland and in particular in the central belt.

These contested views about crime and feelings of being safe/unsafe in the community were raised in all of the focus groups. The older participants with first- hand knowledge of just how bad the gang-related violence had been in the past often reported feeling more confident and safe in their community now. This aligned with being known in the community and by the residents there, which they felt gave them a degree of confidence and security, as they were not perceived as either a threat or a target. Although they were not without their challengers, even amongst the adults:

> My perception is there's large groups of youths that hang around, and my understanding is that they will only fight with each other. You know, so long as you don't make eye contact with them, they just let you go about your business, you know. - *Community Focus Group P4*

Conversely, in other smaller urban areas there were mixed feelings about safety in their community:

> Like if I'm passing a bunch a' neds I'll avoid them just in case something happens. So no, I wouldn't say I feel safe walking down the streets or anything like that but I wouldn't say I feel unsafe either. It's

all just a worry that something might happen. - *Community Focus Group P12*

The younger participants, some of whom had limited knowledge/experience of the levels of gang-related violence expressed concern about the potential for it to re-emerge as they felt that there were often a number of groups of young people on the streets. One of the perceived concerns they expressed in relation to this was that the police couldn't really do anything about young people gathering on the streets any more as most of them were under age and therefore couldn't be charged. One observation in relation to the changing nature of crime in the participants' communities was the risk of dog walking:

> … because there's so much money on them … 'cause they can use them for fighting. It's, it's horrible. They don't care who it is or who it hurts. So it's mair, it's more things like that. And it's ma' kids I would worry for more than me. - *Community Focus Group P5*

Given the range of crimes and range of weapons reputedly used in these communities, respondents were asked about their perceptions of police and policing as is discussed in the following sub-section.

Policing in the Community, Deployments and Officer Safety
Some participating young people felt that there was a lack of respect shown towards them from the police. Some of the young people reported feeling targeted/victimised by the police just for being young and out on the streets. One group when asked what the main problem/s were in their area replied 'the polis' *(Community Focus Group P2)*, whilst others questioned the level of policing they were subjected to. There were also a number of comments about the levels of force used by the police and a perception of some 'polis' being 'good cops' and others 'bad cops':

> I think the police are a big target towards anybody because some a' them have got a bad name for themselves because a' what they've done. But then you cannae put it on a' the police officers 'cause it's no' a' them. They're just dain their job but some a' them can be quite over the top we' what they dae. But they don't, they don't always take it intae a sensible matter a' what they're dain. They, some of them do go over the top but. - *Community Focus Group P12*

Good cops were viewed as those who were perceived as understanding their community and not constantly picking on the same individuals (some participants equated 'picking on' people with stopping and searching them and removing drugs and/or alcohol from their possession). Interestingly, though, this notion of young people and alcohol being the main problem was contested by a number of young people who pointed out that the over 25/30 year old age group were also responsible for alcohol-related incidents:

> Like your thirty year olds coming now and they all start causing fights 'cause they're, 'cause alcohol's involved and it's just not fun at all. - *Community Focus Group P12*

Therefore, perceptions of policing in the community varied by age with the younger participants perceiving good cops as the kind of cops who would leave them alone, but at the same time this kind of policing activity was perceived by some of the older members of the community as an example of the police feeling 'under threat' from:

> … these gangs of youths because they can be quite large, there can be about 20/30. Well, not 30, at least 20 of these youths kicking about. There's a certain area in front of the old shops which aren't, there's only one shop out of four units, sort of semi-derelict, and the kids hang about in the wee green in front of these shops. So, it's a known area where they congregate. The police don't come down. I think the idea is just leave them to it sort of thing, you know. Provided that they obey certain rules and probably don't fight, you know …. I mean, my theory is that certain areas kids are allowed to congregate so long as they aren't creating too much mayhem. You know, rather than try and police the whole area, they let them do their thing in certain areas. - *Community Focus Group P4*

Overall, despite some negative perceptions expressed by participants, almost all agreed that the police had a difficult job to do; they recognised that officers could feel vulnerable and at risk of having their safety undermined. The majority of respondents agreed that the police should have a range of tools at their disposal for use in the community when they were needed. Furthermore, there was a strong recognition that police resources were stretched and that they, the community, did rely on the police to maintain community safety.

Widening Armed Police Deployments
Feelings and perceptions about the changes to the deployment of officers in ARVs were very mixed. For the most part the public did not want to *see* guns, but they did not mind the police *having* guns. They also were in many cases in favour of the police being armed due to perceptions about rising crime and an increase of threat from terrorism:

> …you probably can't ignore the fact it would probably be to do with terrorism as well I suppose. Things like it's obviously on the rise and it's always been a big issue, well recently been a bigger issue. So things like I know there's already armed guards in like airports and things like that but I think maybe something like that might have a big … reason for them maybe arming everyday officers. *Community Focus Group P12*

Interestingly, while there was little discussion on the media reporting of crime, the media reporting of the increased use of violence in London was mentioned as an indication of concern over rising crime:

> Not only that they rely on heavy arms or heavy support from the back in numbers, but they need individual policemen to be strong enough against self-defence, which could be martial arts, tai kwon do, some kind of physical strength they need so they can defend themselves against, like, the incident happened in Manchester when, sorry, down in England, London. *Community Focus Group P7*

The perception of many was that this level of rising crime might be the same across the country. Significantly though this perception was specifically aligned with the more densely populated areas within the UK. Within Scotland, the large cities were identified as places where there might be a need for more armed officers and more specifically the 'airports'.

> I don't think in this particular community [a rural community] because we don't get as much crime for people to be worried about it. It's communities in cities … they're a lot more [crime] where if people saw armed officers they'll feel much safer. *Community Focus Group P6*

> I don't think people [would] like it [if] police officers were armed with guns. I don't think like people here would think it was a good thing. *Community Focus Group P11*

While some described feeling fearful at the sight of armed officers on the street, others who had only seen them in armed vehicles seemed happy for officers to be armed:

> If I see a police wi' a gun I'm terrified. I think, 'oh my God, why is there polis wi' a gun?' And I know why there's police wi' guns but it still makes me feel scared …. like see like just walking doon the street then, I don't think they should be armed. *Community Focus Group P5*

> I can only recall seeing an armed police officer once, that was when I was going away from [named city] airport. And even then I was like, 'whoa they're carrying like, they're carrying like big guns'. When you see people with guns like it's almost like you think like something bad is gonna happen …' *Community Focus Group P11*

> I see armed officers but I stay in a main road so you dae see them driving back and forward. But it's no' like … I don't know. I don't have a problem wi' armed response. I don't have a problem wi' them having tae use their guns cause you know they're only used when they are needed. *Community Focus Group P5*

There are significant issues for Police Scotland to consider here. Police Scotland's policy is about visibility and transparency. The insights from the focus groups suggested that the public would prefer to have the security of knowing that they - the police - have the capacity to use weapons - guns - as and when needed but what they don't want is for them to be visible. The public preference emerging from these focus groups seemed to be for the police to have these guns concealed when they were in the community. Concealment would effectively reduce the deterrent value of the armed officer, but on the other hand the concerns over visibility ranged from concern over criminally-minded individuals and gangs resorting to carrying guns to being uncomfortable with children seeing police officers armed and the kind of symbolic message that sent re-acceptable violence:

> I'm not in favour of they should have what is called proper guns getting in the street all the time. … guns are, are not a very good thing. *Community Focus Group P5*

> I think that would increase crime because if they think there's an officer walking about wi' a gun … I think they then, they would be inclined tae carry. I think that would increase it. *Community Focus Group P5*

> Any firearm doesn't really make me feel comfortable. I just, I don't like seeing them or knowing that they're there. But I do understand that they are needed, that they are necessary. I don't have to like it but I know that they do need them. *Community Focus Group P6*

> There is always a risk when it comes to like firearm.
> The idea of it being abused, the idea of someone using it when they're not supposed to. But if they're trained like that then I imagine there's gonna be a lot more paperwork and forensics and all sorts … everything as long as they're monitored then it's not a huge risk. *Community Focus Group P6*

Such views highlight the need for a good communications strategy with the public to reassure them that the deployment of ARVs in everyday policing is needed, that deploying ARVs more widely provides an additional resource for policing in communities and that these officers are highly trained and have specific skills which will complement and enhance those of response and community police officers.

Post-Revised Deployment Perceptions

Approximately 3-4 months following the changes to the ARV deployment model, all officers dedicated to ARV duties across the country (excluding instructors, close protection officers, specialist firearms officers and those management staff who are ARV trained) (n=368) were invited to participate in a post-deployment online questionnaire survey, supported by QuestionPro. In addition, the research team also re-established contact with each of the local community groups who had participated in earlier focus groups by email. Each of the group members were asked to indicate whether their views had changed since the research team had last met them and were given the option to participate in follow-up focus group discussions about these changing perceptions. As outlined in the Introduction to this report, in reality none of the latter opted to re-engage in discussions, with all indicating that their earlier views had remained unchanged. Accordingly, this final section will focus only on the follow-up survey data emerging from responding ARV officers, as well as additional follow-on data gathered via a focus group with ITFCs from the north, east and west of Scotland.

Perceptions of Officers

In total, 149 ARV officers completed the follow-up survey (an overall response rate of 40%). The majority of the respondents (96%) were again male and the most common age-ranges were again between 31-40 and 41-50 (n= 46% and 33% respectfully. As before, almost all (89%) were Constables, and a large proportion (79%) had been in service for either between 5-10 or 11-20 years. As before, relatively equal numbers of the responding officers served in the north, east and west geographical areas of Scotland (with around one third of the sample located in each area).

Survey Results: Quantitative Data

Officers were asked to indicate whether they believed that the widening of armed response deployments had increased the resilience and confidence of officers. As Table V illustrates, the vast majority of respondents either agreed (47%) or remained neutral (32%) that this had been the case, while a fifth of the sample disagreed. As Figure I illustrates, when compared with the original survey this represented a slight downward shift in attitudes, with a reduction in overall strength of officer agreement, more uncertainty and slightly more officers disagreeing than before. This indicated that the responding officers were generally less convinced about the links between the changing deployment model and the resilience and confidence of officers compared to the perceptions emerging several months previously.

Table V: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland has increased the resilience and confidence of officers'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	8.44%
2.	Agree	38.96%
3.	Neutral	32.47%
4.	Disagree	15.58%
5.	Strongly disagree	4.55%
	Total	100%

Figure I: Pre/post perceptions about the changed deployment model's impact on resilience and confidence of officers

'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will/has increase(d) the resilience and confidence of officers'
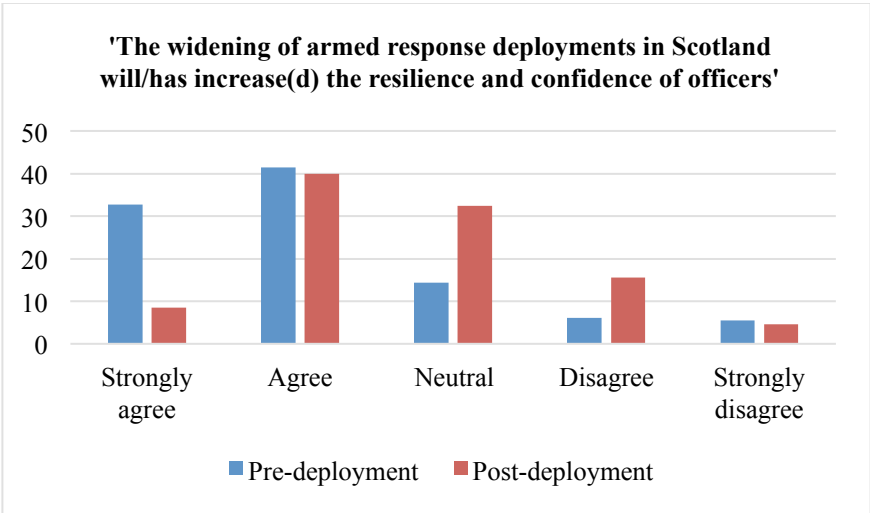
In terms of public reaction, Table VI illustrates that half of the respondents believed that the widening ARV deployment model had enhanced public confidence and reassurance, while over a third remained neutral and just over 13% disagreed. As Figure II illustrates, when compared with the original survey this represented a slight downward shift in attitudes, with a reduction in overall strength of officer agreement, more uncertainty and slightly more officers disagreeing than before. This indicated that the responding officers were also generally less convinced about the links between the changing deployment model, public confidence and reassurance compared to the perceptions emerging several months previously.

Table VI: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will enhance public confidence and reassurance'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	9.74%
2.	Agree	40.26%
3.	Neutral	36.36%
4.	Disagree	11.04%
5.	Strongly disagree	2.60%
.	Total	100%

Figure II: Pre/post perceptions about the changed deployment model's impact on public confidence and reassurance

'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will/has enhance(d) public confidence and reassurance'
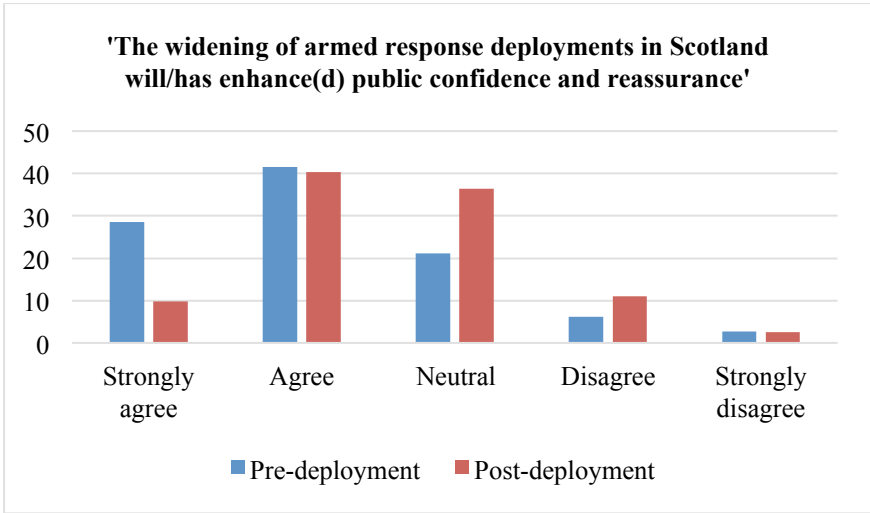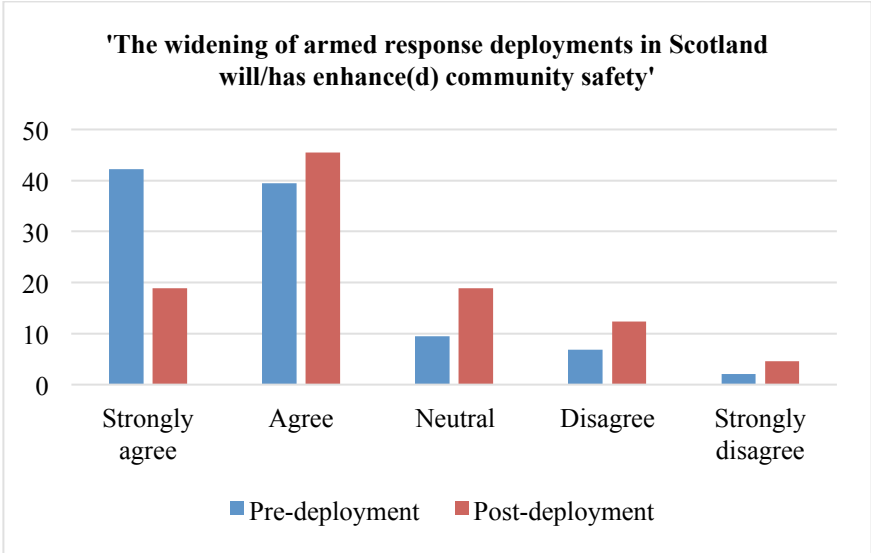
As Table VII illustrates, when asked if they believed that the widening deployment of ARVs had enhanced community safety, just over 64% of respondents agreed, with just over 16% disagreeing with this sentiment. In terms of comparisons with pre-data, Figure III illustrates that again these responses represented a reduction in the overall strength of officer agreement, more uncertainty and slightly more officers disagreeing than before. This indicated that the responding officers were once again generally less convinced about the links between the changing deployment model and the enhancement of community safety.

Table VII: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will enhance community safety'

	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	18.83%
2.	Agree	45.45%
3.	Neutral	18.83%
4.	Disagree	12.34%
5.	Strongly disagree	4.55%
	Total	100%

Figure III: Pre/post perceptions about the changed deployment model's impact on community safety


Finally, officers were asked to reflect upon the extent to which they believed that the widening of armed response deployments had improved their own and other officers' safety at work. Table VIII illustrates that just over half of the respondents believed that this had been the case, almost a quarter were uncertain and a fifth disagreed. As Figure IV illustrates, changes in pre/post responses here followed similar patterns to those related to the previous statements, with a reduction in strength of agreement with the statement, an increase in uncertainty and increase in the number of officers who disagreed. Once again, this indicated that the responding officers generally less convinced about the links between the changing deployment model and their own personal safety at work than before.

Table VIII: 'The widening of armed response deployments in Scotland will improve officers' own personal safety at work'

|	Answer	Per cent
1.	Strongly agree	18.83%
2.	Agree	37.01%
3.	Neutral	23.38%
4.	Disagree	13.64%
5.	Strongly disagree	7.14%
	Total	100%

Figure IV: Pre/post perceptions about the changed deployment model's impact on officer safety at work
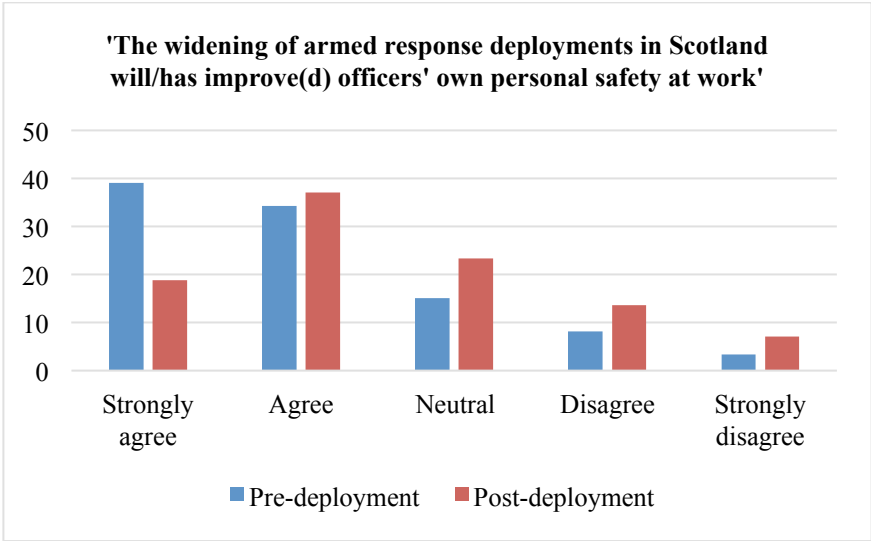
Accordingly, when compared with the pre-deployment perceptions the post-survey results seemed to suggest that the responding officers were generally less convinced than before about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on both community safety and their own confidence, resilience and safety.

In the follow-up survey, officers were also asked to indicate whether or not they had found themselves deployed in a wider policing role, and what the nature of these incidents may have been. In total, 60% of respondents said 'yes', 36% said 'no' and the remaining 4% were unsure. With respect to the 60% of responding officers who responded positively to this question, Figure V provides a summary of the frequencies associated with each of the categories of conventional deployments that they disclosed on the survey.

Figure V: Frequency of officer deployments in wider policing roles post-ARV changes

'Please select one or more incidents you have deployed to and frequency of deployments'
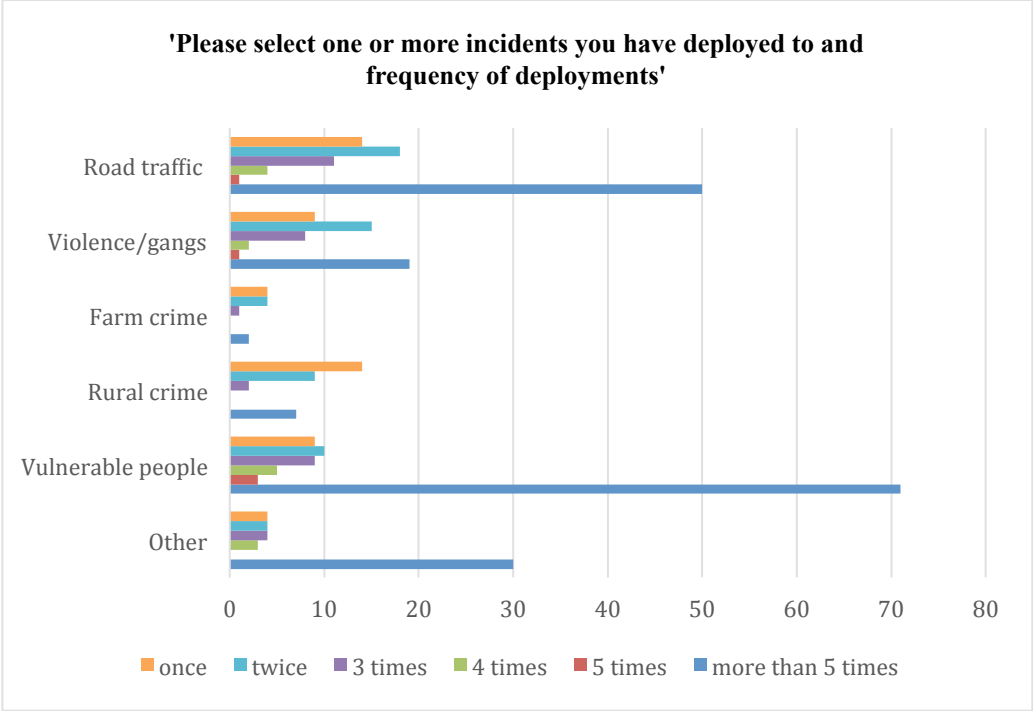
As Figure V illustrates, of the specific options given to them it was apparent that the respondents believed (at the time of the follow-up survey which was conducted at the end of the 2018 calendar year) that they had most frequently deployed to incidents involving vulnerable persons, with a total of 71 officers indicating that they had attended these incidents on more than five occasions. This was followed by road traffic incidents, with 50 officers having attended these more than five times. Incidents involving violence/gang-related activity were also consistently cited (with 20 officers having deployed to these more than five times), while farm and rural crime incidents were less frequently cited. However, around 30 officers indicated that they had also attended 'other' incidents more than five times. In the follow-up response section, the responding officers indicated that they had deployed to incidents involving entry to properties where weapons had to be seized; missing persons incidents; incidents involving general disorder or low-level disturbances; alarm calls; reports of fires; incidents requiring medical assistance; and vehicle and other types of theft. Within the official Police Scotland (2019) statistics made available to the research team towards the conclusion of this evaluation study, it was apparent that during the first year of the changing deployment model (between 7th May 2018 - 6th May 2019), ARV officers had engaged in a total of 8696 'conventional deployments' across the country. Of these, it was evident that officers had most frequently deployed to incidents that involved assisting with missing and/or vulnerable persons (a total of 3671 deployments) – thus reaffirming the perceptions of ARV officers in the follow-up survey. In addition, the statistics suggested that officers had deployed to 1110 road traffic incidents, again confirming the perceptions captured in the follow-up survey that these were the second most commonly attended conventional incidents since the deployment model had changed. Finally, Police Scotland figures also indicated that ARV officers had attended 660 incidents involving the need for medical assistance.

Survey Results: Qualitative Data

In the final section of the survey, officers were asked to indicate whether they believed that their workloads had increased, decreased or stayed the same since the introduction of the revised deployment model. In total, 33% indicated that their workload had increased, 3% believed that it had decreased and a majority of 64% believed that it had stayed the same as before. Those responding officers falling into the latter category were asked to provide open-ended responses to indicate why they thought this was the case.

Almost six months following the introduction of the changed ARV deployment model in Scotland, qualitative responses indicated that many officers still held the belief that there was a general reluctance on the part of ITFCs to allow them to deploy to incidents where they could provide added value in helping to keep people safe, and that this was due to risk aversion and fear of adverse scrutiny. The following represent the perceptions articulated by a large majority of the officers in the final section of the follow-up survey:

> Still not being deployed to incidents. Initial Tactical Firearms Officer reluctant to use firearms officer in any capacity. *Male Constable AA1*

> There is still a fear that sending armed officers to ongoing incidents would result In too much scrutiny the next morning resulting in a reluctance to send us despite us being nearby. – *Male Constable AA2*

> Because it would appear at times that the control room are scared to send ARVs to calls despite us having more training in conflict resolution and NDM spins along with general unarmed policing experience. I feel embarrassed at times as it feels we are stifled from assisting our conventional colleagues on response and community shifts, where we are more than happy to go and assist them in keeping people safe. – *Male Constable AA3*

> My workload has stayed the same because it is still reliant on an Inspector within an overview control room granting permission to attend any incident, regardless of whether this might be a firearms deployment or not. Unfortunately the majority of these inspectors are so risk averse that the only incidents we are allowed to attend are those bordering on the insignificant. This is exactly as it was prior to the change in deployment model. – *Male Constable AA4*

> In short, we hear a call coming in, determine that we can attend and ask for permission, we are then refused permission by the ITFC. This is down to their interpretation of what will or might happened should firearms officers attend an incident. A lack of trust I feel. – *Male Constable AA5*

Some officers articulated a belief that, following a very brief period of finding themselves redeployed, with the rollout of Tasers to just under 500 non-firearms officers in Scotland, Specially Trained Officers (STOs) were now being deployed to incidents ahead of ARV officers:

> Following the revised deployment model there was a brief period of a few weeks where ARVs would be sent to some incidents to provide assistance in a generic policing role; however, this soon stopped and control rooms are now relying on Taser trained officers to be deployed to incidents that clearly merit an armed response. It is the opinion of a number of people that STOs are being deployed to incidents that ARVs are not even being considered for, however are trained to deal with. – *Male Constable AA6*

> There are very few divisional jobs anyway and we tend to only get used for vulnerable people who are missing from home. They prefer to send an STO if there are any jobs with knives or violence. We do not even get tactically relocated either. – *Male Constable AA7*

> Response officers are calling for Standard Taser Officers when it should be ARV officers due to ARV officers not attending in the past and lack of confidence that ARV will attend. – *Male Constable AA8*

Building on the above, respondents indicated that they believed that non-armed officers were sometimes asked to approach individuals who were threatening to self-harm with bladed instruments due to the 'Stay Safe' guidance:

> Firearms deployment incidents workload has decreased significantly but this is due to the rationale of ITFC's. An example of this is, ARV's are allowed to search for self harming missing persons, if the means of self harming is sharp/bladed weapons or items, the ARV's are then advised not to approach the subject but to allow NON-armed officers to approach and deal with the subject using the STAY SAFE guidance. – *Male Constable AA9*

In spite of the general despondency, a small minority of officers (who were mostly located in the east of the country) believed that they had always been deployed more fully and able to be

proactive, but that they were now being more protected from oppressive levels of administrative tasks in order to allow them to be even more proactive:

> I have always worked with a proactive team that forged good relationships with ITFCs who trusted us to work in an operational support role. – *Male Constable AA11*

> We were always encouraged to assist colleagues with ongoing incidents (with the permission of the Inspector in Force Overview). This did not change dramatically, if at all, when the deployment model 'changed.' – *Male Sergeant AA12*

> Although we attend more incidents, we are not being tied up with the admin side but providing support to divisional officers. – *Male Constable AA13*

At the end of the questionnaire, officers were asked to add any final open-ended comments. As above, while a minority of ARV officers (particularly those in the east of the country) felt encouraged by the revised deployment model and felt that they were attending more routine calls, in the majority of cases responding officers reiterated their sense of frustration. This frustration was expressed in relation to their perceptions around the continuing issue of under-deployment and what they interpreted as a risk averse culture, and several highlighted their perceptions around geographical inconsistencies in terms of leadership approaches and a feeling that the current model of under-use was tantamount to a neglect of operational duties:

> … they are still not being deployed to incidents that would and should require a firearms deployment when the situation is analysed using the national decision model by the ITFC. Beat officers still attend reports of violence, weapons etc without the firearms officers being tasked (either relocated or authorised) and this is actually decreasing confidence in the ability of the unit from the perspective of the public and beat officers as well as failing to manage any risk to those groups. This could be due to the ITFC not wanting to be questioned as to why they deployed, however more scrutiny should be directed to each call where firearms officers could be deployed and aren't, even if the resolution is successful with no injury etc. Calls that are resolved without the intervention of firearms officers serve to influence the decision making in future scenarios and increase the risk as a previous call might have been resolved without the use of firearms officers, so this next call will be the same and not dealt with on an individual basis (the norm becoming not to deploy). – *Male Constable AA14*

> ARV officers are trained to deal with conflict through communication and negotiation with use of force being the last resort, however I feel that those in charge of deploying ARV officers to incidents have no faith in officers to show restraint and use their training to resolve matters safely. – *Male Constable AA15*

> It is hard to imagine a more frustrating role than that of armed response under Police Scotland. Firearms units in England and Wales are trusted and utilised regularly, yet within Scotland we are trained and equipped then held back and not used. There is very much the impression that senior officers in Police Scotland view firearms as a necessary tick in the box, but not something that should be used effectively. Time and again public impression seems to be valued over unarmed officers' welfare, and middle management-level officers appear unwilling or unable to challenge this. Any firearms unit in Scotland will certainly be better equipped, and will likely be more experienced, than their counterparts within division. Not to use them is tantamount to neglect of duty. In my opinion there needs to be a degree of investigation into the disparity between regions within Scotland, and also between Inspectors within these regions. This is because it is evident that the East overview utilise their armed assets far more than in the North; while in the North we have one or two excellent Inspectors who frequently use us, while the rest do so only very rarely. I sincerely hope that the results of this survey will reflect some of these frustrations, and that management will consider actually using us. – *Male Constable AA16*

Accordingly, it seemed that there was a great deal of continuing despondency and frustration expressed by officers and a perception among many that they continued to be under-deployed, particularly in areas outwith the east of the country. These perceptions helped to explain why survey results indicated that respondents were less convinced than before about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on both community safety and their own confidence, resilience and safety. Given the vociferous nature of many of the officers' comments regarding ITFC roles and attitudes, it became apparent to the research team that seeking the views of the latter would be beneficial.

Perceptions of ITFCs

Following on from the insights gained from the post-deployment online questionnaire survey, a follow-on focus group was conducted with a small sample of ITFCs from the north, east and west of the country. The purpose of this focus group was to explore some of the strong concerns raised by officers in the follow-up survey [above] and to gain additional insights into the revised deployment model and members of the ITFC forum's views about how it was being operationalized. In total, seven officers participated.

The ITFCs who participated talked at length about the political and media concern that had emerged in 2014/15 after some ARV officers had been photographed with visible sidearms in rural areas in the north of Scotland. They generally felt that, having gone from a situation where no ARV officers were subsequently deployed to routine incidents because of the previous backlash, Police Scotland had now reached a point where a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of these officers was taking place but where common sense was used in terms of the conditions under which they were deployed to non-firearms-related incidents. As one ITFC observed, the general feeling was that ITFCs were a lot more comfortable at deploying ARV officers now without the continual fear of potential political/media backlash emerging as a result:

> I think the internal politics are a lot better … in terms of the will to do it, because my experience … was that … you were kind of reluctant to do it and use them – you couldnae because you pretty much got a kicking internally. That's not the case now. – *Male ITFC F1*

The participating ITFCs had the strong perception that ARV officers were now contributing more to divisional and national priorities because they were dispatched and deployed much more frequently than before (as reflected in the official Police Scotland statistics [outlined above] that suggested that ARV officers had engaged in 8696 'conventional deployments' across the country within the 12 months immediately prior to the publication of this report). Responding to the apparent despondency of ARV officers regarding their perceived under-deployment, ITFCs were very clear about the briefing that had been issued by the Executive team within Police Scotland in 2018 that emphasised that ARVs could be deployed to 'priority incidents' that could directly benefit from their enhanced training and specialist equipment:

> The briefing … was that they could be deployed to 'priority incidents', and that's important … and it gave examples … ARVs have got enhanced training in first aid, they carry enhanced equipment so they carry defibs, they carry various other things that are useful for some of the stuff that we deal with, they carry medical equipment to deal with people that have been shot and a lot of that is obviously transferable to people that have been stabbed – we get a lot of people stabbed in the west coast of Scotland – every shift, every day we get stabbing calls … so there's a lot of work out there for the ARVs to go and assist, to get there and give medical first aid before ambulances get there … so, to me there's issues around … it's got to be a 'priority', there has to be a benefit from sending them. – *Male ITFC F1*

However, in addition to focusing on 'priority incidents' only, ITFCs explained that they also had to consider the security of the vehicles themselves and the need to ensure that the equipment stored within them does not become an added threat to the public:

> One of the things that gets overlooked by many is the security of the vehicle itself – it's an armed response vehicle … the briefing that came out in May of last year spoke about … and the exact wording of it is that armed officers 'must consider one of the following when deploying to an incident' … and it's to keep that vehicle within the line of sight, keep it on CCTV or keep it within a secure police car park. To me, if they don't tick either of these boxes and it's not a priority call and I don't see that there's a real immediate benefit to send them, then I won't send them because I think about the full circle – if it comes back that I've sent them to a low priority call, they've left the ARV, they've gone

and dealt with something, become involved in something that's not a priority and the vehicle's been out of sight and – worse case scenario – gets broken into and a firearm gets stolen and it gets investigated, which it will do, by PIRC, and this briefing will come out that it's quite clear by the Executive that they will only be deployed to priority incidents and the officer must take cognisance of one of those three elements of the security of the vehicle … so, there's a whole ton of stuff that they could get involved in, but there's a bigger picture – it's not just about sending a police officer to go and assist, there are wider issues. - *Male ITFC F1*

The participating officers also highlighted that, although Police Scotland now had a widening ARV deployment model to follow, ITFCs had to consider a wide range of wider environment factors before deploying an ARV officer. For example, some ITFCs drew attention to the risk that could emerge if ARVs were sent to a domestic incident and then a few minutes later had to be withdrawn from a volatile incident within someone's home in order to deploy elsewhere as part of their 'core' function. While ITFCs were sympathetic towards ARV officers' frustrations, they also felt that misguided perceptions abounded and that all ARV officers would benefit from visiting overview control rooms to experience occasional 'life of a call' tours and gain a deeper understanding of what Commanders see and hear and how decisions are made regarding tasking, dispatching and deployment.

Members of the ITFC forum also believed that geographical disparities in terms of volume of deployments can and do emerge. However, rather than this being related to differences in ITFC views and attitudes (as ARV officers seemed to perceive), ITFCs believed that this was associated with the relative increased proactivity of ARV officers in the east of the country:

> I know when I worked in the east, [ARV officers] would quite regularly shout in 'we're nearby, can we attend?' and then a phone call would come up to overview and we'd risk assess it and 'yes' or 'no'. But you were rarely proactively looking for a job that you could task your armed assets to that wasn't an armed job … I know that when I worked in the east, the armed officers would regularly shout up, 'we're in Prince's Street, can we attend?' and the control room would phone overview and ask for permission … that's how it worked. – *Male ITFC F2*

On further discussion, members of the ITFC focus group highlighted that east coast ARV officers operated across a smaller geographical area than those in the north or the west of the country. Mostly confined to 'E' Division, officers were able to regularly listen in to the division's five airwave 'talk groups' [local police radio channels] and quickly identify when an incident had arisen nearby that they could potentially be sent to. Accordingly, ITFCs who had worked in the east highlighted that these officers were good at being proactive and 'shouting up', requesting to become dispatched where appropriate. Conversely, ITFCs drew attention to the relative geographical vastness of the west of Scotland and the multiple channels and 'talk groups' there. Even if a call came through in somewhere like Motherwell and ARV officers were able to identify this within the context of the multiple 'talk groups', it would be unlikely that they would proactively request to become dispatched there if officers were located in the city centre of Glasgow due to the time required to travel. In addition, ITFCs were not always aware of the calls going out in multiple 'talk groups' and so the lack of opportunity for ARVs to become tasked and deployed was not always conscious or intentional on their part.

Regarding the wider ARV officer perceptions about STOs being deployed ahead of them, ITFCs provided counter-arguments and views here. As one ITCF explained, in reality this was never the case since STOs were simply viewed as unarmed officers with additional equipment, and incidents were either assessed as firearms incidents or not:

> It's great to keep [it] simple. An STO is an unarmed officer, [they just have] another piece of equipment, not a firearms officer, it's an unarmed officer and if I'm looking at an incident having lived in a world without STOs and I'm looking at incidents now with STOs, I'm still thinking 'is this for firearms or is this for unarmed officers? Or is this for unarmed officers with firearms as a contingency or …' I establish whether I'm going to need firearms officers to deal with this incident. So, for me,

they're unarmed officers and they just have – as unarmed officers do have – various pieces of equipment and various different support … so when you're looking as a controller and supervisor in the control room, you're seeing a large-scale disturbance, you're not just sending one crew to that, you're sending two or three depending on the number, you're getting a dog handler making their way in terms of support, you're seeing if there is public order in terms of additional numbers so you're seeing there is STOs because they have additional equipment that they can hopefully early resolve a situation where there may be violence towards persons or police officers – but it's not a firearms incident. – *Female ITFC F3*

As above, within the context of the potential misunderstandings misinterpretations around, ITFCs believed that ARV officers could benefit from visiting divisional and overview control rooms and gaining a deeper understanding of ITFCs' and senior operational roles and decision-making processes. However, they also believed there was a need for ITFCs to gain a fuller understanding of and appreciation for ARV operationalization, practicalities and tactics:

It's definitely probably an area … perhaps for new ITFCs … it's quite a knowledge gap, you get a little bit of input into it but not massive. And it's certainly not continuous development – you get it on your initial course. But as a standard 'once a year', no – [but] it probably should be … to allow that open dialogue and actually see [officers in] action. – *Male ITFC F4*

The ITFCs need to have a clear picture of what they're authorising to determine whether that's proportionate in the circumstances … 'do you actually realise what that looks like on the ground?' … if you've not seen it and don't actually know what it looks like, how can you properly authorise that? … so I think it should be a requirement actually … [that] you must actually go and see these tactics being delivered. –*Male ITFC F5*

It's easy when you've been at the other end of the radio, and even simple things like mode of arming. There's three different ways of arming, it can be discreet, overt, covert. Switching from one to the other – 'instead of going discreet I want you to go overt' but the practicalities of that perhaps take a few minutes because there's different pieces of equipment and different weapons you need to get out and stuff like that … so it definitely helps to have that as part of your experience and background … doesn't mean to say you need that to do the job, that's not the case. But it gives you a better understanding of what 's going on at that other end of the radio. - *Male ITFC F1*

In sum, contrary to the views of many of the sampled ARV officers, it was very clear that ITFCs believed a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of officers was now taking place more frequently. However, it was evident that ITFCs had to be focused in terms of the decisions they made about ARV deployments, ensuring that the incidents they deployed to were regarded as priorities, that they did not detract from officers deploying to their 'core' functions and that the risk to vehicle security was minimised. ITFCs believed that any geographical disparities that arose emerged as a result of differing environmental contexts and volume of radio broadcasts and the related levels of ARV officer proactivity, rather than as a result of any differing values, principles and attitudes on the part of ITFCs themselves. Finally, senior officers clearly believed that a more frequent coming together of officers and ITFCs would be beneficial, and that officers should gain experience of the ITFC role and vice versa. It would appear that the latter could be an important means of breaking down barriers and conflicting views and enabling greater collegiality to emerge among these different parts of the Police Scotland workforce.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overarching aim of this study was to evaluate Police Scotland's revised ARV deployment model across the first six months of its implementation. Drawing on the evidence that has been presented, it is now possible to directly address each of the key objectives in turn, as follows:

To explore and examine the pre- and post-change perceptions of police officers, key members of stakeholder groups and community representatives regarding the changes to the ARV deployment model, *with a specific focus on***:**

> **a. the extent to which perceived resilience, confidence and personal safety among officers is enhanced as a result of ARV officers being deployed to more 'routine' incidents.**

> **b. the perceived impact of the changed armed policing deployment model on public reassurance and safety, and the perceived benefits and risks.**

Pre-deployment revisions, the vast majority of ARV officers believed that the widening deployment model would enhance the resilience, confidence and personal safety of officers. Officers generally believed that the decision to revise the deployment model had emerged against the backdrop of an increase in violent incidents, unpredictable behaviour among certain members of the public as a result of drug misuse, mental ill-health and vulnerability and the increased terrorism threat. They also believed that the revised deployment model had emerged against the backdrop of police resources having become more stretched because of the huge increase in issues of mental ill-health and vulnerability that officers were now having to deal with, and the recognition that the skills and capacity of ARV officers had hitherto been under-utilised.

Participating officers believed that their presence at a wider range of incidents would enable them to defuse potentially volatile incidents where threat to life had become an issue much more quickly, but also felt that their enhanced skill-set would be helpful in terms of supporting officers in a range of situations. Officers believed that their enhanced toolkit and military appearance could provide an important signal that a particular incident had been assessed as high-risk as well as enabling suspects to comply, but that their enhanced levels of first aid, negotiation and dynamic entry skills would also help to reassure the public and keep people safe. Officers were very strongly of the opinion that they were first and foremost police officers and felt able to deploy at a wide range of incidents beyond those requiring the immediate use of firearms. Their extensive training and strong ability to draw upon the national decision-making model in each and every incident meant that officers felt well able to make informed judgements. However, during the early stages of the changing deployment model many responding ARV officers identified a perception that some hesitancy and reluctance existed among Divisional Inspectors and ITFCs to allow them to deploy to routine incidents due to apparent fear and anxiety associated with any potential public backlash, political scrutiny and unwanted media attention that may emerge as a result.

Police stakeholders expressed a perception that ARV officers had historically been under-utilised and that this was not a good use of public resources. They raised concerns about the potential de-skilling and de-motivation of ARV officers that had been emerging, and were of the opinion that the visible presence of firearms could act as a strong deterrent in some situations involving violent disorder. While they identified the slight risk that might emerge if ARV officers became tied up with routine incidents at a time when specialist firearms

resources were needed elsewhere, they also believed that the benefits of the revised deployments outweighed the risks.

Members of local communities had mixed and contested views about the current levels of crime and public safety within communities, but many recognised that police officers could often feel potentially threatened and could have their lives put at risk. Many felt that officers needed to be armed with firearms within urban areas, but many also felt that although they did not mind officers *having* guns, they did not want to *see* them. Some members of the public felt that arming officers with visible firearms could lead to more gun-carrying within local communities and potential for accidental shootings. These insights raise significant issues for Police Scotland to consider, given its current policy of visibility and transparency and the implications that suggest that the general public may have a preference for the concealment of firearms possession among ARV officers – which could ultimately reduce their potential for deterrence. Members of local communities who participated in focus groups were evidently concerned about the symbolic message that may be sent out if children and young people became exposed to seeing guns, and this raised questions about the potential need for a robust communications strategy around ARV deployments as a public reassurance tool.

Following the initial 4-5 months of the amended deployment model, responding ARV officers appeared less convinced about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on community safety and on their own confidence, resilience and safety. Although over half of the participating officers indicated that they had on occasion deployed to wider incidents (including those involving vulnerable and missing persons, road traffic incidents and incidents involving violence), the majority also expressed a view that they believed their workload had largely remained the same as it was. Some officers in the east of the country believed that they had always been deployed more fully but were now being more protected from administrative duties in order to enhance their levels of proactivity. However, among a majority of ARV officers there was a perception that there had been a continuing and prolonged reluctance on the part of ITFCs to allow them to deploy. Many of the officers had the perception that this was leading to STOs being deployed ahead of ARV officers and/or mainstream response officers approaching those who were potentially violent and/or threatening self-harm. This was leading to the perception among ARV officers that senior officers had no faith in their ability to show restraint and that public impression was valued over unarmed officers' welfare. It seemed that these despondent officer views about their continuing under-deployment across the majority of the country helped to explain why survey results indicated that respondents were less convinced than before about the potential impact of the widening of armed response deployments on both community safety and on officers' confidence, resilience and safety. In short, there was a perception among many ARV officers that the policy rhetoric around changing ARV deployment had, in most officers' minds, thus far failed to hit the ground.

Contrary to the views of many of the sampled ARV officers, it was very clear that ITFCs who participated in a follow-on focus group believed a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of ARV officers was now taking place across Scotland. That said, it was evident that ITFCs had to be focused in terms of the decisions they made about ARV deployments, ensuring that the incidents officers deployed to were regarded as priorities, that they did not detract from these officers' ability to deploy to their 'core' functions and that the risk to vehicle security was minimised. Their collective view was that any varying practice in terms of volume of deployment patterns in different parts of the country tended to arise because of wider environmental factors rather than as a result of any differing values, principles and attitudes associated with ITFCs themselves. However, in spite of this, ARV officers' beliefs regarding the policy rhetoric around changing ARV deployment failing to hit the ground were still passionately held. Members of the ITFC forum clearly believed that a more frequent coming together of officers and ITFCs would be a beneficial

means of facilitating shared understandings and that in the future ARV officers should gain experience of the challenges associated with the ITFC role and vice versa.

To identify any remaining challenges with the new deployment model and make recommendations for the future.

The remaining challenges associated with the revised ARV deployment model and the relevant recommendations for the future can therefore be summed up as follows:

1.   The levels of concern expressed by some members of the public about the potential increased visibility of firearms on officers' possession, and their expressed fears about the potential for increased conflict, retaliatory weapon-carrying and accidental shootings in local communities.

<u>Recommendation</u>: Police Scotland should first consider launching a robust communications strategy around ARV deployments as a public reassurance tool, focused on informing the public about the wide skill-set of ARV officers beyond firearms capacity and educating the public about the rationale underpinning the current policy of firearms visibility and transparency. Second, Police Scotland should consider implementing further community-based focus groups that seek to explore the perceptions of local citizens who have been exposed or become a witness to ARV officer interventions and seek their views in terms of benefits and risks.

3.   The perceptions among a majority of ARV officers that there is a reluctance among ITFCs to allow them to deploy to routine incidents, that there is disparity between regions within Scotland in terms of deployment patterns, and the apparent impact on officer morale.

4.   The counter-views of ITFCs suggesting a sensible level of risk assessment concerning the tasking and dispatching of officers, that decision-making on ARV deployments was based on a robust model of pragmatism and proportionality and that geographical disparities arise due to wider environmental factors rather than any reluctance on the part of ITCFs to task, dispatch and deploy.

<u>Recommendation</u>: Drawing on the views and perceptions of both ARV officers and ITFCs, Police Scotland should seek to ensure a more frequent coming together of officers and ITFCs within the context of officer professional development, in order to break down misunderstandings and barriers and establish shared understandings and greater collegiality. Specifically, Police Scotland should consider creating opportunities for ARV officers to visit overview control rooms and experience 'life of a call' tours and for ITFCs to gain experience of ARV training and thereby a fuller understanding of and appreciation for ARV operationalization, practicalities and tactics.

<u>Recommendation</u>: In addition to the other recommendations made above, Police Scotland should consider commissioning additional, follow-up independent research to fully explore the progressive impact of the changing deployment model over time and any related impact emerging from the recommended public reassurance and officer professional development strategies. The research should focus on exploring both officers' and local citizens' longer-term views and experiences through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

References

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) (2014) *Review of Standing Firearms Authority for Armed Response Vehicle Crews within Police Scotland*. Edinburgh: HMICS.

Police Scotland (2019) *AP Deployment Statistics 7th May 2018 – 6th May 2019*. Dalmarnock: Police Scotland.

Scottish Parliament (2017) *Deployment of Armed Police and Tasers*. Website, Available at: https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2017-12-19.2.0 (accessed on 24th January 2019).