

Trust and confidence in the police

Where are we, how did we get here, and what happens next?

Prof Ben Bradford

3rd March 2026



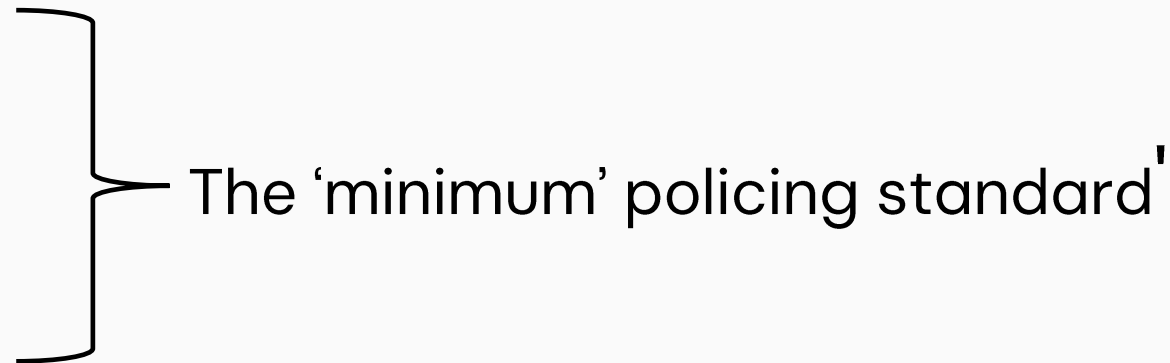
Overview

Where are we: some recent data and trends

What is trust (and confidence, etc.)?

How have we got here?

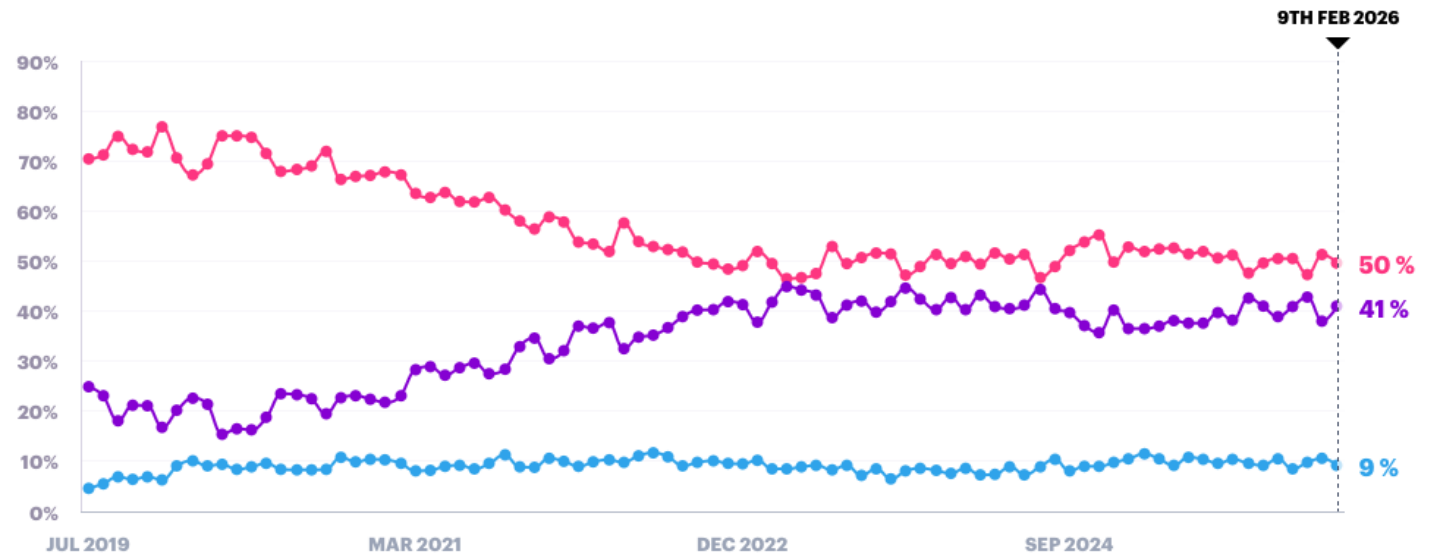
What can we do?



Trust in the police is under strain

Although police remain one of the more trusted institutions in society

Are the police doing a good job?

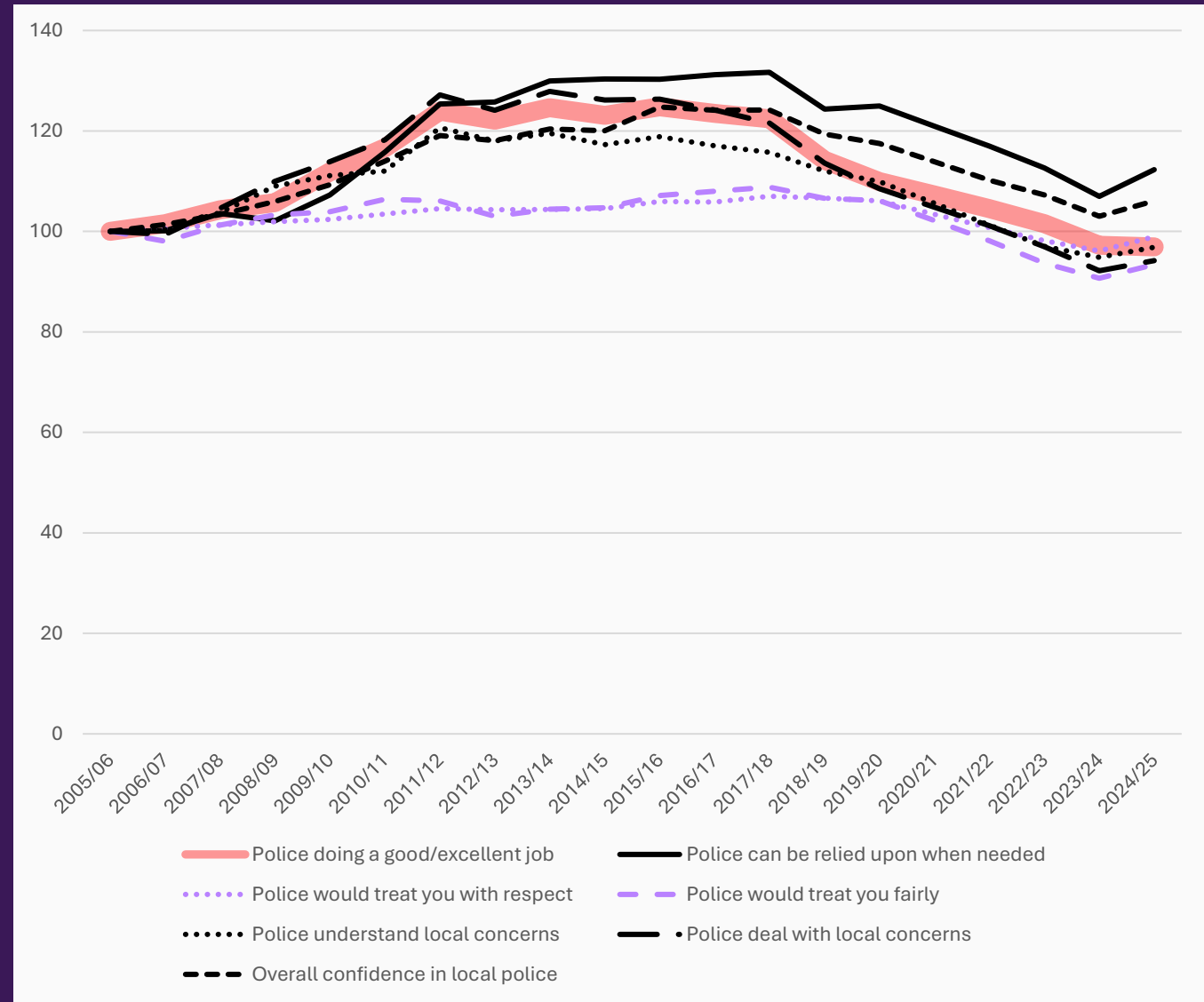


FULL QUESTION

Generally speaking do you think the police are doing a good or bad job?

Longer term trend

Change in a number of key indicators of 'trust and confidence over the last 2 years



Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales

The current 'moment'

London Gaza rally: Rishi Sunak vows to hold Met chief 'accountable' over march

© 51 minutes ago



Devon and Cornwall police allegedly protected officers accused of abusing seven women

Exclusive: Force accused of systematic failings, with allegations including rape and beatings



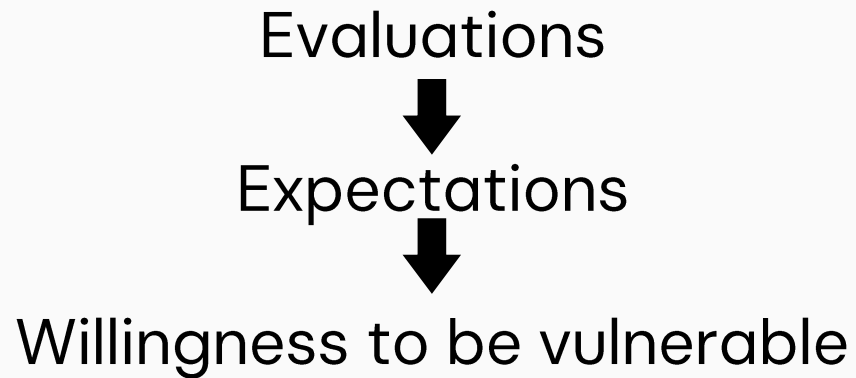
Intense media, political and social pressure on police is thought to have damaged trust – the Stephen Port case, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, the murder of Sarah Everard, the Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman case, the Casey report, protest policing and other high-profile instances of police failure and malpractice

This is an important part of the story – but it is not the only part

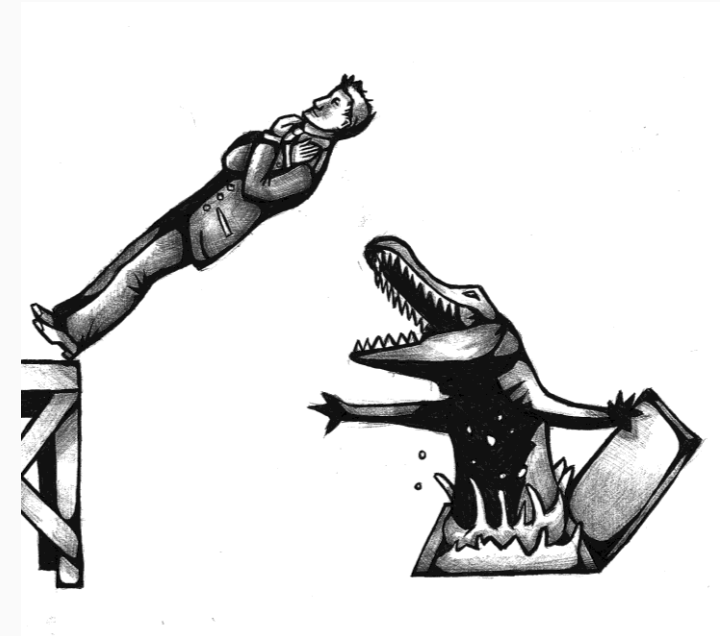


What is trust?

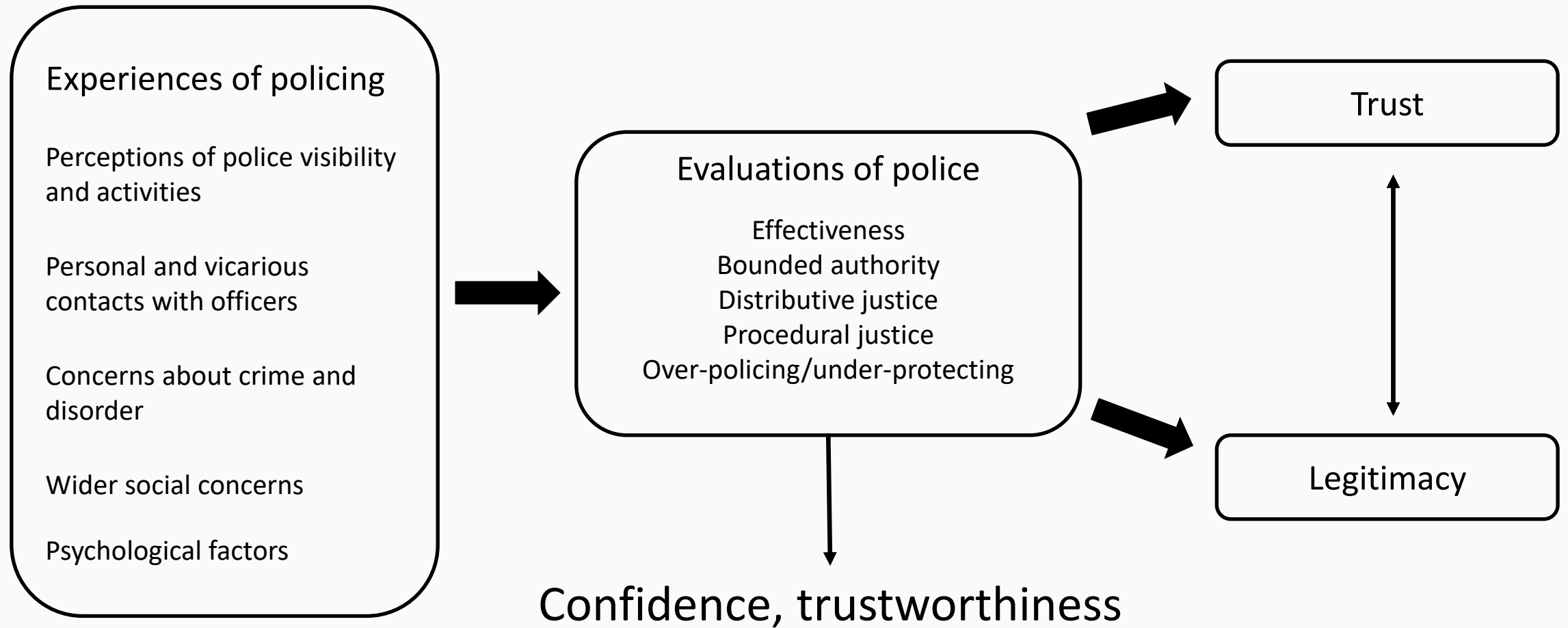
Trust is process, not a state:



We tend to concentrate on the evaluations and expectations bit – which you could also call confidence, a belief the police can be trusted (also perceptions of trustworthiness)



A model of trust



What service should police provide?

Towards a Minimum Policing Standard

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Minimum Income Standard


“The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) presents a vision of the living standards that we, as a society, consider everyone in the UK should be able to achieve.”

e.g., food: A typical day’s food for an adult:

- cereal and/or toast for breakfast;
- a mid-morning tea or coffee and a biscuit;
- a light lunch (e.g., a sandwich and a piece of fruit);
- a more substantial evening meal (e.g. home-made spaghetti bolognese with a side salad, followed by tinned fruit and custard).

Total weekly budgets, e.g. lone parent with two children aged 2–4 and primary school age = £729.14

We wanted to replicate this process for local, neighbourhood, ‘low’ policing



A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom in 2021

by Abigail Davis, Donald Hirsch, Matt Padley and Claire Shephard.

This report looks at the current levels of MIS and the extent to which people can achieve it based on benefits, Universal Credit and the National Living Wage. It also looks at preliminary research on how norms have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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INSPIRING SOCIAL CHANGE

Developing a Minimum Policing Standard

Focus Groups

- Leeds
- Lancaster
- Lichfield
- London

R1

Develop a definition of policing and its function(s)

R2

Develop a list of core functions (what's in and what's out)

R3

'Validating' the Round 2 findings

What people want from local policing

Police Response

Anything relating to how the police operate. This may include response procedures, follow-up procedures, funding, and training.

Police Behaviour

This refers to the type of behaviours that the community wishes for their local police to demonstrate and includes specific behaviours (trust, empathy, respectfulness, fairness).

Police Presence & Engagement

The type and frequency of police engagement that is expected within a local context.

Crime Priority

*Priority crime types within a local context, but also where the police **should not** be responsible (i.e., signposting to other services)*

Minimum Policing Standard (MiPoS)

Police Service Domains		
Response	Behaviour & Treatment	Presence & Engagement
Fast and proportionate response	Building trust	Greater community police presence (including on foot)
Focus on public safety	Treating the public with fairness and respect	Ability to speak directly to a person about local problems
Investigating and solving crimes	Building relationships within the community	Adequate follow-up in the aftermath of crimes
Openness and honesty when dealing with the public	Behaving in a professional manner	Responsive to the local community
Following up on crimes	Being role models of good behaviour	Physical local police station
Crime prevention and early intervention	Establish relationships with young people	Local community Police officer
Equal service across groups and places		Engaging in non-traditional types of communication with community

Focus groups: Summary

Participants were eager to provide their thoughts and opinions on this topic. Many felt that opportunities to communicate directly to their local police were lacking

With minimal prompting, participants developed a list of standards to which the police should adhere

Generic crime priority lists were not seen as useful – that police are visible, engaging and responding fairly to local issues was much more important

Participants consistently felt police were under funded and under resourced, which resulted in low expectations

Participants felt there was a lack of visibility of local police in their communities.

Significant emphasis on initial police response to non-crime incidents seen to present risk of harm.

National Survey

Individuals aged 18+ and living in residential accommodation

England, Scotland, Wales.

The target sample size was 1,500: 1,000 GB-wide plus a 'boost' of 500 from among those living in the 20% most deprived fifth LSOAs

Weighted to be nationally representative

Questionnaire content:

- Contact with police
- Perceptions of crime, disorder and place
- Minimum Policing Standard items
- Other perceptions of police
- Police priorities, response, activities

Response

	% Agree	% Missing
Prioritise public safety when deciding how to act	36	23
Provide a fast response	25	19
Prioritise the crimes most affecting your community	22	25
Provide responses that are proportionate to the issues involved	29	24
Deal with everyone in the same way, regardless of who they are	33	21
Make an effort to investigate crimes reported to them	29	19
Are open and transparent about the decisions they make	23	24
Provide adequate follow ups after a crime has been reported	20	27
Deal effectively with violent crimes	30	28

Just 1% felt police met the minimum standard for Response (i.e. agreed with all statements)

Behaviour and Treatment

	% Agree	% Missing
Behave in a professional manner	62	16
Act in ways that build trust	45	16
Build relationships with the community	34	18
Treat people with respect	51	15
Have good relationships with young people	23	30
Provide role models of good behaviour	37	17

3% felt police met the minimum standard for Behaviour and Treatment

Presence and Engagement

	% all or most of time	% Missing
Responsive to the local community	40	36
Providing a visible policing presence	24	6
Available to people who wish to speak to an officer or staff member	29	30

1% felt police met the minimum standard for Presence and Engagement

What are we measuring here?

Satisfaction? A retrospective judgement about specific encounters with officers or services police have delivered; an active and conscious assessments of a particular experience of policing.

Trust? A willingness to be vulnerable to another under conditions of risk, where such willingness is based on positive evaluations and expectations of the other's competence, benevolence and good intentions.

Confidence? A conscious evaluation of whether an entity is trustworthy (i.e. whether it is in fact competent, benevolent and well-intentioned – or, whether it is doing the right thing)

Legitimacy? A subjective assessment of the police 'right to rule', and of the reciprocal duties this places on the policed

Other attitudes towards the police

87%

Very or fairly safe if alone with a uniformed police officer

64%

I am happy to accept the ability of the police to intervene in people's lives

47%

Most police officers stand up for values that are important to people like me

44%

[It is a] moral duty to do what the police tell you to do, even if you don't like the way that they treat you?

37%

Local police are doing a good or excellent job

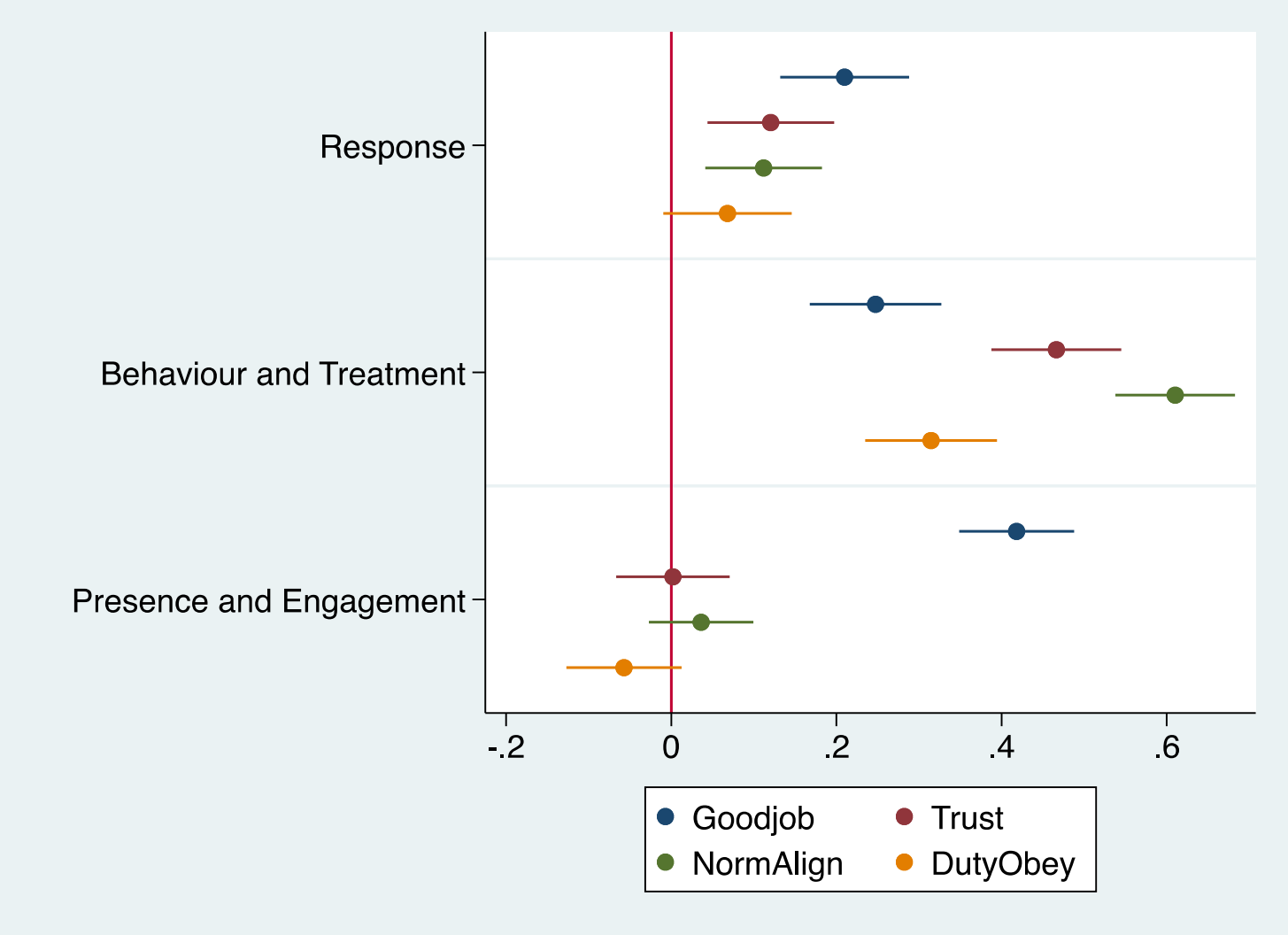
} Trust

} Legitimacy

} Confidence



Predicting other attitudes towards police



% Variation explained by MiPoS scales

Good job local: 56%

Trust: 38%

Normative alignment: 54%

Duty to obey: 16%

MiPoS survey: Summary

Views on policing activity across the three domains can be treated as measures of confidence – perceptions that police can be trusted to deliver the service they should be delivering

People take a very process-based approach to questions about ‘what the police are for’ – i.e. they are less exercised about the outcomes police might achieve than the processes through which policing is conducted

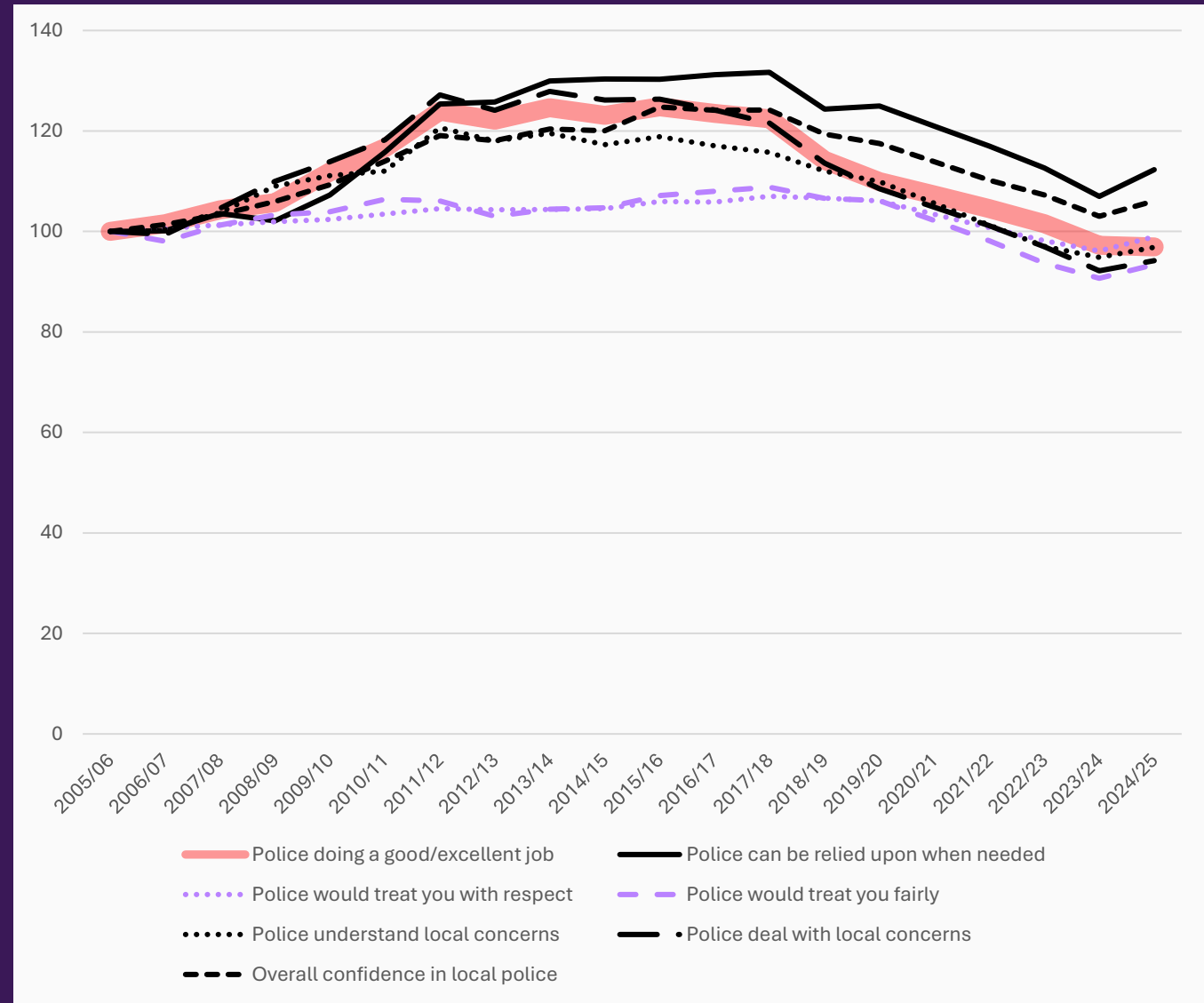
Few people think police are meeting all, or indeed many, of the standards developed during by the focus group

Police officers tend to be viewed more positively than police organisations

People value elements of police work that do not align well with dominant discourse and debate (they want presence, visibility, immediate response, interim solutions)

Longer term trend

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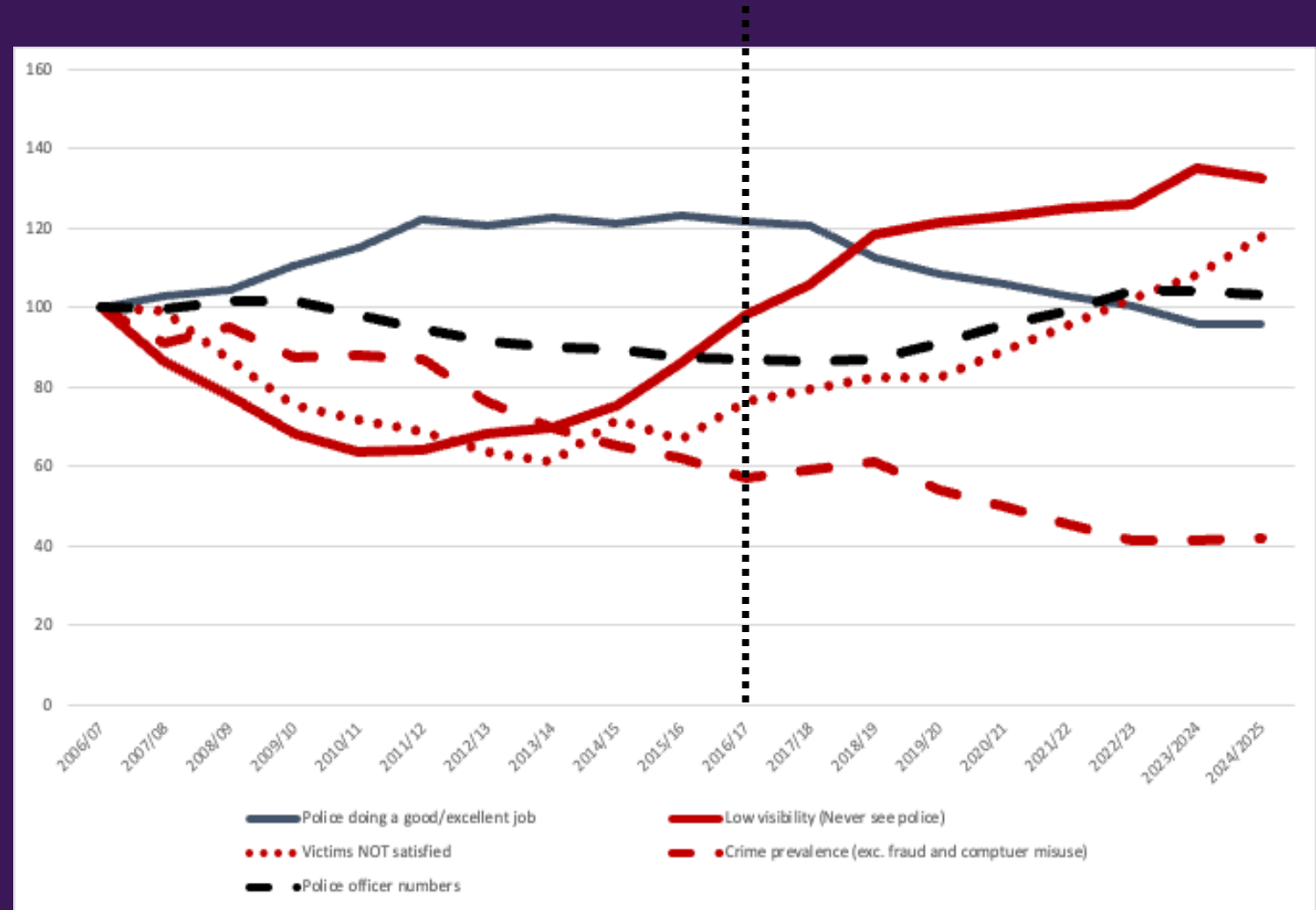


Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales

What changed?

By the mid 2010s, victim satisfaction was getting worse, the % of people saying they never see police was rising, and officer numbers were falling – although levels of victimization continued their long-term decline

This set of conditions may have set the scene or even ‘primed’ for what happened from 2017/18 onwards



Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales and others

What is to be done?

Internal issues – as identified by Casey and many others – clearly have to be fixed (or at least significant progress made). But we also need to consider:

1. The organization, not the individual
2. What people actually say they want, not what policing *thinks* they want
3. Don't panic!

This is an organizational challenge

The counterpart/point to 'Casey et al' is that people seem to think that the biggest failings in policing are the organizational, not the individual, level:

- Withdrawal of neighbourhood policing
- Closing stations
- General 'invisibility'
- (Excessively) automated processes
- Focusing away from the crimes that affect most people

There is a need to consider much more carefully how organizational practices and policies affect public confidence. This includes those instigated by non-police actors and agencies – including government

Expectations vs delivery

The public are saying very clearly what they want from policing

Yet for the last decade they've essentially been told they can't have it.

- This is changing, but will there be follow through on current plans? Can there be, given resource and other constraints?
- On the other hand, public expectations can seem insatiable – but people are also pretty realistic. There should be a way of meeting halfway
- Much of this comes down to how important we think 'trust-and-confidence' really is