

**INFORMAL POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 25 JUNE 2020**

**OPCC RESPONSE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

**REPORT BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

*To brief Members on the OPCC response to the global Coronavirus pandemic, including maintaining business as usual activities whilst operating remotely during the 'lockdown' period.*

**1. PHASE ONE: INITIAL FORCE AND OPCC RESPONSE**

- 1.1 The Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) was first discussed by OPCC and Dorset Police leadership in the days following the publication of the Government's 'Coronavirus Action Plan' on 3 March 2020. At the time the total number of cases in the UK was 39, although Public Health England had issued guidance to expect widespread infection "fairly soon".
- 1.2 On 9 March, the Chief Constable informed OPCC that he had taken the decision to 'stand up' a Gold response, under the command of T/ACC Mark Callaghan. Silver groups were to be put in place both in Dorset Police, and across the alliance, to ensure alignment of operations.
- 1.3 On 13 March, the Government made the decision to postpone the PCC elections by one year. OPCC immediately ceased its transition planning work, and refocused on providing support to the Force's emerging response – which included a reduced service in some departments, notably communications.
- 1.4 On 16 March, OPCC SMT was provided with a formal update on Covid-19 by the Gold commander. The PCC had the opportunity to discuss a range of matters with the Chief Constable and provided input on the following matters – community impact assessment, resource contingency planning, staff protection/PPE, and sickness absence management.
- 1.5 On 21 March, the Force began the production of a daily 'executive briefing' - covering day-by-day staffing availability; daily performance (including metrics on numbers of incidents); local incidents of note; high priority areas (vulnerability, domestic abuse, etc), fixed penalty notices, and the impact on force command centre and custody. This document, provided to both Force and OPCC leadership, and allowed the PCC to effectively question and challenge the Chief Constable on the Force's response. To facilitate this a tri-weekly call was set up between the Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable, PCC and Chief Executive.
- 1.6 Over the next few days, the Chief Executive stood up an OPCC 'cell' to dovetail with the Force's response, and better enable OPCC staff to align themselves with the Force's emerging Gold structure. It was also separately agreed that the PCC would take the lead on briefing the county's political leadership, namely MPs, local authority leaders and the Police and Crime Panel chair and vice-chair.

## 2. PHASE TWO: BUSINESS AS USUAL

2.1 By the beginning of April, the initial governance response has been superseded by the extraordinary Gold structures, which were now well embedded and operating effectively. With this the Force and OPCC had returned to a business as usual state, with OPCC providing oversight and scrutiny of the Force's response through not only the usual strategic Force Boards, but also the new Gold structure, all of which continued virtually throughout lockdown.

2.2 During lockdown, OPCC (represented by the PCC, Chief Executive - CX, Chief Finance Officer - CFO, Director of Operations – DoO, and OPCC managers) continued to have oversight of Force activity through attendance at the usual strategic Boards, all which continued to meet remotely and cover the usual business:

- Joint Leadership Board (all SMT) – joint executive decision-making
- Resource Control Board (PCC, CX, CFO) – finances
- Strategic Performance Board (CX) – performance
- Legitimacy Board (DoO) – fairness and respect
- PRISM Board (CX) – change and transformation (ICT and technology)
- Strategic Estates Board (DoO) – estates and strategic capital assets
- Uplift Board (CX) – management of the police uplift programme
- Innovation Board (CX) – manages joint innovation fund
- Dorset Criminal Justice Board (PCC) – wider CJS including victims, offenders and courts

2.3 In addition to the usual strategic Boards, a range of groups, or 'cells', were enabled by the Local Resilience Forum, by Dorset Police, and by partner agencies solely as a response to Covid-19. OPCC attended the following 'cells':

- Strategic Coordinating Group (CX) – overall multi-agency lead for pan-Dorset response
- Recovery Cell (DoO) – Force recovery
- Comms Cell (OPCC manager) – Alliance communications (closed end May)
- HR Cell (OPCC manager) – Alliance HR policy and process (closed end May)
- Covid-19 Wessex Co-ordinating Group (OPCC manager) – DCJB business
- Covid-19 Ethics Committee (OPCC mngr.) – Alliance 'ethical dilemmas' (closed mid-May)

2.4 To support good governance and the effective flow of information between the local, regional and national structures, a number of Covid-19 specific calls were initiated. The following are all OPCC-led, a similar structure was also set up by Dorset Police, and OPCC was also constantly briefed on those matters via the executive briefing call:

- Executive briefing call – thrice weekly call between PCC, Chief Constable (CC), Deputy Chief Constable (DCC) and CX
- Ministerial call – weekly call between Policing Minister and all PCCs
- Regional PCC call – weekly call between all five south west PCCs
- Regional CX call – weekly call between all five south west CXs
- MPs and Leaders call – weekly call between MPs and local authority leaders, hosted by PCC, supported by CC, DCC, and CX
- PCP SMT call – monthly call between PCP chair and vice-chair, hosted by PCC, first supported by CC, DCC and CX; then by CX and DoO
- OPCC update email – (at least) weekly email from CX to OPCC cell (PCC, OPCC SMT and managers) highlighting relevant information from all Covid-19 meetings

2.5 Finally, pre-existing regional and national boards, meetings and calls also continued virtually throughout lockdown, and were enhanced by a number of Covid-19 specific structures, all of which allowed usual governance to be undertaken. It has been fair to say that during the period of lockdown, to date, the opportunity for OPCC to provide meaningful governance and scrutiny advice has been sufficient to allow for the usual level of assurance.

### **3. PHASE THREE: RECOVERY**

3.1 Towards the end of May, the various Covid-19 specific structures, were re-evaluated as business had reached a steady state in many instances. The Strategic Coordinating Group agreed to step-down from thrice weekly meetings to twice weekly on 27 May, and a new Dorset Police Gold structure was drawn up to be implemented from 1 June. This resulted in the closure of a number of Force cells, as noted in paragraph 2.3.

3.2 OPCC remains integrated with the Dorset Police recovery work, at both the Gold and Silver level, the Gold lead being ACC Julie Fielding. The high level deliverables for the recovery cell are in development, are supported through existing business change and learning and development departments, and are as follows:

- Restart - Business Plans
- Reset - New ways of working with our communities and partners
- Resilience and Wellbeing - Plan for next 12 to 18 months
- Covid-19 Safe – Provide a safe and compliant workplace

3.3 The cross-partnership recovery work is led by John Sellgren, Executive Director of Place for Dorset Council. The SCG is currently undertaking a mapping exercise to set out the range of pan-Dorset recovery and/or reset work underway, with a view towards potential rationalisation and optimisation. Once this work is completed, OPCC will connect with the most appropriate structure to ensure resilience throughout the county's partners in due course.

### **4. EMERGENCY FUNDING**

4.1 In March, local public services were asked to work at pace to provide initial cost estimates to their respective Government departments to inform the cross-Government discussions.

4.2 As a result of these representations, other public services, such as health, fire and local government benefitted from a range of emergency funding to continue service provision during lockdown. However, direct funding for this purpose was not made available to police forces, and instead they received 'repurposed' and 'flexible' reallocation of existing funds.

4.3 For policing, HM Treasury allowed flexibility on half of the £168m ringfenced grant for the Police Uplift Programme (PUP) to help meet forces' cashflow pressures. Specifically allowing forces, from June, to draw down their allocations on a monthly basis to meet a proportion of additional Covid-19 related spending as well as officer recruitment. This meant that whilst forces were able to smooth any cashflow issues arising due to Covid-19 delivery, costs against the purpose of the fund – managing and supporting the PUP – would have to be deprioritised.

4.4 At the same time, early payment of the previously agreed £143m pensions grant recognising the additional burden on forces following on from the national pay award, was agreed. Again, this was previously announced money, the early award of which helped cashflow issues, but did not address the matter of additional Covid-19 costs.

- 4.5 On being questioned about this arrangement by PCCs, the Policing Minister confirmed that £84m figure (50% of the £168m PUP grant) was identified to help with cashflow. The extra costs incurred by policing remained part of a separate conversation with HM Treasury which was still ongoing and which APCC and NPCC were a part of. The Policing Minister also noted that it was anticipated that PCCs would maintain their recruitment plans against the PUP.
- 4.6 APCC and NPCC agreed a set of common principles to help frame the purpose of this exercise and inform the collective decision-making processes. Forces and OPCCs provided detailed spreadsheets for April and May to HO to help build the overall case for policing's future funding needs and to provide clear evidence for the Government's overall financial strategy to deal with the impacts of Covid-19. These returns included details on: workforce, IT, fleet, estates, income generation and specialist equipment.
- 4.7 The current position is that PCCs and Chief Constables have received verbal confirmation that all relevant Covid-19 spend (notably on PPE) and income lost due to reduced operations during lockdown, will be fully reimbursed by Government. This position has yet to be ratified in writing, nor has the mechanism of this reimbursement been made clear.

## **5. EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSIONING: SAFER DORSET FUND**

- 5.1 In mid-April, the PCC decided to launch an extraordinary funding scheme to support charities affected by the Covid-19. Focusing specifically on victims and offenders charities, OPCC delivered this within two weeks of decision by extending the existing Safer Dorset Fund scheme, and liaising with existing relevant suppliers.
- 5.2 A flexible budget of £50,000 to £75,000 was agreed by the PCC, to be taken from the commissioning reserve that the PCC was initially expecting to leave for an incoming PCC following on from the (now postponed) May 2020 election.
- 5.3 The funding was to be used either as an emergency stop-gap for charities struggling financially due to the effects of Covid-19, for help with the emergence of new issues due to Covid-19 and social isolation measures, or for issues which would arise as the lockdown measures eased.
- 5.4 A total of 23 funding requests were received, two did not meet the funding criteria, and the remaining 21 were agreed. In order to maximise the effect of this funding, eight bids received the full funding request, and 13 received partial funding. A total of £65,558 was awarded.
- 5.5 The full details of this fund will be reported to the Police and Crime Panel in due course.

## **6. EXTRAORDINARY SCRUTINY: FIXED PENALTY NOTICES**

- 6.1 In early May, to provide further assurance to the PCC and the public that Dorset Police were using Covid-19 powers legally, appropriately and proportionately an extraordinary scrutiny process was undertaken by the Director of Operations.
- 6.2 Twelve cases were selected at random, which relate to a total of 16 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued between 3 and 21 April 2020. Force records were examined, with additional questions posed to the Force's Out of Court Disposal (OoCD) Manager, where required.
- 6.3 Using a similar process to the PCC's OoCD Scrutiny Panel, the DoO concluded that 14 of the 16 FPNs had been issued appropriately. On the single occasion in which a clear mistake had been made this had been correctly identified and rectified by the Force's own processes, which is reassuring. The other case is subjective and will be further debated by the aforementioned OoCD Scrutiny Panel. It is important to note that ACRO Criminal Records Office provide an additional level of quality assurance and return FPNs with identified errors.

- 6.4 Otherwise, the dip sample would suggest that a disproportionate number of young men were breaching the regulations. There was also evidence to suggest a disproportionate number of people who self-identified as White Other were being issued FPNs.
- 6.5 The Force had already considered ways in which additional messaging could be targeted to ensure compliance from young men and to make sure that the key points are translated into other languages. That decision is supported by the findings of this scrutiny process. Otherwise, the Force's data appears to be closely aligned to the national data reported by ACRO.
- 6.6 The Force has publically stated that officers have attempted to engage and educate members of the public before issuing enforcement action and the scrutinised FPNs demonstrate this approach had been adopted.
- 6.7 This scrutiny process considered the early stages of a new process, undertaken in unusual times, and the overall quality of the decision-making and records reviewed by OPCC was high. The PCC was briefed on these findings and was assured that the Force are using the Covid-19 powers legally, appropriately and proportionately.

## **7. EXTRAORDINARY PUBLIC CONSULTATION: POLICE USE OF POWERS**

- 7.1 In April, both alliance forces agreed to obtain a 'temperature check' of how each force is perceived by the public in relation to some key measures. This would allow more timely performance monitoring to the insight obtained from the Crime Survey for England & Wales which has a time lag of over three months to report results and report only to force level.
- 7.2 Fundamentally, this would provide an insight into how the public feel that Dorset Police were enforcing the Covid-19 legislation.
- 7.3 The questions were based on existing questions from the Crime Survey for England & Wales, and the PCC's public perception surveys. Utilising pre-existing/previous questions provided the opportunity to make comparisons over time, and against a known baseline.
- 7.4 The detailed results of the survey are given in Appendix A and, in summary, the vast majority of respondents thought Dorset Police did an excellent or a good job, and that the Force's public messages during the Covid-19 lockdown were clear.
- 7.5 The survey ran from 7 to 13 May, and received 2,628 responses. The highlights are as follows:
- Two-thirds (66%) of respondents said Dorset Police's messages about policing the restrictions were clear, with 17% saying the messages had not been clear.
  - One-third (33%) said they fully supported the approach the Force had taken to dealing with the lockdown, with almost half (47%) saying they were supportive but that tougher action might have been taken.
  - More generally, almost two-thirds stated the Force was doing a good (38%) or excellent (25%) job.
  - Finally, 83% either strongly agreed or tended to agree that Dorset Police would treat them with respect if they contacted them for any reason.

## **8. SUMMARY**

- 8.1 The PCC and his team were able to undertake significant scrutiny of Dorset Police and partner agencies during the lockdown period. OPCC has fulfilled its usual duties, roles and responsibilities during the lockdown period. There has been a reduction in the level of activity to deliver the Police and Crime Plan, as a direct result of Dorset Police and partner activity being focused on managing areas arising from Covid-19, and OPCC has additionally taken on a number of different tasks to support Dorset Police operations.

**9. RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 Members are asked to note the report.

**SIMON BULLOCK  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Members' Enquiries to:

Simon Bullock, Chief Executive & Monitoring Officer (01202) 229084

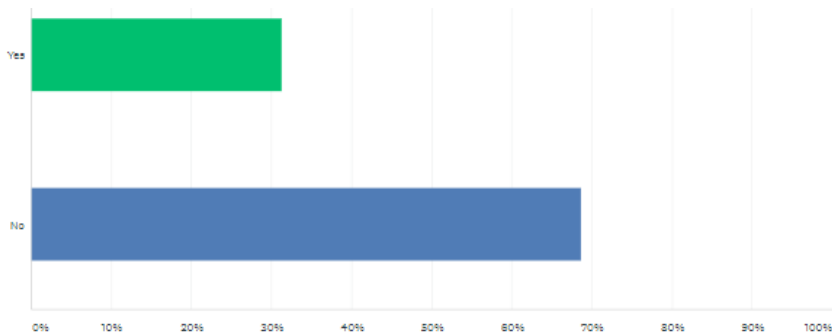
Media Enquiries to:

Susan Bloss, Head of Communications & Engagement (01202) 229095

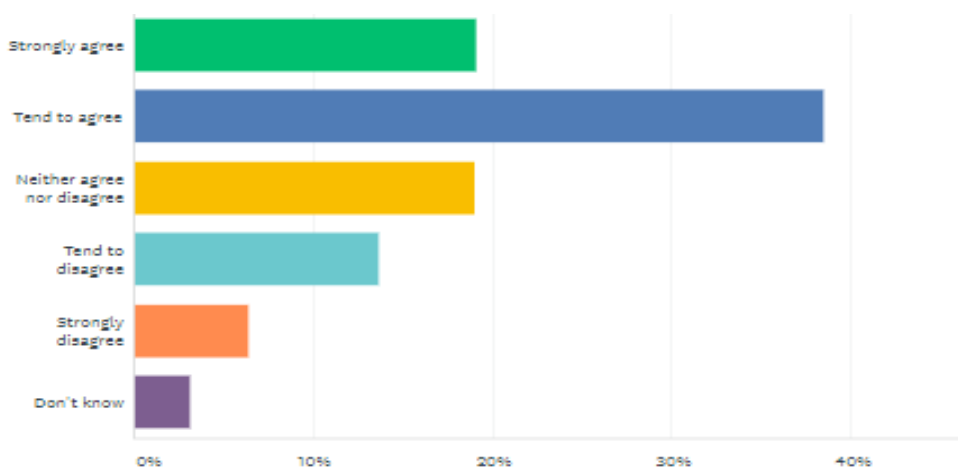
## Appendix A - Covid-19 Public Perception Survey – May 2020

Total Responses: 2628

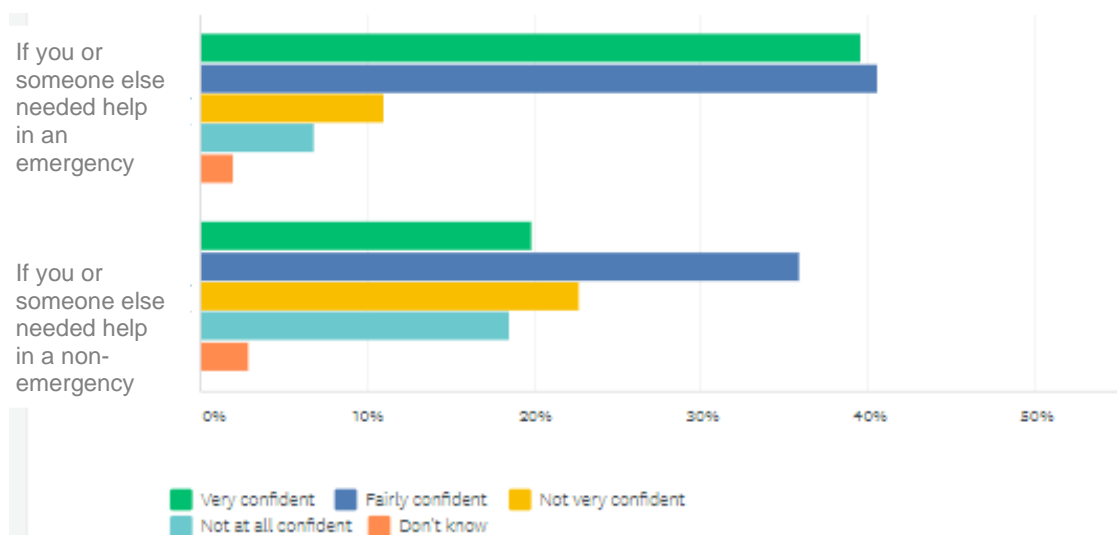
Q1. Have you, for any reason, contacted Dorset Police in the last 12 months?



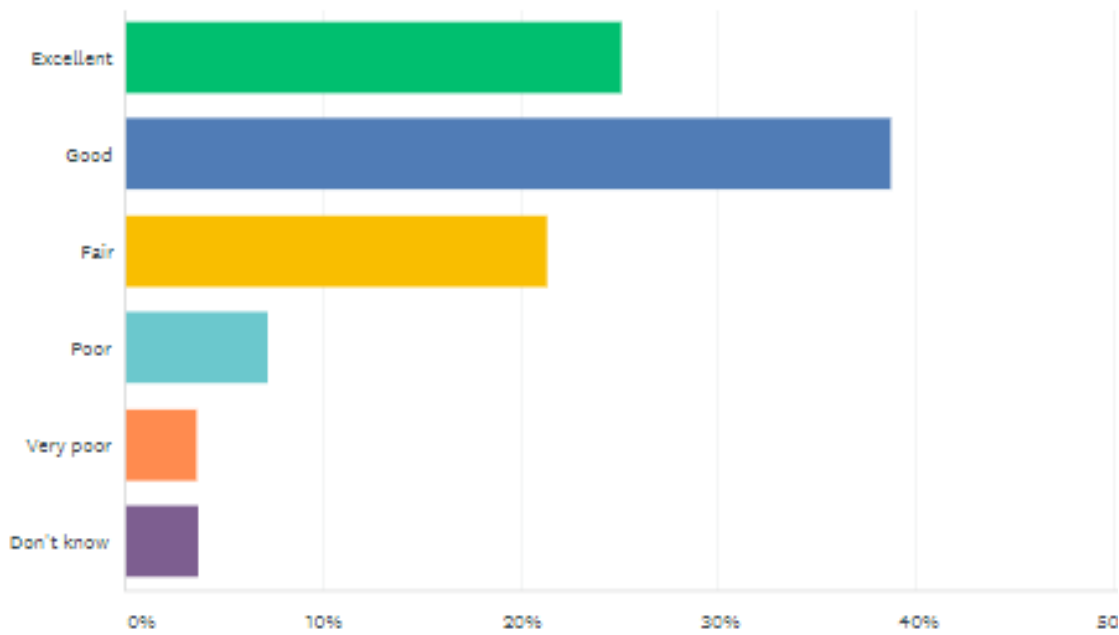
Q2. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Dorset Police can be relied upon to be there when you need them



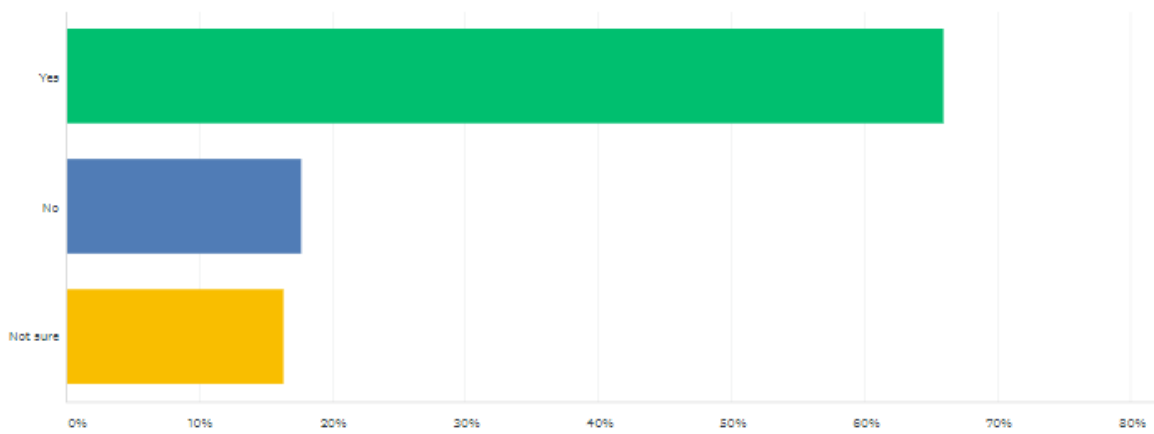
Q3. How confident are you, if at all, that you could easily speak to or access police services in your local area...



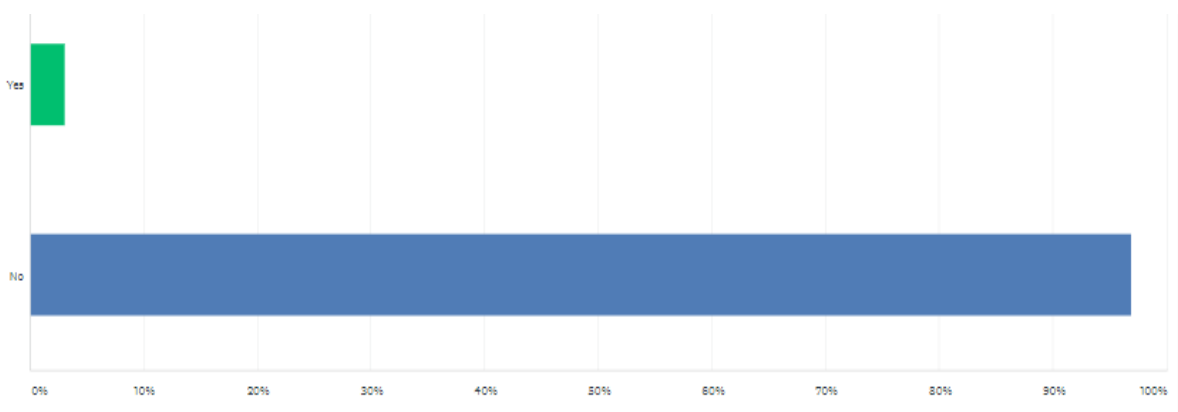
Q4. Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think Dorset Police are doing?



Q5. Do you think Dorset Police's messages to the public about their approach to policing Covid-19 restrictions have been clear?

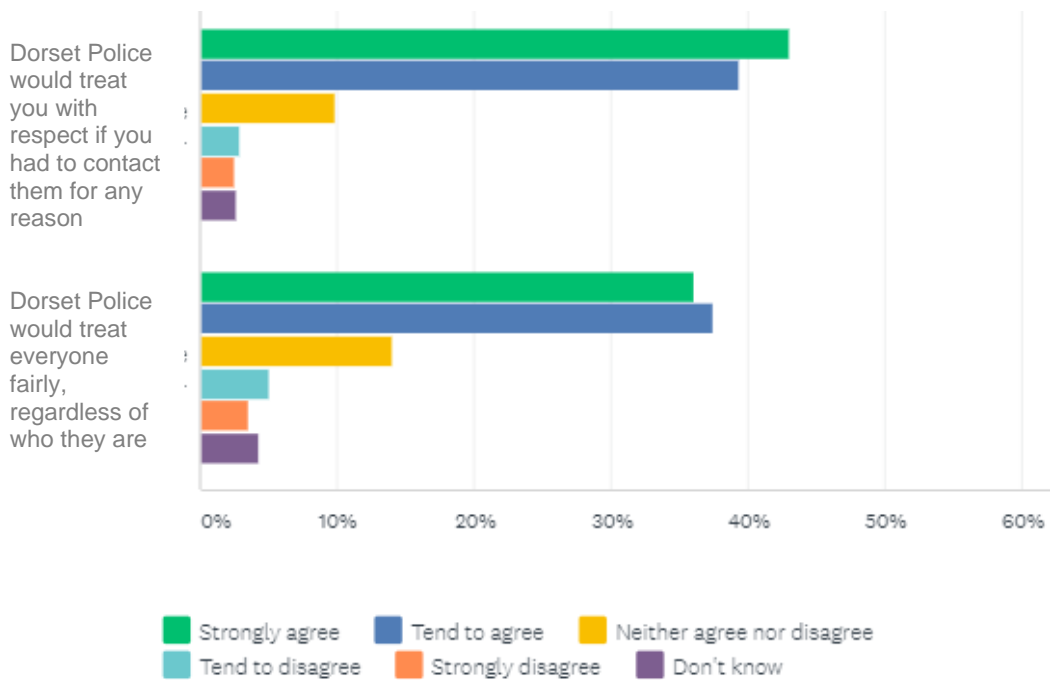


Q6. Have you been stopped during the Covid-19 lockdown?





**Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:**



**Q8. Which of the following statements is closest to your view of how Dorset Police are handling the Covid-19 lockdown?**

I fully support the approach taken by Dorset Police to enforce the Covid-19 lockdown

I support the approach taken by Dorset Police to enforce the Covid-19 lockdown, but in some cases they should take tougher action

I support the approach taken by Dorset Police to enforce the Covid-19 lockdown, but in some cases they are going too far

I do not support the approach taken by Dorset Police to enforce the Covid-19 lockdown, it is too heavy handed

Police should not have a role in enforcing the Covid-19 lockdown, compliance should be a matter for individuals

None of the above

Don't know / no opinion

