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# Community Confidence Action Research – Wick Final Report



December 2024



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# Acknowledgements

The Project Team would like to thank everyone who participated in this project in Wick by providing their views and attending the various community conversations. We would also like to thank the community organisations and local partners who gave time to support the project and promoted our work in the community. Your willingness to be involved and your honesty during this work has been integral in supporting the continuous improvement of policing in Scotland and helping Police Scotland provide a better service to local communities.



# Introduction and context

In 2021 the Chair of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) and the Deputy Chief Constable for Local Policing (Police Scotland) requested research be conducted exploring the relationship between deprivation and confidence in policing in selected areas of Scotland. This stemmed from national research that suggested areas experiencing deprivation are less likely to have confidence in policing.

Delivered by the SPA Strategy and Performance Team and Police Scotland's Partnerships, Prevention and Community Wellbeing Division (PPCW), Wick was selected using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and information from Police Scotland. The project was also keen to work in areas with local partners who were willing to engage in and support the work.

We used a wide definition of "deprivation" drawing from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. This index uses a range of data relating to income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing. Therefore, there can be many different reasons for an area to be identified as "deprived".

The project aimed to investigate confidence in policing in Wick and work with the community to develop initiatives to try to enhance it. A six-stage model was developed comprising of:



In total these stages took about 15 months to complete. During this time there have been increasing financial pressures on policing in Scotland, coupled with the rising cost of living and its effect on communities, as well as [decreases in confidence](#) in policing nationally. The wider picture on trust and confidence in policing will be explored as part of the final report for the whole project and not in this area report.

It is within this context that the [Community Confidence Action Research Project](#) delivered the aforementioned work in Wick. The following sections provide further detail on the activity undertaken as part of these six stages.

# About Wick

Wick is a coastal town in the Highland Council area of Scotland and is one of the main settlements in Caithness. It is an area within the North regional command of Police Scotland and is part of Highland and Islands Division. It is classified as a remote small town.

Wick comprises two intermediate datazones, Wick South and Wick North. These two intermediate datazones had a total estimated population of 6,578 ([NRS, 2021](#)) as of 2021.

Wick South is more deprived than Wick North according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020. Wick South has an estimated population of 3,420 and consists of six smaller datazones, three of which are among Scotland's most 15% deprived:

Data Zone	SIMD Percentile
S01010778	4
S01010777	14
S01010779	15
S01010780	38
S01010776	41
S01010781	64

Although Wick South has been the main focus for this piece of research, Wick and the broader Caithness area became the focus of the Project's research footprint, following early discussions with local people, who felt that many people across Caithness regularly visit and connect with Wick.

For clarity all socio-economic statistics in this report refer to the Intermediate Datazone of "Wick South". Police Scotland Crime and Incident data relates to Beat NJ002 which includes Wick but extends across the east coast of Caithness and incorporates John o'Groats.



Above – Location of Wick  
- [Google Maps, 2023](#)



Above – Map of Wick - [SIMD 2020](#)

# About Wick South

## Intermediate Datazone

In 2023 the majority of properties in Wick South were clustered in council tax bands A, B and C (87%), with 12% in D and E and 1% in F, G and H. In Highland Council there is a slightly more even spread of properties across the bands (bands A-C 55%, D-E 33%, and F-H 12%) ([Scottish Government](#)).

Notably in relation to Highland Council and Scotland as a whole, Wick South has:



Lower educational attainment  
([CPOP, 2022/23](#))



A higher proportion living within 500 meters of a derelict site  
([ScotPHO, 2022](#))



A higher rate of population income deprived  
([ScotPHO](#))



Lower life expectancy for males and females  
([ScotPHO](#))



A higher rate of early mortality  
([CPOP, 2022/23](#))



A higher percentage of those claiming out of work benefits  
([CPOP, 2022/23](#))



Higher rates of child poverty  
([CPOP, 2022/23](#))



A higher rate per 100,000 of Alcohol-Related hospital admissions  
([ScotPHO, 2022/23](#))

# About Wick Police Beat NJ002

## Crime Statistics for 2023

### Group 1: Non-Sexual Crimes of Violence

Violent crime in Wick has decreased slightly in the past year and is at its lowest level for the past 6 year. The rate is lower than both the Highland and national levels which have both seen increases in the volume of crime.

### Group 3: Acquisitive Crime

Acquisitive crime levels increased year on year post Covid and is at its highest level in the past 5 years within Wick during 2023. This again can be seen at the Highland and national levels which have both increased in 2023 and both remain at a higher rate than the level of crime in Wick.

### Group 5: Other (including drug related)

Drug related crime has reduced in the past couple of years and remains below the Highland and national averages for this crime type.

### Group 2: Sexual Crime

Recorded Sexual crime has decreased slightly in Wick in 2023 after seeing an increase during 2022. The level of crime does appear to fluctuate year on year and may be attributed to historical abuse allegations. Wick is also below the average for Highland Council but higher than the national average for this crime type.

### Group 4: Damage Related Crime

Damage related crime has decreased in 2023 within Wick whilst the Highland and national figures have both also shown a decrease.

### Group 6: Miscellaneous Offences

Miscellaneous crime and have increased in Wick during 2023 but remain lower than the Highland and national averages for this offence type.

### Group 7: Road Traffic

Traffic offences have increased in Wick during 2023 but remain lower than the Highland and national averages.

Source: Police Scotland  
Management Information

# About Wick – Call Demand Data

Encouragingly, the level of calls have predominantly reduced to Wick in 2023.

## Anti-Social Behaviour

Antisocial behaviour calls have reduced with the lowest level of calls in the past few years with a 29% decrease compared to the 2022 figure. The 2023 level is below the local authority and national rate for antisocial behaviour.

## Personal Safety

There has also been a decrease in drug related deaths recorded within Wick in 2023. There were also no suicides recorded by police in the area in 2023.

## Crime

Crime related calls have also fallen and are lower than both Highland and national levels.

## Public Welfare

Public welfare calls have remained low and are lower than the Highland level and now similar to the national level.

## Traffic

Traffic related calls remain consistently lower in Wick compared to the Highland and national level.

Source: Police Scotland  
Management Information

# 1. Initial Engagement

Engagement with community organisations started in Wick in March 2023.

After contacting Highland Local Authority, local community group leads helped the project team engage with the wider community in the area.

These contacts were essential to the successful running of the project in Wick through helping share information with the community, advising on the design of the project surveys and facilitating our community conversations.





# 2. Community Confidence Survey

## Community Confidence Survey

A survey was designed to gather views on the community and policing in Wick. Hosted on the Scottish Police Authority's Citizen Space the survey contained 15 questions and ran from 11<sup>th</sup> April to 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. Questions were made available online via social media channels and on paper via community organisations with a freepost envelope to the SPA office for returns. There was also the option to request another format if required. In total 139 responses were received.

The findings were published in [June 2023](#) and key findings included:

- Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Wick had a sense of community. The impacts of deprivation, however, are felt in the town, and people completing the survey perceived that there was a rise in antisocial behaviour and drug use on the area.
- Regarding confidence and trust in policing, the highest proportion of respondents expressed low levels of confidence and trust in the police in relation to a range of policing activities.
- Focusing on police performance, the highest proportion of respondents thought that 'In general' the police are doing 'A somewhat poor or very poor' across various scenarios. The results were similar to SPA national polling conducted in Jan/Feb 2023 and July/August 2023.
- The majority of respondents had not noticed any change in local policing engagement in the last 6 months, nor had their view on local policing changed in the same timeframe.
- Many responses reflected that they feel there is a lack of visible policing within the area. They also noted that police could participate more in community events, and that local policing should serve in a way that is more community embedded and responsive to the community's unique needs.



# 3. Community Conversations

On [12<sup>th</sup> July 2023](#) the SPA and Police Scotland held an engagement session with community groups and members of the public in Wick.

The day focused on the findings of the Community Confidence Survey and aimed to gain insights on how people felt policing in Wick could be enhanced via table/room discussions of the following questions:

- Do you recognise Wick in these findings and in what ways?
- Is there anything you feel is missing or would want to add?
- What do you think could enhance confidence in policing in Wick?

There were approximately 10 attendees over the day including council officers, locally elected members, community group leaders and members of the public.

This was followed up with direct engagement with community groups in the area and their members asking what they felt impacted confidence in policing and how they felt it could be enhanced.

The key themes for policing that emerged from these conversations were:

- **Communication and Presence** e.g. more localised social media, paper and digital newsletters, police attendance at community events/festivals, drop in sessions, physically pop-up stalls/marquees etc.
- **Accessibility and Contact** e.g. greater visibility of police in the community, proactively engaging with people, improved reliability of opening hours for the front counter enquiry desk at Wick police station.
- **Improved resourcing** e.g. doing more to recruit and retain local people to join the police to strengthen relationships between the local police and the local community and maintain continuity.

Those who provided feedback generally found the event valuable and it was great to see police and partners taking on board community feedback to enhance service delivery.

On 30 August 2023 the SPA and Police Scotland held three one-hour sessions across the day to feedback on the initiatives developed in response to the engagement with the community. In total there was about 15 attendees and those who attended were supportive about the 'Tests of Change' that had been proposed.

# 4. Initiative Implementation

This section outlines small-scale initiatives implemented by local policing and PPCW based on community feedback.

## Improved Visibility and Accessibility

- Better visibility and community engagement when Policing planned events in the community, i.e the use of a marked up Gazebo
- Holding “Coffee with a Cop” sessions
- Each Community Council to have a named Liaison officer



# 4. Initiative Implementation

## Retention of Experienced Officers

- Recruitment Events to be held locally
- Approval has been given for promising Caithness posts to those who want to work and live in Caithness. This will have long term effect of reducing the high turnover of Officers in Caithness



# 4. Initiative Implementation

## Improved Communication

- Sharing good news stories
- Local officers to be trained to use the Police Scotland Highland & Islands Social Media pages
- Regular Newsletter to be prepared and distributed to the public through various channels
- Creation of a presentation giving an overview of what policing looks like in 2023.



# 5. Evaluation

To evaluate the initiatives the following approach was taken:

- A survey conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, mirroring one conducted in April and May 2023;
- Conversations with community representatives.

The survey contained 15 questions and ran from [4<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023](#).

It should be noted that due to small sample sizes and the non-representative nature of the samples the findings of these surveys cannot be generalised to the entire Wick/Caithness population and should be considered indicative only.

## Key findings - Survey

- Over half of respondents were unaware of any of the initiatives undertaken by local policing. Respondents felt that the police need to promote/advertise their efforts more effectively.
- Respondents reported having lower levels of trust and confidence in the police compared with 7-8 months earlier.
- Awareness of initiatives seems to have been a key determinant: those who were aware of at least one of the initiatives had higher levels of trust and confidence in the police than those who were not aware.
- People continue to say that Wick has a strong sense of community, however the proportion saying this has fallen.
- Issues raised about Wick reference ongoing antisocial behaviour matters that do not appear to be being tackled, a town centre increasingly feeling neglected and abandoned, a perceived increase in drug-dealing, and a sense that centralisation of the police service and other public services is leading to poorer levels of service.

# 5. Evaluation

## Community Reflections

- When asked about the research project and their experience of participating, people said that they found the conversational sessions useful and appreciated that time was being taken to organise meaningful conversations rather than simply seeking ill-prepared and off-the-cuff inputs.
- Participants had commented about the low level of turn-out for events relative to the number of people completing surveys online and suggested that more thought is given to running conversational events outside of the working day. Participants welcomed the second set of community conversations extending into the early evening and hosting multiple sessions.
- In terms of timeframes some people highlighted that three months is perhaps not enough time for the test of change to be noticed by people, and therefore it is too early to say whether it could help to improve confidence.
- Overall people reported that it was good to see the police listening and responding to community needs.



# 6. Project Closure and Next Steps

This publication marks the formal closure of the Community Confidence Action Research Project activity in Wick.

Regarding the future of the initiatives implemented by local policing in Wick, these will continue where possible.

At a future date, the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland Partnerships, Prevention and Community Wellbeing Division will return to Wick to review if there are any longer-term impacts of this work in the community.

