

The British Transport Police Leaving Home project

The impact of the transfer of British Transport Police (BTP) D Division into Police Scotland on officers and staff.

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Introduction

In November 2014 the Smith Commission recommended that the functions of the BTP in Scotland should be a devolved matter. Responsibility for railway policing in Scotland subsequently passed from the British Transport Police Authority (BTPA) to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) under the Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017. At the time of writing it is expected that railway policing in Scotland will transfer to Police Scotland in April 2019.

This research project investigates the impact of integration on BTP officers and staff in Scotland, exploring issues of organisational identity, community, and attachment. The project also amplifies the voices of BTP officers and staff during a contested period of organisational change. This academic research is independent and does not rely on any funding.ⁱ Assistance, however, was provided by the BTP Federation in relation to accessing participants. The research has full ethical approval from the University of the West of Scotland.

The findings presented in this briefing are based on responses to an online survey of BTP officers and staff submitted between 6 and 16 February 2018 (see [Methodology](#) for further details). Participants answered a series of multiple-choice questions about their background, service history and experience, and views on the BTP. Additionally, participants were asked, using open-ended questions, for their views on integration, including the advantages and disadvantages for themselves, their colleagues, the BTP/A (BTP Authority), and Police Scotland. 182 officers, staff and special constables took part in the survey, with an overall response rate of 66%. Please note that the briefing provides headline findings only, with a full report to be published in spring/summer 2018.

Summary

The responses to the online survey demonstrated a deep strain of scepticism, cynicism and opposition towards the integration of BTP functions into devolved policing structures. Over four-fifths (83%) of respondents stated that they were either very unsupportive or unsupportive of integration. Many respondents viewed the merger as politically or ideologically motivated, citing the lack of a robust business case as evidence.

Participants did, however, identify some benefits to integration. For example, some cited improved access to Police Scotland resources as an advantage, which is consistent with the intended policy benefits of integration set out by Scottish Government. Respondents also suggested that integration could provide greater employment and development opportunities, especially for younger colleagues or those with limited service; although some cautioned that that this might lead to less favourable terms and conditions. Some respondents thought that Police Scotland could gain financially from the merger, while others viewed integration as a financial burden for Scotland's national police service.

'I am proud to belong to British Transport Police and have been for over 30 years or I would not have stayed. It is being destroyed for political reasons. I am happy with my job and the way I am treated. It is an infuriating turn of events.'

'It is this political motivation which has angered officers most rather than any other issue.'

In terms of disadvantages it was noted that Police Scotland was already under financial and political pressure, and that integration was likely to exacerbate such matters. Participants also raised operational issues, for

instance differences in crime recording between BTP and Police Scotland, and a lack of joint-up systems and integrated IT within Police Scotland.

Respondents saw very few advantages for the BTP/A or railway policing (most saw none) and a range of disadvantages. These included a loss of seamless border policing, a greater risk of delays, and financial costs. Some suggested that integration could precipitate the wider break-up of the BTP.

In relation to BTP officers and staff the findings raise questions about a failure to secure buy-in and trust from those whose skills and experience will be fundamental to integration. These observations are underscored by the fact that most respondents expressed pride in working for the BTP and many were broadly positive about their current working relationships.

More broadly, the findings suggest that any gains in Scotland could be secured at the expense of railway policing across the UK, and at a significant personal and professional cost to many BTP officers and staff in Scotland.

In addition to the practical challenges, it is arguably this perceived unfairness that continues to be damaging in relation to policy legitimacy and helps to explain the strength of negative feeling towards the merger.

Looking ahead, the effective integration of railway policing in Scotland will depend on support and consensus from BTP Scotland officers and staff, which at the time of writing is yet to be secured. The findings in this briefing show the need for improved communication, a much better understanding of how the merger is affecting people's professional and personal lives, and an appreciation of how BTP officers and staff feel about their current organisational identity, roles and working relationships.

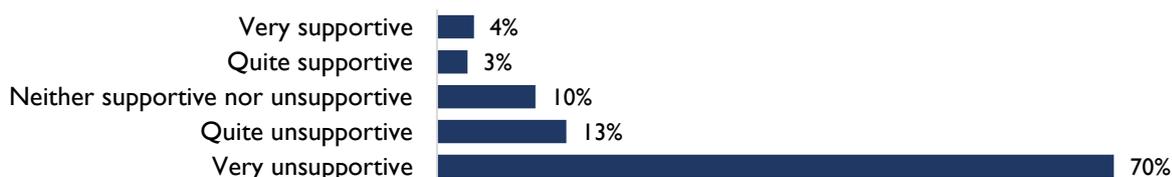
'The merger provides an additional strain on an already stretched service and more transformation at an already turbulent time within [Police Scotland's] short history.'

'I find it incredible that a merger of this size has been allowed to progress without a formal business case outlining the benefits and risks.'

Key findings

Most respondents did not support integration. Figure 1 shows that over eight in ten (83%) were very or quite unsupportive, compared to 7% who were very or quite supportive. Explanatory factors included ongoing uncertainty over terms, conditions and pensions, as well as stress and low morale related to the merger.

Figure 1. How supportive of the merger are you?



Base: 159

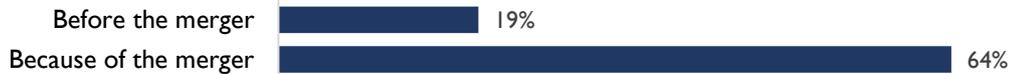
'The stress levels put upon officers involved in this merger are unbelievable and should never have been allowed to happen.'

'Nobody wants to be here just now... We don't know what is happening, what we are keeping, what we are losing, where we will be working, who will be in charge of us, what we will be doing, are our pensions safe, can we still retire [as] we were entitled to when we signed up for the BTP? We know nothing.'

'The uncertainty has left me feeling anxious and unprepared for my future.'

Figure 2 below shows that nearly two thirds (64%) had given serious consideration to leaving policing because of the merger, compared to 19% before the merger. Those most likely to have given consideration to leaving were mid-career, with around 11 to 15 years' service (based on the age-group categories shown in Table 5).

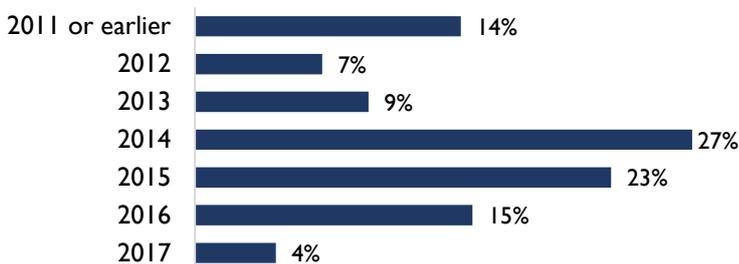
Figure 2. Have you given serious thought to leaving policing?



Bases: (before merger) 147 (because of merger) 158. Excludes not applicable.

Figure 3 shows when respondents first became aware the BTP D Division might merge with Police Scotland (or a future single service), with nearly a third (30%) aware of potential change prior to 2013 or earlier.

Figure 3. Looking back, when did you first become aware (either officially or unofficially) that BTP D Division might merge with Police Scotland?



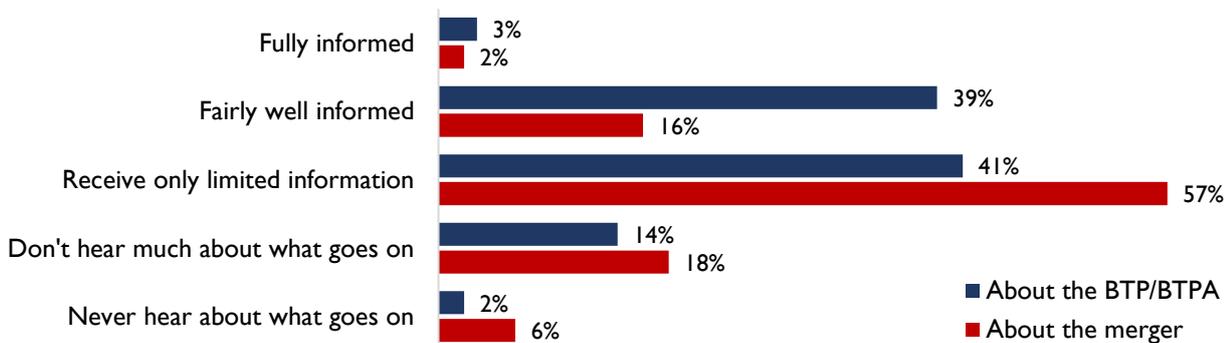
Base: 159. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

'I have always enjoyed and taken pride in working for BTP but I am unwilling to risk the uncertainty around my future pension by staying in policing post-merger.'

'Colleagues are uncertain about their future and rightly concerned. We all have family as well and it is difficult to try and plan ahead when we have no guarantees about the future.'

Respondents were asked about communication about the merger, and for comparison, about communication within the BTP/A more generally. Figure 4 shows that a very small proportion felt that they were 'fully informed' about the merger, and about BTP/A more generally, at 2% and 3% respectively. However, two fifths (39%) said they were 'fairly well informed' about the BTP/A, around double the proportion that felt 'fairly well informed' about the merger (16%).

Figure 4. How well informed do you feel about the merger, and about the BTP/A? (%)



Base: (About the BTP/A) 167 (About the merger) 158. Proportions include 'Don't know/no opinion. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

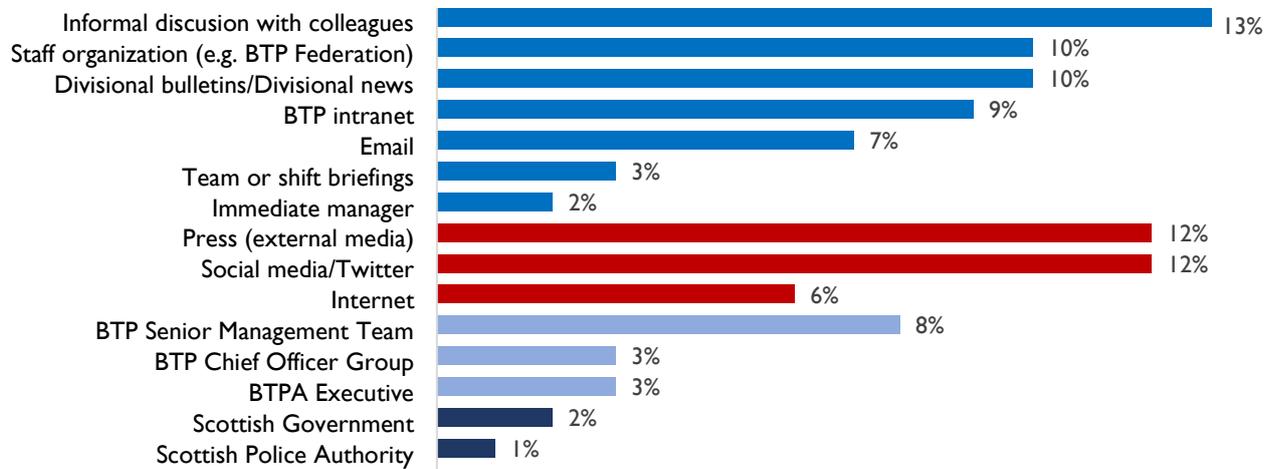
Slow decision-making was cited as one explanation for the limited communication to date. Figure 5 (below) shows that most information and communication reached officers and staff through informal discussion with colleagues (13%), the press and social media (12% respectively), the BTP Federation or staff organisation (10%), and Divisional Bulletins (10%).

At the other end of the scale, communication from the BTP Chief Officer Group and BTPA Executive was very low (3% respectively), while the Scottish Government and the SPA almost negligible at 2% and 1% respectively.

'The communication throughout has been woefully lacking. Two years of talks I am unsure what, if anything, has actually taking place.'

'The vacuum of information is filled with rumour and hyperbole which tends to affect morale.'

Figure 5. Where have you received most information about the merger from? (%)



Base: 159. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

To better understand the impact of integration, respondents were asked how they currently felt about working for the BTP/A, for example, about their commitment and working relationships. To provide a point of reference, questions were modelled on the 2015 Police Scotland staff survey.

The results suggest a tension between respondent's sense of organisational attachment, which was generally (but not invariably) strong; and the fact that this was to be terminated by dint of integration. As one participant put it, 'the merger is forcing me to work for an organisation I did not chose', while another stated, 'I will be moved out of the Force I want to be with.' While many respondents directed their frustration at the Scottish Government, a few also felt let down by the BTP Executive.

Several participants viewed integration as precipitating the break-up of the BTP: 'the beginning of the end of the remainder of BTP' and 'the end of an era'.

Tables 1 to 4 (below) show that many officers and staff hold broadly positive attitudes towards their current roles. These findings are important because they underscore the sense of loss associated with integration. As one participant put it, 'I enjoy my work immensely and it is going to be taken from us'.

Table 1 shows that 82% said that they were proud to work for the BTP/A, while 72% identified with the organisation, describing the BTP/A as 'we' rather than 'they'. Further down, 45% stated that they were inspired to do their best.

'I have worked in many different places over the years and this is by far the best bunch of people I have ever worked with. Being such a small force means that everyone either knows you or knows your name. Everyone is very supportive and we all help one another out. I just know that that feeling - almost like being part of an extensive family - will be lost.'

'A working force ripped apart, a functioning force ripped apart, good working practices ripped apart. Working IT systems ripped apart, working with fellow colleagues in England ripped apart, the understanding of the railway ripped apart.'

Table 1. Views on working for the BTP/A	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I feel proud to work for BTP/BTPA	82%	10%	8%
When I talk about BTP/BTPA I say 'we' rather than 'they'	72%	11%	16%
I would recommend BTP/BTPA as a good place to work	60%	24%	17%
BTP/BTPA inspires me to do the best in my job	45%	33%	22%

Bases: (proud) 159 ('we' rather than 'they') 160 (recommend as a place to work) 157 (inspires me) 158. Proportions include 'don't know/no response'. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Table 2 shows that respondents were generally positive about their current job: 84% agreed that people in their team worked well together, and over three quarters (77%) felt a sense of personal achievement. However, less than half (47%) felt that they received recognition for good work.

Table 2. How BTP officers and staff felt about their job	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
My team works well together to improve the services we provide	84%	11%	3%
I have the opportunity to use my initiative	79%	11%	9%
My work gives me a sense of personal achievement	77%	12%	10%
I understand the contribution I make to BTP/BTPA in my role	75%	19%	9%
I am encouraged to contribute to decisions that affect my work	64%	19%	17%
I receive recognition for any good work that I do	47%	23%	30%

Bases: 159 to 164. Proportions include 'don't know/no response'.

Some described their frustration at limited promotion or development opportunities in the BTP. In this respect, many respondents thought that opportunities might be greater within Police Scotland, particularly for younger officers and/or those with less service. However, some cautioned that this could have a negative impact on current terms and conditions.

'I can see the advantages for officers, especially younger officers, in that there would be the scope for more varied roles and it might be easier for them to get promotion.'

Participants were generally positive about their current working relationships, which some felt would be undermined by the merger. Table 3 shows that 84% agreed that were treated with respect by colleagues, while 80% enjoyed positive relationships with peers and were treated respectfully by their line manager. Further down the scale, only 40% felt valued for their work contribution, while 38% thought that senior management actions were consistent with BTP/A values.

Table 3. Work relationships and inclusion	Agree or strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I feel I am treated with respect by my colleagues at work	84%	12%	4%
I enjoy strong, positive relationships with my peers at work	80%	14%	6%
I feel I am treated with respect by my immediate line manager	75%	11%	13%
I am treated fairly at work	69%	20%	11%
BTP/BTPA policies & practice support an inclusive workplace	59%	28%	11%
I feel I am valued for the work I contribute to BTP/BTPA	40%	32%	27%
Senior management actions are consistent with BTP/BTPA values	38%	36%	23%

Base: 156 to 162. Proportions include 'don't know/no response'.

Finally, Table 4 shows how BTP officers and staff felt about their line managers. Eight out of ten (82%) stated that they felt trusted to do their job, 78% thought their line manager acted in line with BTP/A values, and three quarters (76%) felt their line manager was supportive. Again, these broadly positive findings suggest a sense of organisational belonging or attachment; and by the same token, the potential loss associated with integration.

'My line manager and colleagues have a great team spirit, we all support each other and other colleagues in the BTP, we have a well-run department which we have all worked hard to achieve. I enjoy my work immensely and it is going to be taken from us.'

Table 4. Views on line managers	Always or usually applies	Sometimes applies	Rarely or never applies
Trusts me to do my job	81%	8%	8%
Acts in line with the values of the organisation	77%	11%	6%
Is supportive if I have a problem	75%	10%	11%
Supports me in my job	70%	17%	11%
Is open and honest	70%	12%	12%
Encourages us to work and regularly communicate as a team	65%	14%	17%
Recognises when I have done a good job	61%	17%	18%
Manages individual performance effectively	60%	16%	19%
Provides me with constructive feedback	57%	18%	21%

Base: 159 to 163. Proportions include 'don't know/no response'.

'We all choose to join BTP for a reason - we are all proud to serve the rail network. We may not cry out from the roofs what we are doing but we are a strong unit with experience that is not understood outwith the industry.'

'It quickly became very clear that dissolving BTP Scotland as opposed to devolving BTP Scotland was going to take place... With no career future in sight, I decided to leave, but long service, conscience and pride in what we have achieved so far means I will stay until the last day. Leaving the best crime and justice legacy of BTP Scotland is important to me. My name will be on it at handover.'

Methodology and research participants

The study used an academic online survey tool (esurv) and ran from 6 to 16 February 2018. Initial access to BTP Scotland police officers was arranged via the BTP Federation, with 'snowballing' to reach non-federated officers, civilian police staff, and special constables. 182 respondents took part with an overall response rate of 66% (for comparison, the BTP D Division employee survey had a 57% response rate and the Police Scotland 2015 staff survey had a 50% response rate). Respondents varied in role, rank, and had a wide range of specialisms. Around a quarter had line management responsibilities and a fifth had worked in other forces. Of those who stated their country of birth (166), 85% had Scottish nationality. Length of service ranged from 2 years or fewer, to 21 years or over. Tables 5 to 7 show statistics for length of service, role and location.

Table 5. Length of service	%	Table 6. Role	No. respondents	BTP Scotland resources	% BTP Scotland resources	Table 7. Location	%
0 to 2 years	17%	All officers	131	213	62%	East	21%
3 to 5 years	16%	Police Staff	28	38	74%	North	14%
6 to 10 years	15%	Special Constables	11	26	42%	Outer Glasgow	12%
11 to 15 years	20%	Not stated	12			Glasgow	46%
16 to 20 years	9%	Total	180	277	66%	Not stated	7%
21 years or over	16%	Source: HMICS (2017) Strategic overview of BTP in Scotland (Table 2)					
Not stated	5%						

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ⁱ Dr Murray's University of Edinburgh position was funded by an ESRC Outstanding Early Career Impact award.