# Beyond Measuring 'How Good a Job' Police Are Doing: The MPS Model of Confidence in Policing[1]

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**Abstract**   In England and Wales, the 'public confidence agenda' has enjoined the police service together with their key local partner, local authorities (Home Office, 2008). Yet before the police can consider this partnership to reduce crime and local disorder, they must know what people think about policing itself. This paper presents a model built around the question 'do police do a good job in your local area?', which serves as the foundation of the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) strategic direction for achieving local confidence. This model is derived from a multi-layered analysis of the MPS's local survey, the Public Attitude Survey. Four key elements—perceptions of police effectiveness, fairness of personal treatment, the level of police engagement with the community, and local people's concerns about local disorder—have strongly significant effects on 'overall' confidence. Taken together these four elements indicate that public confidence can be influenced by 'what police do'. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the model and how it can be used as a strategic guide for improvement.

## Introduction

There is a growing recognition that public trust and confidence is vital in two interrelated ways. Firstly, in a democratic society people expect, and have a right to expect, that the police will be trustworthy, competent and ethical, and focussed on the needs of local people. Secondly, there is a large body of evidence that suggests that people who have trust and confidence in the police, and who regard the police as legitimate, are more likely to be satisfied with individual encounters with officers, to defer to police authority, to come forward and offer information or assistance when needed, and perhaps more likely to obey the law (Bradford, 2009; Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Tyler and Fagan, 2008).

Ideas about the variegated nature of public opinion have heavily influenced government interest in citizen confidence in public services. In the realm of policing, US work consistently finds that opinions about, for example, the efficacy of the police in fighting crime are distinct from impressions of the fairness and transparency of officer's behaviour (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Reisig *et al.*, 2007). And wider views are equally relevant—people's

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concerns about crime, perceptions of low-level disorder in their area, and ideas about social cohesion all have significant impacts on people's opinions of the police (Girling *et al.*, 2000; Jackson and Bradford, 2009; Loader and Mulcahy, 2003). Broad social changes, such as the 'decline in deference' and increasing consumerism, are also likely to have had significant impacts on public confidence in policing (Jones and Newburn, 2002; Loader and Mulcahy, 2003; Reiner, 1992, 2000).

We describe here a model of public confidence in the local police derived from a multi-layered analysis of the PAS. Four key elements—perceptions of police effectiveness, fairness of personal treatment, the level of police engagement with the community, and local people's concerns about local disorder—have strongly significant effects on 'overall' confidence. Taken together these four elements indicate that public confidence can be influenced by 'what police do'. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of the model and how it can be used as a strategic guide for improvement.

## What influences people's perception about whether the police doing a good job?

Before April 2009, the headline measure of public confidence in policing was generated from responses to the British Crime Survey (BCS) question 'How good a job do you think the police in this area are doing'? This question is also included in local policing surveys such as the Metropolitan Police's Public Attitude Survey (PAS). As a 'headline' measure, the question condenses a range of opinions among the public about different aspects of police performance and the condition and nature of the local area in which people live.

Figure 1 below summarizes evidence from a range of sources on the factors that can influence perceptions of the local police (see, *inter alia*, Bradford *et al.*, 2009; Girling *et al.*, 2000; Innes, 2004a, 2004b; Jackson and Bradford, 2009; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Loader and Mulcahy, 2003; Tyler, 1990; Tyler

and Huo, 2002). It is of course not exhaustive of potentially important factors. Most notably it excludes deeper political and moral considerations that might predict variations in public support. It does, however, give a taste of the breadth of possible influences on confidence, ranging from concrete police actions and behaviours to what might be seen as more ephemeral concerns, for example people's understanding about social cohesion and worry about crime.

While all the factors shown in Figure 1 have been shown to be important in predicting overall confidence in the police, the extent to which they are realistically open to practical influence from the police varies. It is plainly possible for both individual officers and the organization as a whole to affect public impressions of effectiveness, engagement with the community and fairness of treatment in some way—for example during face to face encounters, via highly visible policing, arresting local offenders or through the nature and content of written communications to people living in a local area. But it is much less certain how perceptions of social cohesion or even fear of crime (notwithstanding 'reassurance policing'—see below) are amenable to police influence in the same way. In the light of this, the discussion below centres on identifying, and measuring, indicators of confidence in the police that are open, potentially, to such practical influence.

## The MPS model of confidence: deriving indicators of public opinions

The most common, and robust, way to measure general public opinions of institutions like the police is via sample surveys such as the BCS and PAS. These surveys commonly contain a range of questions about police activities, public opinions, and other concerns, which cover many of the elements shown in Figure 1. For example the PAS contains questions around the effectiveness of the police in fighting crime, providing patrols, policing events, responding to emergencies and supporting victims.
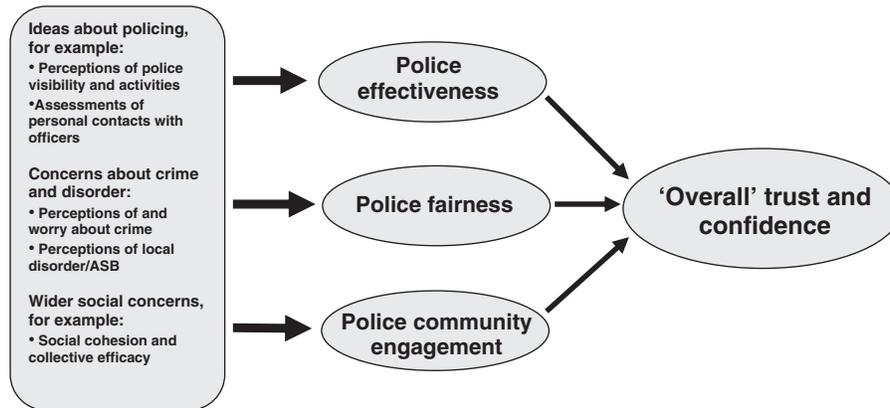
**Figure 1:** Conceptual map of public confidence in policing.

Such question sets are included in surveys primarily because there is business interest in the specific topics they cover. But they can also be used to obtain a more nuanced picture of people's views than simply asking 'how effective do you think the police are?', not least of course because the ideas people draw upon in answering such a question will vary from respondent to respondent, and the extent of this variation is hidden if only a single question is used.

Survey respondents are generally asked to answer all the questions relating to a particular issue, such as police effectiveness, and most do so. However, responses to such groups of questions are frequently highly correlated. This, and methodological work conducted across a wide range of subject areas, suggests that when answering such question sets respondents are not necessarily addressing them on a one by one basis but drawing on a single underlying idea or orientation, in this case about the general effectiveness of the police. This makes intuitive sense—people are unlikely to have a detailed opinion about how well the police are doing in dealing with the drug problem, for example, but will have an overall opinion about how effective it is as a whole. This viewpoint or orientation will inform how the specific questions are answered. Equally, the viewpoint itself can be seen as being measured by the answers to the individual questions, the salience of which

vary across individuals, members of social groups and people from different geographical areas.

These underlying opinions or orientations are known as latent variables, because they are not measured directly ('how effective do you think the police are?') but built up from responses to a range of associated questions (which are known as observed variables or indicators). We can thus develop a good idea about how effective (or engaged, and so on) people think the police are by 'combining' their responses to specific questions using a range of statistical techniques. The latent variables or indicators that are generated by these techniques can then be analysed in their own right—for example, in assessing how views about how engaged the police are with the community vary from borough to borough—and can also be bought together to generate understanding of how public confidence in the police is 'built up' across London.

A MPS confidence model that involves four important aspects, or indicators, of public opinion in London was developed utilizing these ideas. The task of constructing these indicators proceeded in four stages. The first was deciding on which elements of public opinion to include. The next stage was identifying the specific questions to use to measure the latent indices, while the third and fourth stages comprised generating and validating the actual measures

to be used.[2] This paper concentrates on the first two of these stages.

A model combining all the elements identified in Figure 1 above would likely be a robust summary of factors important in the formation of public opinions about the police. However, as noted it would also contain elements that are largely beyond meaningful police influence—in particular, concerns about social cohesion and, arguably, worry about crime. Furthermore, perceptions of police visibility are strongly associated with ideas about effectiveness and community engagement (Bradford *et al.*, 2009), suggesting that there is considerable overlap between these 'different' issues in people's minds (many people might consider a high level of visibility to be a core feature of an effective police force). The same is true for how informed about the police people feel, while the likely outcomes of contact experiences on overall confidence are unlikely to be direct, but will rather operate on and through opinions of police effectiveness and fairness (ibid.).

Accordingly we concentrate here on four key factors that represent important and *conceptually distinct* ideas relating to key aspects of public opinion that both (1) have concrete impacts on overall confidence and (2) are within the ability of the police to influence. These are public perceptions of
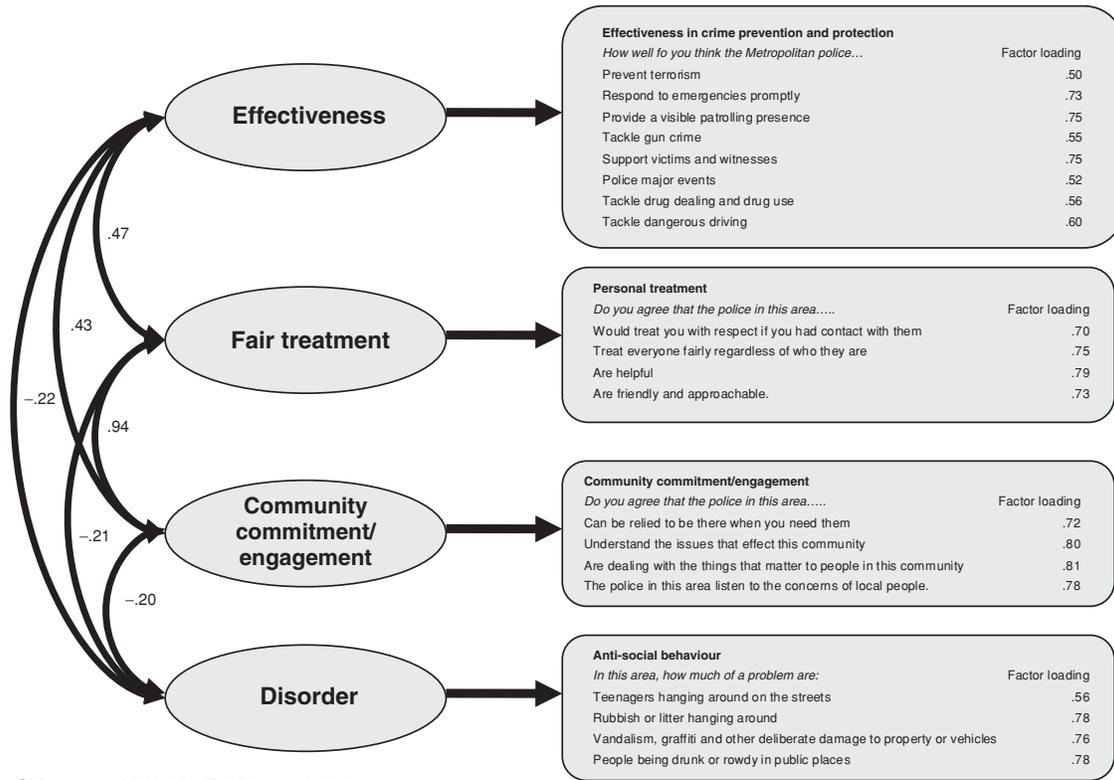
- the ability of the police to fulfil its central remit (*effectiveness*, not just in combating crime but in providing a visible presence, policing public events, and responding to emergencies);

- the way in which officers treat people in terms of fairness and respect, and whether they are helpful and friendly (*fair treatment*);

- the extent to which police listen and respond to the concerns of those they police (*community commitment/engagement*);

- and the extent to which police respond to disorder and the nature of people's local area (*disorder*).

Note that following the conceptual map outlined in Figure 1, perceptions of disorder sit prior to assessments of the police. To put it another way, people form judgements about the police in the light of their assessments of the level of disorder/ASB in their local area.

The exclusion of public concerns about crime form a model of confidence in the police might seem a little odd—after all, reassurance and other policing policies are predicated at least in part on the idea that people's fear or crime can be alleviated by the police in some way and, through this, public confidence can be enhanced (Crawford, 2007; Innes, 2004a, 2004b). However, recent evidence suggests that generalized worry about or fear of crime has relatively little impact on opinions of the police (Jackson *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, there is much evidence to suggest that expressions of concern about crime relate less to actual fears of victimization and more to broader concerns about society and the direction of change in modern life—and it is these later concerns that have important influences on opinions of the police (Jackson and Bradford, 2009; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007).

The next step was to select questions from the PAS to measure these underlying ideas. Three criteria were used to do this. Firstly, we drew on prior work on this subject and identified associations between certain questions and underlying constructs (see in particular Bradford *et al.*, 2009; Bradford and Jackson, 2008). Secondly, to ensure that the derived indicators measure distinct aspects of public opinion it was important to have as little overlap between them as possible. So, for example, 'dealing with drunk people' could be an important aspect of police effectiveness, while the number of drunk and disorderly individuals people see in their local area could be a key aspect of their ideas about ASB. In order to keep the indicators as distinct as possible, where ideas about a specific issue or concern could conceivably fit two or more indicators they were fitted to only one. Finally, in relation to effectiveness as wide a range of police functions as possible were

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[2] Results from stages 3 and 4 are held on file at the MPS and are available from the lead author on request.

**Effectiveness in crime prevention and protection**

| *How well fo you think the Metropolitan police…* | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| Prevent terrorism | .50 |
| Respond to emergencies promptly | .73 |
| Provide a visible patrolling presence | .75 |
| Tackle gun crime | .55 |
| Support victims and witnesses | .75 |
| Police major events | .52 |
| Tackle drug dealing and drug use | .56 |
| Tackle dangerous driving | .60 |

**Personal treatment**

| *Do you agree that the police in this area…..* | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| Would treat you with respect if you had contact with them | .70 |
| Treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are | .75 |
| Are helpful | .79 |
| Are friendly and approachable. | .73 |

**Community commitment/engagement**

| *Do you agree that the police in this area…..* | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| Can be relied to be there when you need them | .72 |
| Understand the issues that effect this community | .80 |
| Are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community | .81 |
| The police in this area listen to the concerns of local people. | .78 |

**Anti-social behaviour**

| *In this area, how much of a problem are:* | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| Teenagers hanging around on the streets | .56 |
| Rubbish or litter hanging around | .78 |
| Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles | .76 |
| People being drunk or rowdy in public places | .78 |

Chi square=8319.42; df=152; p=<0.001
RMSEA=.051; CFI=.948; NFI=.947

**Source: Metropolitan Police Public Attitudes Survey 2008/09**

**Figure 2:** Confirmatory factor analysis of the confidence indicators.

included to ensure that ideas across the range of MPS activities were taken into account. The final questions to be used in each indicator are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows results from a simultaneous confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) investigating how the latent indicators are 'built-up'. It points to one (of many) interesting empirical findings of the modelling process, since it suggests that Londoners hardly differentiate between how police interact with individuals (personal treatment) and how they interact with the community (engagement)—at least in terms of the questions asked in the PAS. But in operational terms this finding may be problematic. It mixes two sets of concerns that are *practically* quite distinct, and therefore confuses possible actions to remedy any shortfalls. These two

latent constructs could be measured by one single indicator—however, if this indicator was moving in the 'wrong' direction over time, it would have to be unpacked in order to confirm whether it was issues relating to the treatment of individuals, interaction with the community, or indeed both, which were at stake. Furthermore, there is evidence that perceptions of fairness and community engagement can react differently to external stimuli, for example the receipt of information via police newsletters (Hohl *et al.*, 2009), or have differential associations with other indicators (Bradford *et al.*, 2009). We therefore decided to retain two separate indicators, although further work will be needed to fully investigate this issue.

The four indicators described above appear to explain a significant degree of the variation in overall

confidence as measured by the 'how good a job' question—work on the PAS suggests at least 30–40%, which in a social science context is a considerable amount.[3] In terms of using the latent indicators in further analysis, how they 'fit together' in building up overall confidence is one issue of interest. The empirical findings strongly suggest that police community commitment/engagement has the biggest unique association with overall confidence, followed by effectiveness and fairness, and then concerns about disorder.

## Demographic versus perceptual factors

Does knowing 'who people are' help explain overall confidence in policing? Regression analyses conducted by the MPS suggest that, controlling for the three main components of confidence, gender had little impact on confidence, and nor did age (with a few exceptions, see Appendix Table A1). However, being employed full-time was associated with greater odds of thinking the police were doing a good or excellent job, while those without access to cars appeared to have higher levels of confidence than those with cars. Finally, where there was variation by ethnic group this was in the direction of greater confidence among those from ethnic minority groups than the White/British Irish majority—the only exception was the Mixed group who had slightly lower odds of an excellent/good response. This last finding is interesting, since it suggests that the more favourable opinions of the police among people from ethnic minority groups (as is found for example in successive waves of the British Crime Survey) are not the results of more favourable assessments of the effectiveness, fairness or engagement of the police, since these are taken into account in the model. Rather, there must be some other basis for higher confidence within ethnic minority groups—or, perhaps, *lower* confidence among White British/Irish people. What this suggests is that community engagement is an eclectic craft, requiring reaching out at different levels of 'group/community' as

well as to particular individuals (see Dann, this issue).

## The usual caveat: Limitations of the model

The indicators outlined here are based on public opinion, not on other measures such as sanction arrest rates or reported crime. As such it is perfectly possible for puzzling outcomes to arise. A borough commander might wonder why people feel that police effectiveness is deteriorating when reported crime is falling in that borough. So too the local incidence of disorder as measured by reports made to police may be falling when public opinions grow worse. There may of course be some time-lag in people noticing any differences achieved by police activity, as declining disorder takes time to seep into the public consciousness. More generally, it is obvious that public opinion is affected by many other factors apart from what the police actually *do*. There is ultimately no 'solution' to this issue. But what borough commanders must take into account is that no matter what the police view of progress might be, they need to *tell* local residents what they are doing locally in order for many people to make a connection between local change and policing activity (see Wünsch and Hohl, this issue).

Perhaps the key message is that this model of public confidence has at its heart *communication* between police and public—of engagement and commitment, of fairness, of competence and of dealing with the issues that matter in local areas. Of course, it is unlikely as well as undesirable that the public can be deceived into thinking that police are effective in their core tasks in an environment where crime or disorder is growing rapidly, or are treating people fairly when they see or hear about police maltreatment. However, the model shows that people's opinions of police effectiveness (as well as engagement and fairness) are important in informing their overall level of confidence. This clearly suggests that the *police need to actively communicate*

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[3] The precise proportion varies depending on the specific techniques involved and the dataset used.

*what they are doing and achieving.* Even more importantly communication—as two-way process—is vital to demonstrate that the police are engaged with the concerns and issues uppermost in people's minds.

A second important limitation of the model is that is built up from questions already existing in the PAS. There was no *tabula rasa* onto which an ideal question set was written. This was partially for good reason—many questions exist in the PAS to address specific issues that have been raised by the public or from within the MPS itself, and which probably need to be included in the modelling process. Using existing question sets was in any case unavoidable given the requirement to develop a better understanding of public confidence rapidly in response to its increasing priority with regard to performance targets. However, being limited to existing questions does mean that other issues of potential importance but still within the remit of the police to influence may be missing from the model. Further work is needed on these issues, and several projects are currently underway that aim to examine in more detail public confidence in the police along with other criminal justice agencies (Hough and Jackson, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2009).

## Conclusion

There remains a good deal of confusion about 'what to do' about improving public confidence in policing. If overall opinions of the police are 'built up' from a range of usually complementary, but also possibly contradictory, ideas about police actions, behaviours and priorities, this makes the translation of the evidence into discrete action less than straightforward. If you as a senior officer are responsible for 'increasing public confidence', what do you 'do'? Knowing that there is a falling proportion of people in your local area who think the local police are doing a good job, how do you advise your senior team to proceed? If you know that you wish to demonstrate you are taking local people's opinions and concerns into account, what do you actually do

differently to current practise? And if confidence is 'rising', what do you do to sustain this?

The above caveats notwithstanding, perceptions of *engagement, fairness and effectiveness* are found to be key predictors of 'how good a job' people think their local police is doing. Both effectiveness and engagement/fairness have unique associations with overall confidence (with engagement/fairness having the strongest statistical effect—see Appendix Table A1). According to the model of public opinion put forward here the effects of 'experiential' variables on overall confidence—disorder, visibility, how informed about police people are and personal contact—are all filtered through the 'perceptual' variables, effectiveness and engagement and fairness. Previous research has shown that perceptions of police visibility and disorder have particularly strong associations with public opinions about the police (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002; Jackson *et al.*, 2009; Roberts and Hough, 2005), and these are not excluded from the model—rather, it is assumed they have measurable impacts on the key drivers (see Bradford *et al.*, 2009) and through these influence 'overall' confidence.

The MPS model of confidence should therefore be considered as both a summation of the current 'state of the art' and a starting point for further work. For example, future projects could look at the ways in which people's experiences of the police, whether personal, vicarious, or mediated in some way, have effects on and interact with the drivers of confidence outlined in this paper. More in-depth examination of the relationship between disorder and crime in influencing people's opinions would also be welcome. It may be, for example, that for a minority of people crime—serious crime, perhaps—*is* an influence on their opinions. If this was the case then the model could be extended to cover such concerns. Finally, more work is needed on what actually comprises 'confidence'. Or, to put it another way, what does trust in police effectiveness, fairness and community engagement flow into? The work of Tyler and others suggests that one possible outcome of enhancing public trust and confidence will be

increased propensities to cooperate with the police and defer to legal authorities. Such a possibility should be a powerful incentive for police forces in England and Wales to continue work aimed at greater understanding of public trust and confidence.[4]

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[4] In England and Wales, the key question measuring 'police performance' has now changed to: '*How much do you agree that the police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area*?'. Preliminary analyses of this question shows that the inclusion of 'the council' may depress reported levels of confidence. In addition, we suggest that there are improvement to policing itself that can be guided by modelling confidence in the way we do here.

## Appendix Table

### Binary logistic regression predicting rating of the local police

(1 = excellent or good; 0 = fair, poor or very poor)

| | Odds ratio | 95% confidence interval | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Opinions of the police (high = better) | | | |
| Community engagement/fair treatment | 3.144*** | 3.009 | 3.286 |
| Police effectiveness | 1.670*** | 1.597 | 1.747 |
| Sex (ref: male) | | | |
| Female | 0.940 | 0.873 | 1.011 |
| Age (ref: 35–44) | | | |
| 15–17 | 0.584** | 0.411 | 0.830 |
| 18–21 | 0.904 | 0.719 | 1.137 |
| 22–24 | 0.927 | 0.769 | 1.118 |
| 25–34 | 1.041 | 0.934 | 1.159 |
| 45–54 | 0.908 | 0.814 | 1.012 |
| 55–64 | 0.714*** | 0.629 | 0.810 |
| 65–74 | 0.917 | 0.797 | 1.054 |
| 75–84 | 1.069 | 0.887 | 1.289 |
| 85+ | 1.080 | 0.738 | 1.582 |
| Ethnic group (ref. White British/Irish) | | | |
| Mixed | 0.853* | 0.752 | 0.967 |
| Indian | 0.923 | 0.770 | 1.108 |
| Pakistani | 1.226 | 0.981 | 1.533 |
| Bangladeshi | 1.330** | 1.081 | 1.637 |
| Caribbean | 0.859 | 0.733 | 1.006 |
| African | 1.160* | 1.006 | 1.339 |
| Other | 0.824** | 0.736 | 0.922 |
| Economic activity status (ref: all others) | | | |
| Employed full time | 1.599*** | 1.459 | 1.751 |
| Car access (ref: no) | | | |
| Yes | 0.845*** | 0.779 | 0.917 |
| Social class (ref: AB) | | | |
| C | 0.775*** | 0.693 | 0.867 |
| DE | 1.016 | 0.890 | 1.158 |

$^*P < 0.05$; $^{**}P < 0.01$; $^{***}P < 0.001$.
Unweighted $n = 19{,}029$.
Source: PAS Q3 07/08 to Q2 08/09.