MOUNTED POLICE PROJECT 2014

**Information in relation to focus group information submitted to the UKDS**

**Background**

This data package contains information in relation to focus groups conducted as part of a larger ESRC ‘knowledge exchange’ funded project investigating the use of mounted police in the United Kingdom – see here for details: <http://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/mounted-police-uk.html>. Three focus groups were conducted; two involved football fans, and the other public order police officers who were not in mounted sections. The aim was to develop an idea of mounted policing ‘from the outside’ – what were the experiences of mounted police among people who relatively regularly experienced this mode of policing? Details of the organization and contexts of the focus groups are given below; copies of the discussion guides and information sheets for participants are also included in this data package.

Note that transcripts of the focus groups themselves are not included. This is because (a) there were concerns that, even when anonymised, certain aspects of the groups may have been disclosive and (b) that participants were not properly informed that transcripts of the focus groups might be submitted to the UKDS. For information about the results of this aspect of the research see the report linked above (a copy is also included in this data package.

**Focus group with football fans**

With the support of the Football Supporters’ Federation (FSF), the research team twice engaged with what may be considered ‘serious’ or lifelong football fans. Focus groups were conducted in two separate locations. Participants were recruited via the FSF mailing list ­­– emails were sent out by the FSF which gave general details of the research (see below) and, once a group of respondents had been recruited, where and when the focus groups would be conducted. Food and drink were provided during both sessions, which took places in private rooms in city-centre pubs.

There were 19 participants in total across both groups. Most had been attending football matches since an early age, and it was not uncommon for a participant to claim that they had attended football matches since four years of age, and some attended upwards of 60 matches per year including travel to away and international matches. At least two participants had been subject to football banning orders. As all were involved with their fan associations or the FSF, most participants had substantial and reflective opinions on football policing, its current shortcomings, and how it could be done better in the future. As such, they did not represent ‘average’ football fans, but instead were included in the focus groups because of their depth of experience as fans.

On each occasion the group was initially told that the research team were undertaking a study comparing various policing options at football matches, and in particular that they were interested in match-day tactics by police, although were happy to discuss other issues that were important to participants. The team was conscious that revealing their interest in mounted police at the outset might unreasonably bias discussion, and it was important for the researchers to understand the participants’ opinions of mounted police in context of their broader sets of beliefs about football policing. The research team ultimately revealed their interest in mounted police as the focus group progressed, once they were confident that they had adequately determined the priority issues and concerns for this group of fans. Although the focus group discussions were at times co-opted by participants to discuss unexpected issues, the discussions were mostly free-flowing and were based on questions around fans’ experiences of (dis)order in football, the policing of football matches in general terms, and specific police tactics (in particular, mounted policing).

Consent was sought verbally at the beginning of each session. Participants were told who was funding the research, that the focus group was being recorded, and that any future use of the data would be on a fully anonymised basis. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research process at any time. Once the group was finished participants were handed cards with the contact details of the researchers and the invitation to contact them should any concerns or further issues arise (copies are included in this data package).

**Focus group with public order officers**

One of the aims of the mounted police project was to understand the opinions of police officers regarding the value of mounted police, and more specifically their perceived effects and relative value across a number of deployment scenarios. Thus, the research team conducted a focus group with police working in public order settings to further develop the picture of where and how mounted police may be considered valuable, or not. Officers were recruited via contacts within a particular English police force, and the focus group held at one of its training facilities. Food and drink was provided at the session.

The experience of officers in this focus group was mostly in public-order settings, but some had also taken part in neighbourhood policing[[1]](#footnote-1) and other activities involving mounted branch such as city-centre policing related to the night-time economy. The research team was forthright from the outset regarding their interest in mounted policing as the focal point of the research. This was largely done for efficiency’s sake, in order to ensure that mounted police work was discussed in-depth within the 90-minute timeframe. As well, the specific line of questioning around mounted policing (which was longer and more detailed than in the football fan focus group) would likely have aroused suspicions regarding the purpose of the study, leading potentially to issues of trust that could have damaged the process.

The team was nonetheless conscious not to overestimate the importance of mounted policing in the experience of non-mounted officers, so also asked a number of questions to determine broader attitudes of participants on the goals of and options available in various aspects of police work. The questions centred on themes of success in police work, experience of working with mounted police, and comparative value of mounted police relative to other options in various situations.

Consent was sought verbally at the beginning of the session. The officers were told who was funding the research, that the focus group was being recorded, and that any future use of the data would be on a fully anonymised basis. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research process at any time. Once the focus group was finished participants were handed cards with the contact details of the researchers and the invitation to contact them should any concerns or further issues arise.

1. Virtually all officers in UK police forces will have experience of neighbourhood policing at some point in their careers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)