

# TOWARDS

# EQUITY

LGBT+ community perspectives  
on policing in Scotland



**LGBT  
Health and  
Wellbeing**

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>P1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>P2</b>
<b>KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>P3</b>
<b>BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT</b>	<b>P4</b>
<b>APPROACH</b>	<b>P6</b>
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>P7</b>
• The impact of historical policing	P7
• The current socio-political climate	P9
• Lack of trust in policing for marginalised people	P10
• Intersectionality, experiences, and impact	P12
• Desire for meaningful engagement and progress	P15
• Relationship building and breaking down barriers	P16
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>P18</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>P19</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>P22</b>

# FOREWORD

At LGBT Health and Wellbeing, we are committed to a vision of a Scotland where LGBT+ people thrive: an equal Scotland where who we are does not negatively impact our health and wellbeing.

The conflict between policing and the LGBT+ community, shaped by a legacy of harm and ongoing mistrust, remains a significant barrier to achieving that vision. We cannot build a society rooted in equality, safety and dignity without a positive, accountable relationship with those charged with upholding and enforcing the law. It's in that spirit that we initiated these conversations and produced this report.

'Towards Equality' brings together the voices of LGBT+ people from across Scotland, many of whom carry personal histories of harm in their interactions with policing. These stories are powerful, often painful, but grounded in reality. They reflect the deep and lasting impact that criminalisation, discrimination, and exclusion have had on our community.

The Chief Constable's recent apology to LGBT+ community marked an important and welcome step. Acknowledging the historical persecution of LGBT+ people and the role policing played in it is essential if we are to build a more just and equitable future. But as this report makes clear, apology alone is not enough. Many in our community, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of marginalisation, continue to experience real barriers to trust, safety, and fair or equal treatment.

Despite this, amid the hurt and scepticism we also heard hope. A hope that things can be different. A willingness to move forward. Participants shared clear, practical, and powerful ideas about how Police Scotland can rebuild trust and deliver truly inclusive services: from co-designed training to sustained, year-round engagement grounded in human rights.

This report is both a reflection and an invitation. It reflects difficult truths, but it also offers a way forward. We are committed to continuing this work, with our community and with Police Scotland. As an organisation that is from, for, and with Scotland's LGBT+ community, we are committed to assist in building the relationships, systems, and culture that will make Scotland safer and fairer for all LGBT+ people.

To Police Scotland, we say this: we see the beginnings of change. We welcome your apology. We welcome your engagement. But we need more than words. We need action that is sustained, intersectional, and rooted in human rights.

To our LGBT+ community: thank you for your trust, your honesty, and your vision. This report is for you, and because of you.

Let this be a turning point. Not just a reflection, but a roadmap towards our vision. Let's build a safer, more equal Scotland, together.

**Mark Kelvin** (he/him)  
Chief Executive



# INTRODUCTION

In early 2025, LGBT Health and Wellbeing conducted a series of focus groups with LGBT+ individuals from across Scotland to explore their experiences and perspectives on the relationship between the LGBT+ community and Police Scotland. These series of focus groups were titled “Let’s Talk About It: The LGBT+ Community and Policing” and aimed to provide a safer space for LGBT+ people to come together, in community, to openly reflect on our shared history with policing, the impact of legislative changes, and the realities of our communities’ present day relationship with Police Scotland.

The focus groups were designed to centre the voices of multiply marginalised LGBT+ people, creating space for open and meaningful conversations about their experiences with policing. Participants were invited to reflect on both personal and community histories, share their perspectives, and offer suggestions for how Police Scotland could begin to rebuild trust with communities that have faced historic persecution and ongoing marginalisation. By highlighting both challenges and opportunities for change, we hope this report contributes to meaningful action and improved experiences for LGBT+ people in Scotland.

Alongside this work led by LGBT Health and Wellbeing, Police Scotland engaged a diverse group of LGBT+ people from across Scotland in the country’s first LGBTQI+ Citizens’ Panel. The Panel brought together voices from across Scotland’s LGBTQI+ community to discuss and develop policy recommendations for senior Police Scotland leaders, aimed at guiding future actions to better serve LGBT+ communities. This report is intended to complement the Panel’s recommendations, and support ongoing community engagement by amplifying diverse voices and perspectives from within our community.



# KEY FINDINGS

This report highlights several key themes emerging from focus groups with LGBT+ participants regarding their experiences and perceptions of policing in Scotland:

## The impact of historical policing

The legacy of criminalisation, discrimination, and violence by police against LGBT+ communities continues to influence trust and engagement today. While Police Scotland’s apology was welcomed, many stressed the need for accountability backed by meaningful action.

## The current socio-political climate

Rising far-right rhetoric and online hate contribute to feelings of insecurity and scepticism towards policing, with concerns about potential bias.

## Lack of trust in policing for marginalised people

Trust in Police Scotland is fractured, particularly among those who experience multiple marginalisation (race, gender identity, asylum status). Past negative experiences and systemic inequalities contribute to hesitancy in reporting hate incidents or seeking police support.

## Intersectionality, experiences and impact

Participants highlighted that LGBT+ identities intersect with other forms of marginalisation, shaping varied and complex experiences with policing. Rural versus urban policing differences and asylum seekers’ past traumas were noted as significant factors affecting trust.

## Desire for meaningful engagement and progress

Despite challenges, there is a strong community desire for improved relationships with Police Scotland, including better understanding of LGBT+ issues and more inclusive, informed policing practices.

## Relationship building and breaking down barriers

Participants emphasised the importance of proactive, authentic engagement between police and diverse LGBT+ communities, underpinned by comprehensive, intersectional training that goes beyond tokenism to foster trust and safety.

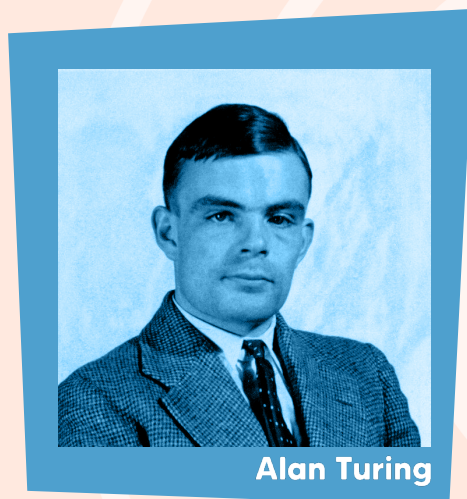
Overall, the findings underscore an urgent need for Police Scotland to engage respectfully and meaningfully with LGBT+ people, fostering trust through transparent, informed, and equitable policing that responds effectively to the community’s needs.

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In May 2024, Police Scotland Chief Constable Jo Farrell apologised to the LGBT+ community for the role Police Scotland played in the “criminalisation and persecution” of the LGBT+ community under United Kingdom (UK) Government anti-LGBT+ legislation.<sup>1</sup> The Chief Constable committed to working with LGBT+ organisations in Scotland, and the wider community, to ensure that Police Scotland is an inclusive service which protects LGBT+ people from discrimination, and works for everyone. The apology follows previous acknowledgement from the Chief Constable in 2023 that Police Scotland is institutionally racist and discriminatory, stating “The onus is on us to challenge bad behaviour and prejudice, address gaps and eradicate bias, known or unwitting, at every level.”<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the apology and recognitions of institutional discrimination was the implementation of the Historical Sexual Offences (Pardons and Disregards) Act throughout the UK in 2019. The introduction of this legislation allowed those previously criminalised for engaging in homosexual activity during criminalisation the ability to apply for a pardon from the UK Government, and any criminal record associated to crimes (now legal today) expunged. The Act also sought to pardon any women, or former members of the Armed Forces, who had been convicted of homosexual offences which have since been abolished or repealed. Former UK Government Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines, stated “the appalling criminalisation of homosexuality is a shameful and yet not so distant part of our history... the Disregards and Pardons scheme has gone some way to right the wrongs of the past.”<sup>3</sup> This is just one piece of recent UK Government legislation implemented as a means of apologising to the LGBT+ community for the historic criminalisation of sexual acts. Legislation which criminalised LGBT+ identity included the 1885 Labouchere Amendment, which saw prominent figures such as Alan Turing and Oscar Wilde criminalised for “committing homosexual acts.”<sup>4</sup>

Legislation aimed at rectifying past injustice was a result of the tireless work of LGBT+ campaigners who fought for legal reform and equality. These campaigners, often at great personal and collective risk, pushed for changes such as the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the equal age of consent, and marriage equality. Their advocacy not only changed public opinion, but also prompted the legal changes that led to greater equality for all queer people living in the UK and Scotland.



Alan Turing

<sup>1</sup> Police Scotland (2024a). Apology to the LGBTQI+ communities of Scotland - Police Scotland. [online] Police.uk. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2024/may/apology-to-the-lgbtqi-communities-of-scotland>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-67053958>

<sup>3</sup> McKee, J. (2023). UK to wipe women’s historic convictions for homosexuality. [online] PinkNews | Latest lesbian, gay, bi and trans news | LGBTQ+ news. Available at: <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/06/13/uk-historic-homosexuality-convictions-women-veterans> [Accessed 4 Apr. 2025].

<sup>4</sup> UK Parliament (2019). 1885 Labouchere Amendment. [online] UK Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/1885-labouchere-amendment>.

In 2024, Police Scotland conducted an Internal Survey of their staff and officers on the issue of institutional discrimination within the police force. From the 1300+ responses, more than 40% of respondents agreed that institutional discrimination is an issue for Police Scotland. This level of agreement was greater amongst marginalised groups such as women, of whom 59% agreed that there is institutional discrimination present in the force. More than 82% of LGBT+ and minority ethnic people agreed that institutional discrimination is an issue within Police Scotland, or agreed they had personally experienced discrimination. In response, Assistant Chief Constable Catriona Paton reiterated Police Scotland's commitment to the Policing Together Strategy which states "integrity, fairness, respect and the upholding of human rights is at the heart" of all they do.<sup>5</sup>

LGBT Youth Scotland's "Life in Scotland" research explores the lives of LGBT+ young people living in Scotland, and their views on issues which impact them. The organisations 2022 Report found more than 38% of LGBT+ young people surveyed had experienced a hate incident in 2021, compared to 35% in 2017.<sup>6</sup> This figure is indicative of the growing rate of hate incidents and crimes within recent years, especially against the LGBT community. Notably, this figure was even greater amongst trans participants with just under half (49%) having experienced a hate incident/crime compared to 26% of cisgender participants. These statistics indicate that hate crime has become a major issue for LGBT young people in Scotland, particularly trans young people. The research also found LGBT+ young people expressed lack of confidence in reporting hate incidents/crimes. Of the participants who had experienced a hate incident/crime, only 11% had reported it to the police and only 17% of participants said they would feel confident reporting a hate incident/crime if they experienced one in the future. Reasons given by young people included: fear of not being taken seriously, wasting police time, being brushed off by the police or having to come out to family / police officers who might not understand the experiences of LGBT+ people.<sup>7</sup> Consequentially the fears associated with reporting a crime to the police greatly outweigh the benefits for many young people, however some of the participants argued that if there were alternative means of reporting hate crimes or greater anonymity within the police system then they would be more likely to report hate crime incidents.

A qualitative study of relations between LGBTQ+ people in the Northeast of England and the police found that only 4% of the participants of their study had reported victimisation of a hate crime incident to the police and more than 60% of respondents believed that hate crime is not treated as a serious issue by the police.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Police Scotland (2024b). Listening to our communities. [online] Police Scotland. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/how-we-do-it/policing-together/listening-to-our-communities/labouchere-amendment>

<sup>6</sup> LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People in 2022. [online] LGBT Youth Scotland. Available at: <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/life-in-scotland-for-lgbt-young-people-in-2022/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Pickles, J. (2019). Policing hate and bridging communities: a qualitative evaluation of relations between LGBT+ people and the police within the North East of England. *Policing and Society*, [online] 30(7), pp.1-19. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1588269>

## APPROACH

LGBT Health and Wellbeing facilitated five 90-minute focus groups over three events, engaging 20 LGBT+ people living in Scotland in this conversation. Alongside Participant Information Sheets and a Demographic Survey, participants were provided with focus group questions ahead of time, allowing all participants the opportunity to review questions with the aim of increasing the accessibility of the sessions, and comfortability in the discussions.

As many within our community face significant barriers to participation in policy influencing, this conversation aimed to provide a safer space for multiply marginalised LGBT+ people, including LGBT+ older people, trans and non-binary people, disabled LGBT+ people, LGBT+ people of colour and those with experience of the asylum system to share their views.

Participants within the focus groups were asked a range of questions broadly situated within four themes: Historical and Legislative Reflections, Present-Day Engagement and Challenges, Advocating for Change and Building Trust and Hopes for a Better Future. Questions were open-ended and non-leading, allowing participants maximum control over their own narratives. Participants did not have to answer all questions, and instead selected those which felt most relevant and important to the individuals who comprised each focus group. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary, to allow for rigorous, rich data insights. Each focus group was made up of three to five participants.

National Policy Lead, Policy Intern and Development Workers from LGBT Health and Wellbeing led the focus groups and transcribed participant discussions. Transcripts were later anonymised with any identifying information redacted to maintain (as far as possible) the anonymity of participants. All five transcripts were studied, coded and thematically analysed. Once saturation was reached, key themes emerged from the data which provided insight into the understandings, experiences and priorities of the LGBT+ people we engaged in this discussion.

16 of the 20 participants who engaged in focus groups also completed a short survey which included demographic questions (sexual orientation, gender identity, trans status, age, council area, ethnicity, disability, experience of asylum etc.). The survey also included a series of social attitudes questions measured on a Likert scale.



# FINDINGS

Whilst participants across the focus groups discussed a wide range of topics, experiences and opinions, thematic analysis resulted in the development of several key themes. These key themes were conceptualised as:

**The impact of historical policing**

**The current socio-political climate**

**Lack of trust in policing for marginalised people**

**Intersectionality, experiences and impact**

**Desire for meaningful engagement and progress**

**Relationship building and breaking down barriers**

## The impact of historical policing

A key theme touched upon by all focus groups was the lasting impact of the criminalisation of homosexuality, and the role of policing in enforcing such legislation. Participants within focus groups attributed the complex relationship between the LGBT+ community and policing to community experiences of hostility, harassment and discrimination experienced by themselves, queer elders or friends. Some participants termed policing as an “arm of the state” used to “corral the gays and stop them corrupting society” to the detriment of LGBT+ peoples’ wellbeing, dignity and realisation of human rights. Relatedly, participants also discussed the, sometimes violent, role policing played in suppressing LGBT+ movements, marches and protests throughout the fight for equal rights and recognition.

One participant shared:

**“Police used to beat us up. They supported and facilitated a rotten system.”**

Others shared their perceptions of policing’s legacy as “misogynistic” “queerphobic” “ableist” and “racist” while stressing the significant power policing held and still holds over civilians.



**We asked participants whether “being LGBT+ shapes how you interact with and think about the police”?**

<b>Strongly agree or agree</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	<b>0%</b>

When discussing historic implications, it was clear that the harm done via the criminalisation, persecution and harassment of the LGBT+ community by policing was felt deeply by both older and younger participants. Discussions recognised that over time things had of course improved, but that overt discrimination persisted after decriminalisation and lasted well into the millennium – impacting generations of LGBT+ people.

“  
Historic injustice and oppression impacts communities for generations – a shared history, shared violence, shared fear, shared denial of freedom of expression, shared denial of freedom to love and be.  
How can it not?  
”

Participants discussed the apology from Chief Constable Jo Farrell to the LGBT+ community for the “recent and historical injustices and discrimination that members of LGBTQI+ communities in Scotland have faced” and the ways in which policing has contributed to this. Many participants were receptive to the apology, and recognised its significance as a step towards mending a fractured relationship.

One participant shared: **“The apology makes it pretty clear they didn’t police fairly beforehand. The recognition of this is important, it shows accountability.”**

Participants stressed the importance of accountability followed by action. Another participant echoed this sentiment by stating: “apology is meaningless without commitment to change.” Some participants highlighted they were not aware of the apology, but welcomed it and hoped it meant things might improve for engagement between the community and Police Scotland. There were some participants who expressed scepticism at the apology and the commitment to action.

One participant shared: **“Sorry we were a bit shit to you in the past. Is that it? What’s next?”**

## The current socio-political climate

Participants also discussed the rise and legitimisation of far-right politics and the implications this has for minoritised people in our society. Many participants identified this as a concern which impacts feelings of safety, security and trust in institutions, organisations, services and the media. Participants touched upon the role the media played in platforming and furthering anti-LGBT+ rhetoric historically, and drew parallels between this and the treatment of LGBT+ people today in media, publications and online.

One participant shared: **“being trans in the 90s was seen as sinful, shameful and deviant. Portrayed as serial killers on TV. The political and social media climate is more negative now.”**

Participants also touched upon the role of corporations, such as Meta, in furthering and promoting Hate Speech on their platforms due to the regressive changes to Hate Speech guidelines.

One participant said: **“The internet, social media, Twitter, is a bin fire. A hateful, unregulated bin fire.”**

Another participant echoed this sentiment, touching upon the detrimental impact online hate and queerphobia can have on LGBT+ people’s lives.

“

Queer people experience tremendous online harms, much more than the rest of society. It seems like these aspects can’t be reported? There are no clear laws for criminalising online harms. It’s hard to prove the psychological impact.

”

Participants discussed the impacts of a social and political climate which vilifies and persecutes LGBT+ people on personal wellbeing, whilst expressing concern for the mass-legitimisation of right-wing sentiment and hostility towards minority groups. Particularly, participants expressed concern about the pervasiveness of anti-LGBT+ and gender critical views and how one can never “truly know” people’s prejudice. One participant shared concern around potential bias and/or queerphobic views within policing.

“

Police Scotland need to be discerning in who they hire to avoid those with bias that they are unwilling to work on. What percentage of people are dropped from training due to bias? How do we know that management aren’t biased? Bias at higher levels can cause more issues.

”

## Lack of trust in policing for marginalised people

Participants who took part in focus groups discussed at length the significant lack of trust minoritised communities have in policing and Police Scotland, touching upon the pervasive impact of systemic racism and queerphobia and their role in widening structural inequality.

**We asked participants whether they “feel comfortable approaching the Police”?**

<b>Strongly agree or agree</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Strongly disagree or disagree</b>	<b>37%</b>

This suggests a divided experience and highlights that trust in policing is far from universal amongst the LGBT+ community. Moreover, some individuals who expressed personal comfort still acknowledged the existence of structural barriers and that some LGBT+ people might not feel safe or supported engaging with police.

Throughout discussions, a collective lack of trust in policing (and institutions in general) was evident. Participants attributed this lack of trust to many factors but one topic which dominated discussions was the relationship between policing and government. Multiple participants expressed scepticism in repairing relationships in a socio-political climate where countries within Europe and the Western world are re-introducing anti-LGBT+ legislation, denying access to basic human rights and dignity of treatment for queer people. Participants referenced recent anti-LGBT+ legislation in Hungary and the frequency of harmful and discriminatory anti-LGBT+ bills progressing through state legislatures within the United States.<sup>8</sup>

We are entering an era of pushback. We are only ever one generation away from persecution, a thin line away from the opposite of what we have now. I take nothing for granted. The police will act for the state, irrespective of an individual’s identity.

This concern was shared significantly by trans participants, one of whom

shared: **“What happens if it was no longer legal to be trans? Unlikely, but not impossible. If this did happen, what role would the police play in keeping trans people like me and my friends safe?”**

When asked what Police Scotland could do to improve trust, participants highlighted that Police Scotland shouldn’t have to be neutral about human rights.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2025>

One participant shared: **“they should make an institutional commitment to not enforce any law changes, for example, if section 28 was to return to law. Commitment to change.”**

Alongside concerns of future political implications, past experiences with policing and Police Scotland impacted individual trust and feelings of safety when engaging with police. Participants touched upon the ways in which Police Scotland responses to mental health crises, domestic violence incidents or hate incidents left them feeling hopeless, frustrated and at times unsafe. One participant shared:

“ I did experience a hate crime. I reported it and I didn’t even get an acknowledgement. I wasn’t expecting much to happen, it’s possible it got lost in the system, the fact is it crossed my mind that someone saw this and did not care. That says a lot. They won’t even acknowledge that I was harassed for being trans. ”

Another participant shared their experience of supporting a friend through domestic violence: **“there was no communication with us from police. I don’t trust them and can’t count on them.”**

One focus group also touched upon distrust of policing stemming from its legacy, highlighting that they themselves, or other LGBT+ people they know, are likely to feel more trusting of newer cohorts of police officers, who are more likely to have received up-to-date equalities training at policing college. This suggests that while historical issues continue to impact trust broadly, there is some hope for change through improved training and recruitment practices.



## Intersectionality, experiences and impact

All five focus groups discussed the impact of multiple marginalisation on experiences with and trust in policing practices. 56% of participants who took part in focus groups were from ethnic minority / racialised communities, 54% had experience of the asylum system, 25% were trans and 31% were women. There was also representation from LGBT+ older people, disabled and neurodivergent LGBT+ people as well as those from working-class backgrounds and those who live in rural communities.<sup>9</sup>

Many participants discussed how their own experiences, and experiences of their friends and kinship networks, impacted their trust in policing to “get it right” when engaging with marginalised people.

Participants also touched upon the difference in experience in urban versus rural contexts with regards to racism and queerphobia. Multiple participants shared they feel safer, better understood and supported by policing divisions within cities than they do or have when living rurally.

One participant added:

**“I’m quite happy to disclose my LGBT+ identity in the city. I don’t trust my local police as they seem quite misogynistic, and aren’t visible.”**

**“When I received death threats and reported it I didn’t feel heard. They didn’t take me seriously – because I’m a lesbian. They refused to listen to evidence, I didn’t feel supported. I’m Asian so there’s extra intersection. I don’t trust the police from a race point of view or from a sexuality point of view. I felt I was treated worse than a cis-het man, everyone should be treated the same.”**

**We asked participants whether they would “disclose their LGBT+ identity to Police”?**

<b>Strongly agree or agree</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Strongly disagree or disagree</b>	<b>20%</b>

LGBT+ participants with experience of asylum shared significant barriers to engaging with Police Scotland, including traumatic experiences with policing in their countries of origin, experiences of racism and prejudiced treatment here in Scotland and concern around the status of their asylum claim. Experiences of violence, persecution and hostility at the hands of police in countries of origin where LGBT+ identity is criminalised left some participants fearful of policing.

<sup>9</sup> Data omitted due to small sample sizes to protect anonymity of participants

“ It took time after moving from [West African Country] to adapt to interacting with police. Do I run? Do I not? Don't talk. It took a long time to adapt. And there's a strong reminder from experiences in the past that are not good. There was lots of work to do to account for intersectional trauma and past experiences. ”

Another participant highlighted the impacts of policing in their country of origin when discussing how police in [South American Country] were using violence against civilians with impunity. They shared: **“the chauvinistic and macho society and corruption is to blame for actions by police and the government in my country.”**

Multiple participants with experience of asylum also discussed the impact of racial bias, with two stating that if they were a victim of a violent crime, or a hate incident, they would not feel comfortable reporting it to the police if the perpetrator was a white person, over fears they would not be believed. Some participants expressed the strong need to keep personal records of evidence in instances where they chose to report an incident to police. Another participant added: **“it isn't about explicit remarks. I don't see police making explicit remarks, it is an institutional problem.”**

Despite recognising hesitancy to engage with Police Scotland, many LGBT+ people with experience of asylum stated they feel “much safer” around Police in Scotland than they did in their country of origin. Participants attributed this to no longer having to fear for their personal safety at the hands of police officers, that officers in Scotland do not carry weapons or guns, and that CCTV and surveillance in Scotland aids feelings of safety and security. One participant said: **“the police in Scotland are perfect compared to police in my home country”** - this participant had not interacted with Police Scotland before, but communicated they did not fear future engagement due to positive perceptions of Police Scotland and the rights held by citizens and residents in the UK.

Within focus groups, participants discussed their views and comfortability around reporting hate incidents to Police Scotland. Participants expressed a range of views, some highlighting they would feel comfortable reporting a hate incident they experienced, some stating they would feel uncomfortable but would “grit their teeth” and report, and others stating they would not report a hate incident. Reasons provided by participants were multifactorial, including: lack of faith in ability of police and legal systems, fear they wouldn't be taken seriously, and concern that Police Scotland are not LGBT+ informed and wouldn't understand LGBT+ issues or identities.

“

I failed to report a hate crime I experienced, even when approached, because I didn't feel like having to explain my identity as a trans person who hasn't engaged in hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or surgery.

”

Concerns that police officers might lack understanding of trans identities, and how to best support and engage with trans people throughout reporting was a key issue highlighted by participants. As was the importance of officers understanding trans issues, and wider LGBT+ issues, to be able to recognise the significance of hate incidents (and what actually constitutes a hate incident). One participant also pointed out the frequency of hate incidents against LGBT+ people because of their identity, highlighting that reporting often felt pointless due to the burden of proof required. They said:

“

How do you evidence a homophobic insult on the street? What will, what can, they do about this? Must a queer person be punched in the street and enter a police station with a black eye before they can claim to be a victim of a hate crime? I don't see what reporting can do. How can it improve things?”

”

Multiple participants touched upon the upset, fear and trauma that experiencing a hate incident can cause, and how this coupled with poor relationships with/trust in policing can contribute to lack of reporting of hate incidents, even when involving violence and threat to life. One participant shared:

“

My friend was targeted outside a bar in the city and was followed by a guy who pulled a knife on him and chased him with homophobic slurs. It wasn't reported. He was severely emotionally impacted. This is a wider experience than we give it credence, how emboldened did this person feel, that they could attack my friend?

”



BLACK TRANS  
LIVES MATTER

## Desire for meaningful engagement and progress

Although many participants we engaged in this conversation expressed concerns around the relationship between LGBT+ communities and the police, many participants wanted to see the treatment of LGBT+ people improve, and for the community to be able to place their trust in Police Scotland.

**Within our Survey we asked participants if they “had confidence in the police to meet the needs of the LGBT+ community”?**

Strongly agree or agree	41%
Neither agree nor disagree	26%
Strongly disagree or disagree	33%

Multiple participants recognised that, despite the fractured relationship, there are instances of positive engagement between police and the LGBT+ community, and that policing like most services are stretched. One participant discussed the impact this can have on engagement, particularly in the context of mental health interventions for marginalised people, when saying: **“I think police do get quite good training in mental health support, and they see it every day. They do their best, but they shouldn’t have to.”**

**“We need to have police officers who understand LGBT+. Either they’re a part of the community, or they just understand the issues. If you want to support a specific group, and to build and have trust, you need to have that quality.”**

Similarly, almost all focus groups discussed the importance of improving trust in policing for the community, improving LGBT+ people’s experiences, and improving understanding of LGBT+ issues in policing. Participants noted instances where engaging with Police Scotland is important, and highlighted that LGBT+ people should feel comfortable reporting hate incidents, or contacting police when they or members of their community are in danger. One participant framed the current situation as a “state of constant fear” experienced by the community, whilst other participants recognised the relationship as it stands between some of the LGBT+ community and police is not conducive nor helpful to enabling LGBT+ people to feel safe, valued and protected within society. One participant shared: **“I want a new vision, of respect and care and kindness.”**

Another added: **“If police were to think about working with us, then there needs to be more effort into building relationships. There’s a lot of queer voice that can and needs to go into policing. There needs to be action, and measurement of outcome and improvement.”**

## Relationship building and breaking down barriers

Participants within focus groups discussed at length approaches that Police Scotland could take to improving relationships with, and outcomes for, LGBT+ communities in Scotland. The most common suggestion was the need for “proactive engagement” with LGBT+ people and communities living in Scotland. Participants stressed this was fundamental to productive dialogue around understanding perspectives within the community, improving the experiences of LGBT+ people and increasing the confidence of police officers in engaging with minoritised groups. One participant shared: **“it’s not only about formalised lectures, and learning about LGBT+ history. It’s about us, and people like us, sitting around a table with officers. It’s about engaging with real community.”**

Other participants highlighted the importance in engagement with a broad range of LGBT+ people with a broad range of views and experiences, including those who are “adversarial” to policing. One participant shared: **“consult us, experience us. Host an event, invite police-hostile queer people. They will have to listen and hear us.”** Another added:

**“** We need to have a conversation with police officers present. Consultations are important, but having officers listen first hand to what you want them to hear is important. There’s a big difference between reading a report, and being there in person. **”**

Participants also touched upon the importance of any community engagement not resting solely on the shoulders of police officers who are themselves LGBT+. One shared:

**“** This shouldn’t be something pushed on LGBT+ officers, I want someone who is on the other side of the fence. Everyone plays a part. Policy makers, lawyers, uniformed and plain clothes. You want to speak to people who don’t understand, and who aren’t part of the community. **”**

Throughout discussions within focus groups, multiple participants discussed actions that increased their confidence in policing, and in their own feelings of personal security and safety when engaging with police. Participants with experience of asylum talked about the importance of “knowing their rights” and having access to information sessions (from both charities and policing divisions) in improving their confidence in engaging with Police. One participant said:

**“knowing the law, and making sure that people understand their rights can make a huge difference. Something like an accessible communications network with all the information would be very helpful, especially for those with language barriers.”**

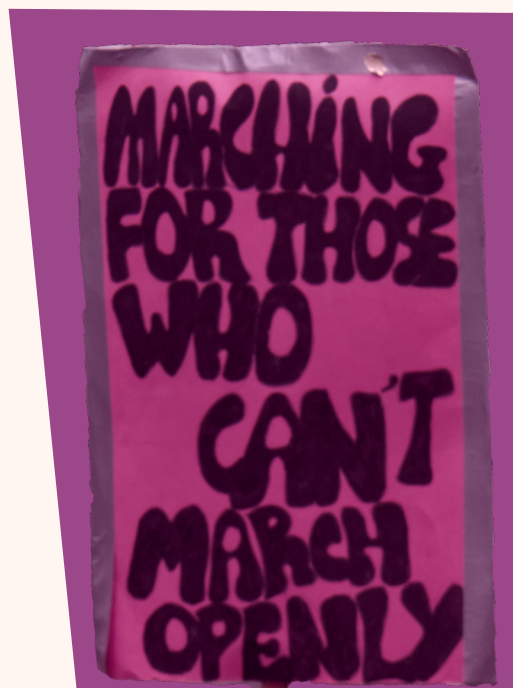
Relatedly, participants within all focus groups stated the importance of LGBT+ informed and affirming training for officers and employees within Police Scotland. Many participants made it clear that for training to be impactful, educational and informative it should be grounded in understandings of human rights, systemic and structural inequality and lived experience. One participant added:

**“ We keep banging our heads, training, training, training. But it’s not just any training, it has to be the right stuff. Otherwise, you could sit there for hours and it would still be pointless. If you want to understand a specific group, be among them. Be within that community.”**

Another participant shared this sentiment, highlighting the importance of intersectionality by stating:

**“ It’s important for people of colour, women, immigrants, LGBT+ people. Organisations should help police to deal with real life LGBT+ people, instead of just theoretical situations.”**

Another focus group discussed the importance of training being embedded within and made available to all within Police Scotland, and highlighted the need for it to be interactive and **“not a module someone begrudgingly completes on their lunch break.”**



# DISCUSSION

The findings within this Report highlight the complex and often strained relationship between LGBT+ communities and Police Scotland, especially amongst individuals who experience multiple marginalisation. While the majority of participants shared experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of understanding from the police—revealing significant barriers to trust and engagement—some also reported positive experiences. These accounts demonstrate that, although many challenges persist, there are instances where policing has effectively supported and met the needs of LGBT+ people.

A key theme emerged around systemic issues within policing, particularly regarding trans, racialised, and disabled LGBT+ individuals. Many participants expressed frustration that their concerns were dismissed or misunderstood, with police understanding of and responses to issues like transphobia and racism falling short of expectations.

Participants also called for consistent, year-round community engagement with LGBT+ communities, including in rural areas where police presence is limited. Effective inclusion requires sustained effort from Police Scotland, ensuring that multiply marginalised people who face complex barriers to engagement are explicitly and thoughtfully included.

The issues raised by participants underscore the need for trauma-informed, intersectional approaches to engaging with marginalised people. LGBT+ issues should not be understood in isolation; they must be understood in the context of other forms of discrimination, such as racism and discrimination against disabled people. Meaningful change requires police training that is comprehensive, rooted in lived experience, and focused on the complexity and impact of systemic inequity and discrimination.

Ultimately, the insights shared by participants highlighted the urgent need for sustained, systemic changes in how Police Scotland engages with LGBT+ communities. Rebuilding trust demands measurable, long-term commitment which ensures that all members of the LGBT+ community feel safe, heard, and respected when engaging with policing.

This Report is not just an acknowledgment of harm – it is a call to action. Police Scotland must forge a genuine, ongoing partnership with LGBT+ communities. The path forward, as outlined by our participants, is clear: it requires listening, bold action, and a willingness to transform the structures and cultures that continue to cause harm. Trust can be rebuilt, but only through tangible, measurable change. The findings within this Report point to an urgent need for improvement of the experiences of queer people, and the process of rebuilding trust will depend on sustained transparency, accountability, and consistent, impactful action.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

By presenting the experiences of LGBT+ communities across Scotland we hope to aid Police Scotland in it's stated commitment to "build an inclusive Service, free from discrimination, for all our communities." History cannot be undone, but trust can be rebuilt - through transparency, accountability and meaningful change. It is in that spirit that we present these recommendations:

## 1. Proactive, ongoing and inclusive community engagement backed by tangible action

- Establish **regular forums and engagement sessions** with LGBT+ communities, especially those most marginalised (e.g. trans people, disabled LGBT+ people, racialised LGBT+ people, LGBT+ people with experience of asylum).
- Engage with a **diverse range of individuals with diverse views** on and experiences with policing
- Ensure **engagement is national, meaningful, accessible, and designed to meet queer people** where they are—both in terms of physical spaces (e.g. rural and urban LGBT+ community groups, and safer spaces) and communication channels
- Commit to ensuring that **engagement is not tokenistic**: feedback and insights gathered should be acted upon transparently and effectively, with clear mechanisms for implementing changes based on community input.

## 2. Roll out intersectional LGBT+ training for all Police Scotland staff

- Training should be practical, comprehensive and **rooted in lived experience, human rights and systemic inequality**
- Ensure training is **ongoing, co-designed with LGBT+ organisations and individuals** and tailored to address specific issues (e.g. transphobia, racism, ableism, trauma-informed practice)
- Ensure that **responsibility for LGBT+ inclusion is shared across all staff**, and that LGBT+ officers are not solely tasked with leading or driving this change

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 3. Dedicated LGBT+ Liaison Officers and safe contact points

- Re-introduce **LGBT+ Community Liaison Officers** across Scotland
- Establish clearly identified and **trained contact points** within local police stations for sensitive reporting, support, and signposting
- Ensure **accessibility** for people with language barriers and those who fear state institutions due to asylum or immigration status
- Ensure that **Third Party Reporting Centres** (TPRCs) are supported, LGBT+ aware, and provide sensitive, inclusive support to all individuals reporting hate incidents

## 4. Transparent data collection, monitoring and accountability

- Monitor outcomes of community engagement and **report publicly on actions** taken
- Introduce **independent oversight** for reviewing police conduct in cases involving marginalised LGBT+ people

## 5. Public commitment to a human rights-based approach

- Engage actively with **Human Rights organisations** (such as the Scottish Human Rights Commission) and advocacy groups to adopt best practices in policing based on a human rights framework
- Embed the **PANEL principles** (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and equality, Empowerment, and Legality) in all policies and practices to uphold the dignity and safety of marginalised communities
- Ensure policing strategies explicitly **counter regressive policy shifts** that threaten the dignity and safety of marginalised LGBT+ people

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6. Improve accessibility and awareness of reporting mechanisms within marginalised communities

- Provide accessible, tailored **guides to reporting hate incidents**, including translated materials, infographics, and BSL accessible videos
- Co-create (with experts) **clearer guidance for officers** on recognising and recording LGBT+ hate incidents, including non-physical forms of harm
- Ensure materials are distributed through appropriate channels that effectively **reach LGBT+ communities**

## 7. Mental health-informed and trauma-aware approaches

- Ensure officers are trained in **trauma-informed responses**, particularly when dealing with marginalised survivors or victims of hate crime, domestic violence, or those in mental health crisis
- Explore **inter-organisational approaches** with equalities, human rights and mental health charities to improve support pathways for marginalised people who come into contact with Police Scotland

## 8. Embed intersectionality at all levels of policy and practice

- Adopt an **intersectional human rights-based approach** across all Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies - considering how racism, misogyny, discrimination towards disabled people, classism and xenophobia compound LGBT+ exclusion
- Establish an **internal panel** which focus on multiple marginalisations, not only "single issue" diversity work

# APPENDICES

## Limitations

This report has several limitations that should be considered when reviewing:

1. **Sample Size and Diversity:** The sample size of 20 participants, while providing valuable insights, is relatively small and may not fully represent the diversity of views within Scotland's LGBT+ communities. Lack of representation from older people and those from rural communities noted.
2. **Self-Selection Bias:** Individuals who took part in these conversations self-selected by registering for our events. The majority of individuals who took part in focus groups were community members who engage with our services at LGBT Health and Wellbeing
3. **Qualitative Nature:** Due to qualitative approach, the findings are based on participants' own experiences and engagements with Police Scotland.
4. **Temporal Context:** The study reflects a snapshot of the LGBT+ community's views at the time of data collection in early 2025, and changes in social, political, or legal contexts may impact future perceptions and relationships with Police Scotland

# APPENDICES

## References

LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People in 2022. [online] LGBT Youth Scotland. Available at: <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/life-in-scotland-for-lgbt-young-people-in-2022/>

McKee, J. (2023). UK to wipe women's historic convictions for homosexuality. [online] PinkNews | Latest lesbian, gay, bi and trans news | LGBTQ+ news. Available at: <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/06/13/uk-historic-homosexuality-convictions-women-veterans/> [Accessed 4 Apr. 2025].

Owen, S.S., Burke, T.W., Few-Demo, A.L. and Natwick, J. (2017). Perceptions of the Police by LGBT Communities. American Journal of Criminal Justice, [online] 43(3), pp.668-693. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-017-9420-8>

Pickles, J. (2019). Policing hate and bridging communities: a qualitative evaluation of relations between LGBT+ people and the police within the North East of England. Policing and Society, [online] 30(7), pp.1-19. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1588269>

Police Scotland (2024a). Apology to the LGBTQI+ communities of Scotland - Police Scotland. [online] Police.uk. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2024/may/apology-to-the-lgbtqi-communities-of-scotland/>

Police Scotland (2024b). Listening to our communities. [online] Police Scotland. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/how-we-do-it/policing-together/listening-to-our-communities/>

UK Parliament (2019). 1885 Labouchere Amendment. [online] UK Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/collections1/sexual-offences-act-1967/1885-labouchere-amendment/>



[lgbthealth.org.uk](https://lgbthealth.org.uk)

**Scotland's LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing charity**

We welcome the entire diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, including non-binary, queer, intersex, asexual people and all identities under the LGBTQIA+ community - this includes those questioning their sexuality or gender identity, or who do not use labels for either.

**Follow us on social media @lgbthealthy**  

Scottish Charity No. SC034216 | Company Limited by Guarantee No. SC2462