

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2016-17

Written submission from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

Thank you for inviting me to submit views on behalf of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) on this topic.

You will be aware that since I gave evidence to the Committee on 4 November 2014 HMICS has undertaken substantial inspection and review work involving both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). This work includes:

- MAPPA
- Assurance Review of Call Handling
- Local Policing+ of Edinburgh (including Partnerships and Custody)
- BTP Crime Audit
- Local Policing+ of Aberdeen (including Missing Persons and Custody)
- Stop and Search Phase 1
- Local Policing+ of Ayrshire (including Intelligence)
- Local Policing+ of Fife (including Rape)
- HMICS Annual Report 2013-14
- Crime Audit
- Armed Response
- Continuous Improvement Review SPA – Leadership and Governance
- Continuous Improvement Review Police Scotland – Strategic Planning and Performance Management

As part of that work, I have endeavoured to consistently assess planning, management and use of resources, commenting on the state, efficiency and effectiveness of the police service. I believe I can therefore provide a unique perspective on the financial challenges which face policing in Scotland.

I wish to focus my comments in three specific areas for the Committee's consideration:

1. Financial Strategy

In line with recommendations previously made by our colleagues in Audit Scotland, I do not believe that the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland have a fully formed financial strategy in place. And whilst I accept that there are many unknowns which can prevent such a strategy being completed, including the delay to the current Spending Review, this does not prevent the majority of public sector organisations having at least a Medium Term Financial Plan in place.

I have been consistent in my view that there is a post reform challenge for medium to longer term financial sustainability in the current model of policing and the existing change programme. The SPA and Police Scotland must be clearer about future

delivery structures and have detailed transition plans which deliver sustainable savings.

In order to do this, there must be a clear long term vision for policing established through engagement with the people of Scotland, which allows detailed planning to take place to shape the organisation. This vision must be based on fiscal reality balanced with the very real new and developing threats which face us.

It will also be essential that strong governance is in place at every level to set strategic direction, agree a deliverable budget and monitor spend and savings. HMICS expects that the recently announced SPA Review of Police Governance will be addressing these issues.

2. Resource Management

Our inspection and review work has highlighted a number of growing concerns regarding day to day resource management. I have been consistent in my focus on the need for a balanced workforce, but have observed the loss of skilled police staff, increases in overtime and increased use of police officers in corporate functions and other settings with no real business case rationale. Ongoing pressure on staff, including senior officers, is also impacting on morale. This is validated by the recent staff survey results and our own work which found that morale amongst officers and staff is mixed, with concerns over the impact that increasing demand along with reducing response and community officer numbers is having on the ability to provide an effective service.

In our recent report on Local Policing in Edinburgh, I highlighted the issues around workforce planning and demand management. There were challenges for the division in meeting demand from the public within its current level of local policing resources and staff abstractions. The current level of officers maintaining public order and engaged in administrative duties in courts is not an efficient and effective deployment of limited local policing resources. Although these challenges are largely being met through the flexibility of staff and are supported by good internal processes, this is not sustainable in the medium to longer term.

In our assurance review of call handling, we identified key issues around demand management and resource allocation, which require to be addressed at both divisional and corporate levels. An effective and flexible enterprise demand management approach is essential to balance public demand, protective demand and pre-planned demand with expectations. This needs to empower staff to deliver a responsive local service within necessary corporate parameters.

To date, HMICS has not commented on the policy of an additional 1000 officers (maintaining 17234 officer minimum number). We have however noted that the consequences of a financial strategy which focuses primarily on a reduction in civilian staff is not sustainable and prompts behaviours such as those observed in our assurance Review of Call Handling which included a lack of meaningful staff engagement, a focus on productivity and efficiency and adherence to timescales in spite of high levels of risk.

In many of our inspections we have struggled to obtain accurate financial information. We are aware that progress toward the full integration of existing and procurement of replacement financial systems has not progressed to plan and continues to constrain the production of accurate costing, project and savings information. There is a need to accelerate this programme and ensure that there is sufficient capability and capacity within both organisations to deliver.

3. Future Financial Pressures

I have identified a general downward trend in the number of calls for service from the public, although the nature of demand is changing. As I have mentioned previously there are new and developing threats which policing must consider in terms of future investment. This includes the requirement to invest heavily in both Cybercrime and Counter Terrorism prevention and detection whilst potentially making further efficiencies elsewhere. The level and diversity of such crime remains mostly hidden, which is not the fault of Police Scotland, but a feature of its challenging nature.

Other areas such as crimes against vulnerable people also continue to grow at unprecedented rates within the context of a wider fall in crime levels. With the financial imperative to continue to make savings, the ability of the police service to adequately plan and manage these emergent areas is often constrained.

Public and staff confidence has undoubtedly been affected by a number of recent and ongoing issues, including concerns regarding budget overspend. Strengthened governance would go a long way to provide a higher degree of assurance to both the public and staff.

I remain committed as Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland, to the improvement of policing and am keen to recognise the achievements of both the SPA and Police Scotland in addressing all three of the areas I have highlighted. However, I firmly believe that more joint action is required on behalf of the Scottish Government, SPA and Police Scotland as the tripartite agencies responsible to fundamentally address the issues I have set out.

I hope this submission is of interest to the Committee.

Derek Penman
HM Inspector of Constabulary
24 November 2015