

Justice Committee

Policing in Scotland

Written submission from Police Scotland

We serve a changing Scotland comprising diverse communities whose needs, vulnerabilities and expectations continue to evolve. Indeed the nature of our policing mission itself is diverse, ranging geographically from urban to rural, and in personal profile from those engaged in criminality, victims of crime and the increasing number of people we as a service encounter each day who are in a state of crisis and distress. Policing is a challenging, often dangerous and complex environment in which police officers and staff operate every single day.

Five years ago we embarked upon a generational programme of change which we are very much still on and will continue for years to come. Police Scotland as a single service is still relatively young, as is the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). We continue to develop the organisation, recognising best practice from across the UK and wider law enforcement internationally to ensure we deliver the best policing service possible for the people of Scotland. The relationship between Police Scotland and the SPA has taken time to mature in terms of a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, as well as the provision of clear and robust accountability.

Shaping the future of policing, we have, for the first time in Scotland, invested in the development of a long-term strategy to enable the service to become operationally and financially sustainable. The 2026: Serving a Changing Scotland Strategy has been developed with partners and communities the length and breadth of Scotland to ensure we have actively captured people's views and opinions, which will influence the shape of policing and help us to achieve sustained excellence in service and protection. A draft version of the implementation plan which underpins the strategy was presented to the SPA in December 2017. It is important to recognise that we must maintain focus on delivering our core function - high quality operational policing - whilst implementing a significant change process.

The implementation plan provides details of a number of key transformation programmes that we will implement to:

- Improve public contact, engagement and service
- Strengthen effective partnerships
- Invest in our use of information and technology
- Enhance cyber and forensic capabilities
- Enable and develop our people
- Transform corporate support services.

Our plan includes our Local Approaches to Policing programme, through which we recognise that a one size fits all approach will not be successful. This programme of change will shape our policing services and operational response to reflect the true needs and demands of all our communities, be they island, remote, rural, urban or virtual.

At this time, the focus of Police Scotland remains on continuing to meet the operational and organisational challenges we face each day. Our operational priorities are shaped by listening to what the public across Scotland tell us through a wide variety of communication channels and from our ongoing analysis of the risks and emerging threats likely to impact on Scotland. This approach enables our policing teams across the country to deliver services designed to prevent crime and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Our priorities are outlined within the Annual Police Plan as:

- Violence, Disorder and Antisocial Behaviour
- Serious Organised Crime
- Counter Terrorism and Domestic Extremism
- Protecting People at Risk of Harm
- Road Safety and Road Crime
- Acquisitive Crime.

Police Scotland has the ability to tackle all of these policing priorities through an effective combination of dedicated local policing teams who work alongside their communities and partners, and the specialist command teams who provide national capability and capacity around incidents such as those involving serious violence, or sexual crime, significant events and operations, and emerging critical incidents. Every person, in every community across the country, has equal access to both a local policing model which is right for them and to a consistently high level of specialist support which can be accessed nationally.

One of our key strengths lies in our existing partnerships, which we continue to develop, from the support we receive internally from staff associations and unions, to the many external partners, including other Emergency Services, Local Authorities, Health Service providers, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS).

The health and welfare of our people is fundamental to our ability to deliver quality policing services. Good mental and physical wellbeing is vital for all of us and we recognise policing can be a stressful and demanding vocation that at times may impact on the emotional and physical health of individual officers and members of staff. In this regard, the Police Scotland wellbeing initiative, Your Wellbeing Matters, was launched in September 2017. It was introduced to ensure that the officers and staff within Scottish policing have access to appropriate support and assistance when and where they need it. Working closely with our staff associations, unions and external partners, Your Wellbeing Matters offers a range of specialist services, confidential guidance, advice and practical support. We are committed to the wellbeing programme and have in place more than 200 wellbeing champions who provide a direct route into support services. This forms part of a range of work focused on our people, including new training programmes which provide the right training and development opportunities for everyone within Police Scotland.

Issues around governance and accountability rightly need debated and developed further, but the day to day service provided by the men and women of Police Scotland compares favourably to any police service in the world. Policing in Scotland is strong, resilient and being delivered every minute of every day by dedicated and effective individuals across every rank and role in our service.

Police Scotland
17 January 2018