

Ms Mary Fee MSP
Convener
Justice Sub Committee on Policing
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh

21 June 2017

Our ref: AF/039/17/CW

Dear Convener

INITIAL SPA RESPONSE TO HMICS THEMATIC INSPECTION – OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

I am aware that the Sub Committee is taking evidence on Thursday 22 June 2017 from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Derek Penman, on his inspection report (published today) on Scottish Police Authority (SPA) openness and transparency.

The full SPA Board will be considering this report within the agenda of its public meeting on the afternoon of Thursday 22 June 2017, however I can offer you some initial comments in response.

As indicated previously to Parliament, I and other SPA members have acknowledged recent mistakes made, have listened to the strengthened civic and public concerns around transparency, and responded accordingly.

However, two charges that have been levelled at the SPA in recent months is that we were creating an organisation to keep secrets, and that we were inappropriately taking decisions behind closed doors which should have been made in public.

It is notable that today's HMICS inspection report contains no evidence or findings that would support either of those accusations.

The acceptance by HMICS of the need for SPA members to have private discussions and free exchanges of views with Police Scotland and other stakeholders is also helpful. We also welcome that the report found no evidence of a 'bullying culture' within the SPA, and I hope that this finding is given as much prominence as the original allegation.

The report contains a number of findings that were well-signposted in advance, and which the SPA have implemented or anticipated.

The lead policy recommendation of the report around SPA reverting to holding its committee meeting in public was actioned by the Board on 25 May. The acknowledgement by HMICS that the quality and length of Police Scotland papers, and relationships between SPA and Police Scotland, are both much improved is notable in underpinning this transition and we will now look in detail at the further administration that HMICS recommend around that.

Last week's announcement by the Scottish Government of a joint review of the required structure and support for the Board, led by our Deputy Chair and a local authority Chief Executive, addresses a material recommendation and is in train to report later in the autumn.

Further, I hope that my own decision last week to step down as Chair later in the year has also removed for SPA and policing any lingering debate and distraction.

There are a number of further recommendations about Board practice and perspectives that we require to consider collectively, and we will take a view upon after our Board discussion.

There may also be recommendations where we seek more information from HMICS on its evidence base, so that we can in turn better tailor and design our response within an overall action plan.

Informed by the discussions tomorrow afternoon, I will respond further in writing to the Sub Committee by no later than Monday 26 June 2017.

While I accept that openness and transparency is an important aspect of the work of the SPA, I also welcome the acknowledgement by HMICS of positive progress in the governance of the SPA, our commitment to good governance, and a genuine commitment by SPA Board members to putting policing before personal interests.

I believe these are strong foundations to build upon.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Flanagan
Chair, SPA