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Across
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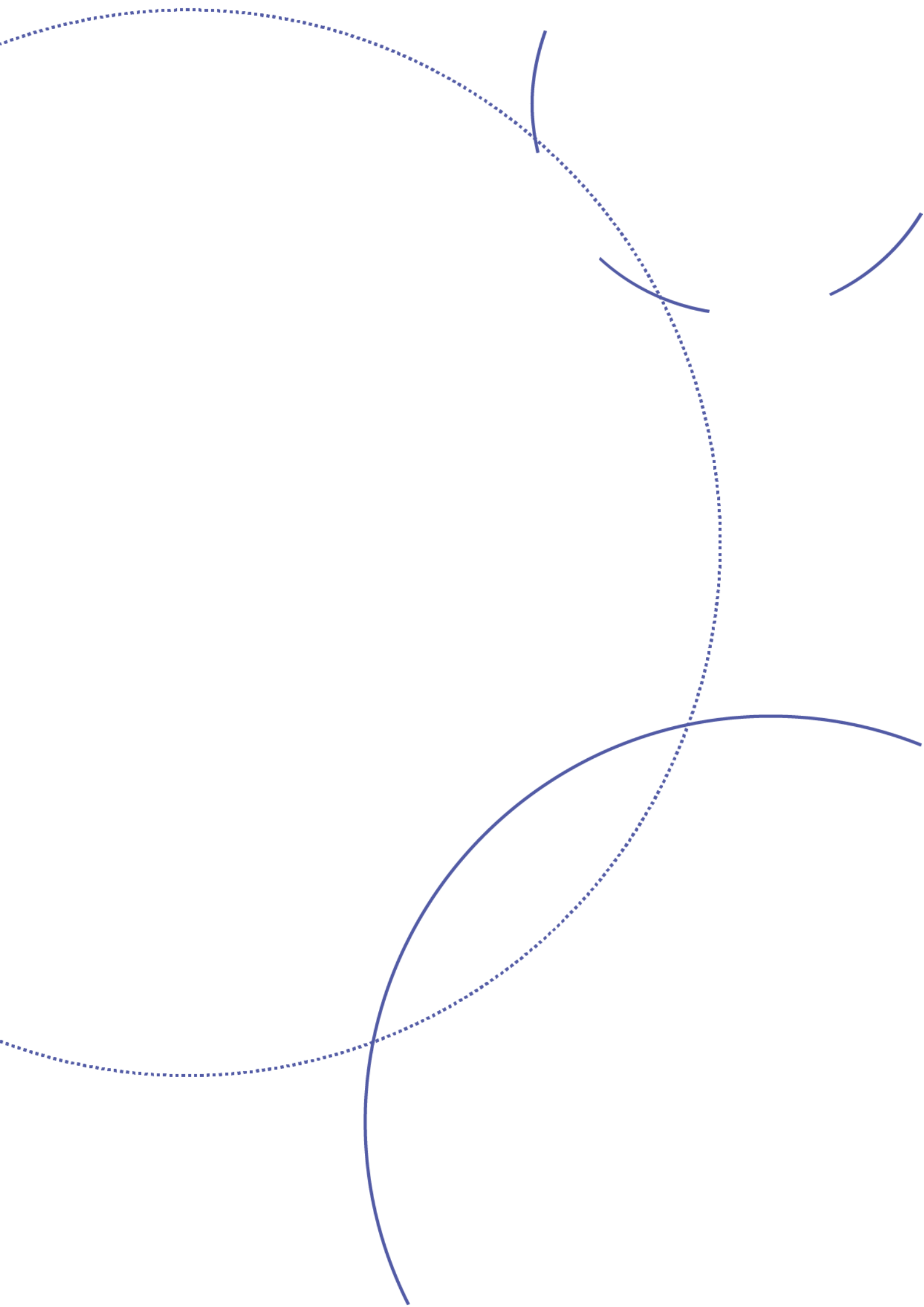


HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

October 2024



Thematic inspection
of police response to
missing persons in
Scotland





HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) is established under the [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#) and has wide ranging powers to look into the 'state, effectiveness and efficiency' of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

We have a statutory duty to inquire into the arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA to meet their obligations in terms of best value and continuous improvement. If necessary, we can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SPA or Police Scotland as they consider appropriate. We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on policing in Scotland.

- Our powers allow us to do anything we consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions
- The SPA and the Chief Constable must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require to enable us to carry out our functions
- When we publish a report, the SPA and the Chief Constable must also consider what we have found and take such measures, if any, as they think fit
- Where our report identifies that the SPA or Police Scotland is not efficient or effective (or best value not secured), or will, unless remedial measures are taken, cease to be efficient or effective, Scottish Ministers may direct the SPA to take such measures as may be required. The SPA must comply with any direction given
- Where we make recommendations, we will follow them up and report publicly on progress
- We will identify good practice that can be applied across Scotland
- We work with other inspectorates and agencies across the public sector and co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication
- We aim to add value and strengthen public confidence in Scottish policing and will do this through independent scrutiny and objective, evidence-led reporting about what we find.














Our approach is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.¹

This thematic inspection was undertaken by HMICS in terms of Section 74(2)(a) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and is laid before the Scottish Parliament in terms of Section 79(3) of the Act.

¹ HMICS, [Corporate Plan 2021-24](#), 1 February 2022.



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Our inspection

We have undertaken this comprehensive inspection of the police response to missing persons in recognition of the impact that this issue can have on individuals and their families. We have also become increasingly aware of the significant resources dedicated to responding to missing person incidents within local police divisions and across the specialist national divisions (e.g., operational support, Policing Together and the contact, command and control divisions).

Our inspection has been far reaching and we have engaged widely across the aforementioned police divisions, through interviews and focus groups. We undertook onsite visits to meet with partners from health, local authority and third sector services to examine how well partners work together to address this important issue. In the methodology section of this report, we outline our approach and the range of tasks undertaken, including a comprehensive review of calls made to police service centres and an audit of the national missing persons application used by police to record incidents and guide investigations.

A significant number of people are reported missing each year. We know from research that becoming missing is a universal issue as anyone can potentially go missing. People from all walks of life can be affected and the incident can occur in a wide variety of circumstances. There are many complex reasons why an individual may go missing, and it is likely that one person's reasoning may differ greatly from another. Research has tended to focus on the most vulnerable groups of individuals such as children, people with mental health issues or with dementia. However, there are many cases where the pressures of everyday life or problems within relationships can be the basis of a missing person incident.

It is of concern that the majority of people reported missing each year are children and young people. Our report outlines that children and young people represent over 60% of missing people in the past year (2023-24). We outline the extent to which police and partners are responding to and addressing this issue, however, recognise that this is part of a wider societal problem that needs to be addressed in order to protect, support and prevent children and young people from becoming missing in the first place.



This report highlights that while there is a significant level of demand placed on policing, with over 20,000 missing person calls being made to police service centres each year, the vast majority of missing people either return by themselves or are returned by Police Scotland. That said, many missing people come to harm while missing, and the impact on families in the relatively small number of situations where a person is not found, or is found dead, can be devastating.

Overall, the policing response to missing persons is robust and effective and demonstrates a significant level of commitment to investigate thoroughly and locate people as swiftly as possible. However, more needs to be done to ensure that clear leadership and strategic direction is in place. We have also highlighted where improvements can be made in the operational response and have outlined recommendations intended to support Police Scotland to drive improvement.

The role of partner organisations, including local authorities, health services and third sector partners, is critical to achieving positive outcomes for missing people. We have found that while some areas can demonstrate effective partnership working that has resulted in better preventative approaches and a reduction in missing person incidents, this is not consistent across the country.

The competence and professionalism of Police Scotland's approach to missing persons has been recognised for its effectiveness by partners across Scotland and police forces in other countries. Our interviews with leaders from health, social work and the third sector, were very positive about the commitment and expertise that police bring to addressing missing person incidents. Police Scotland has previously been approached by the Australian Federal Police, South Australia Police, Swedish Police Authority and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to discuss structures, processes and practice that have proved effective, with a view to adopting these.

We anticipate that the findings and recommendations resulting from this inspection will contribute to the collective efforts of police and partners to achieve better outcomes for missing people and their families.

Craig Naylor

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

October 2024



Key findings

General

- The scale of missing person incidents in Scotland is considerable, with Police Scotland recording over 20,000 missing person reports on its system for tasking and operational resource management (STORM)² in 2023. Following assessment, almost 18,000 missing person investigations proceeded and were recorded on the police national missing persons application (NMPA) in the same year.
- The number of police investigations undertaken has reduced over the past two years. Investigations undertaken in the year 2022-23 were recorded as 17,917 whereas, in 2023-24, the figure reduced to 16,236.
- Most people go missing from their home address. There has been a decrease in the number of people missing from home in the past year, along with those missing from NHS settings, foster care and children's houses.³
- The majority of missing person investigations in Scotland relate to those aged 17 years and under.
- The issue of missing persons in Scotland is wide-ranging and affects both urban and rural areas (although the police investigative response can differ significantly, based on differences in population and geographical issues).
- There is a clear definition in place of what constitutes a missing person, which has been agreed between Police Scotland and partners. This includes an agreed definition of risk.

² STORM is a computer system used by Police Scotland to create and manage incidents reported by members of the public, but also to manage the deployment of operational resources.

³ This is the term commonly used in Scotland when referring to what were previously known as residential childcare units or children's homes.



- The response to missing persons is not solely a police matter and often involves key partners from health, local authorities and third sector organisations at a national and local level.
- Police Scotland has demonstrated consistent success in resolving missing person incidents. Data for the past four years shows that over 99% of missing persons are traced alive each year. Over 90% of missing incidents are closed within 48 hours, with 58% closing within the first eight hours.

Leadership and vision

- Police Scotland subscribes to the National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland (the framework). This is a Scottish Government-led framework that sets out expectations and commitments for a multi-agency response to missing persons in Scotland.
- Police Scotland has collaborated effectively with partners at a national level to develop the framework, which was first introduced in 2017.
- The establishment of a national multi-agency framework for missing persons is a particular strength in Scotland. The principles are supported by research and evidence of what works. There is no similar framework in place in other parts of the UK.
- The Scottish Government provides valuable support to promote missing person policy. It provides funding for national missing person coordinators (hereinafter referred to as national coordinators), hosted by a third sector charity organisation, [Missing People](#), that operates across the UK and undertakes secretariat functions for the framework implementation group.
- Police Scotland has been a driving force behind the implementation of the framework. However, more recently, there have been gaps in clear and visible leadership at senior level, as well as in the oversight and governance of operations.
- There is clear and effective divisional leadership. This includes effective command structures for high-risk missing person investigations.



- The framework is not statutory guidance, which can result in some partners giving it less attention and emphasis than it requires. The framework does not have the consistent profile that it should have among some partner organisations.
- There was limited awareness of the collective aims and objectives of the framework across divisions and among operational officers and staff.
- Several partners and partnership areas have made considerable progress in adopting the framework and have worked effectively with Police Scotland on its implementation at a local level. However, this is not consistent across the country.
- Police Scotland has a good understanding of demand resulting from missing persons. However, a more strategic planning response is required to identify efficiencies that may have a positive impact on demand levels.
- Police Scotland has developed suitable guidance for officers and staff, but there is no specific role profile or overarching guidance for divisional missing person coordinators where they are not affiliated to a divisional missing person coordination unit.
- While there are a range of procedures and toolkits in place to support the operational practice of officers and staff in respect of missing person investigations, these can be difficult to find on the police intranet. This resulted in some staff not being aware of relevant practice guides.
- Police Scotland provides quarterly performance reports to the SPA. The reports are used to highlight trends and changes in the number and type of incidents that are investigated. Current performance management data includes a range of demand-related information relevant to demographics and geographical differences.
- There is no overarching internal mechanism to evaluate the quality of the police response for missing persons.



Partnership working

- Police Scotland is a key partner in the framework implementation group. This is principally made up of representatives from Scottish Government, police, third sector agencies and academia. While beneficial in setting the agenda and providing oversight of the development and implementation of the framework, the group has no representation from senior personnel from local authorities or health services, which limits its influence.
- The development of collaborative working arrangements and positive operational culture is largely driven by divisional police leadership, alongside the National Crime Agency's UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU). This is considered by partners to be very positive.
- The contribution of partner organisations at a divisional level is variable. Several partners and local authority areas have made considerable progress in adopting the framework and have worked effectively with Police Scotland on its implementation at a local level. However, this is not consistent across the country.
- There is no national strategic group, made up of senior representatives from partnership bodies including police, health, and local authorities, to collectively steer the partnership response to missing persons. The effectiveness of a collaborative missing person response tends to be based on the quality of divisional partnership working agreements and can therefore depend on the level of priority given to it by divisional commanders and local partners.
- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was previously in place between Police Scotland and Missing People however this has lapsed. The MOU concentrated on arrangements for referrals aimed at helping and supporting missing persons and their families. An information sharing agreement is being developed, however more needs to be done to ensure the range of services offered by Missing People are understood and used more widely across Police Scotland.



Delivery

- The overarching operational response to missing person incidents is very effective. There are a number of areas where efficiencies can be identified and should be addressed to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that police response and outcomes for missing persons continue to improve.
- The Police Scotland national missing persons unit (NMPU) provides effective oversight and support for missing person enquiries. The unit provides investigative advice and quality assurance of the forms uploaded to the NMPA and oversees compliance with the system.
- The NMPU has limited staffing and resources to achieve its aims and objectives and relies on divisional coordinators (with varying degrees of capacity) to drive national approaches at a local level.
- The role of divisional coordinator is an essential and integral part of ensuring an effective response to missing persons. The role is not always protected within divisions. This can result in inconsistencies in how missing persons are managed at a local level and can affect the quality of performance information and partnership working.
- The NMPA provides a standardised framework for all Police Scotland missing person investigations. It is a very useful system that holds information on all missing person incidents and allows police to analyse critical missing persons information that can enhance investigative opportunities.
- The NMPA does not work well on mobile devices used routinely by police, as the system was developed for desktop use. This has introduced time inefficiencies, with officers often travelling to and from offices to record information on the system.
- Police Scotland's initial response to calls made to police service centres was of a very high standard. Most calls were dealt with by service advisors in a polite, helpful and professional manner. Our audit of calls made to service centres showed the majority of service advisors accurately obtained and recorded information as expected, in accordance with guidance.



- A THRIVE⁴ assessment was used in almost all calls reviewed as part of our audit. However, we consider that the assessment could be used more effectively and consistently in respect of children reported missing and, in some cases, where calls had been made from older-adult care facilities.
- Contact centre service advisors referred to the iVPD⁵ and other police systems to gather relevant information on potential vulnerabilities of the missing person, however their access to the system is limited.
- Almost all calls within our audit were assessed accurately and resolved appropriately by service advisors. This meant that accurate response levels were provided to local police divisions in a significant majority of cases.
- The operational response from local policing divisions to missing person incidents is very good. Police are highly committed to locate and return people who have been reported missing, as quickly as possible.
- The issue of some people being reported missing repeatedly presents a considerable challenge to police and partners. Children and young people are most likely to be subject to repeat missing person reports.
- Addressing repeat missing persons is a priority for Police Scotland, but there is no distinct national strategy for this. It is most often led by local divisions and therefore the approach can vary across the country.
- The effective use of early intervention, preventative approaches and protocols is essential to improve outcomes and reduce demand in an appropriate manner, including subjects of repeat missing persons reports.

⁴ The term THRIVE relates to a risk assessment approach that focuses on the following areas of relevance: threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement.

⁵ The Police Scotland interim Vulnerable Persons Database.



- Police Scotland is very committed and engaged in working with partners to implement nationally adopted protocols at a local level, including the Herbert, Philomena and Not at Home protocols.⁶
- We found several good examples of early intervention, prevention and the use of protocols at divisional level, however this was not replicated consistently across the country.
- The national coordinators, hosted by the Missing People charity, provide consultancy, training and valuable support for divisional police and partner organisations to implement and embed the missing persons framework.
- Some divisional coordinators and their local partners have achieved a reduction in demand by targeting repeat missing persons and collaborating on an appropriate supportive response.
- The practical approach and arrangements for return discussions (conducted with returned missing people) vary across the country, and more needs to be done to coordinate a consistent approach between police and partners.
- Police Scotland provides introductory-level training on missing persons to all probationary officers at the Scottish Police College, but there are gaps and inconsistencies in its training for operational officers and supervisors. Such training should enable and equip them to assess risk consistently across the country.
- While the operational support division (OSD) provides a wide range of specialist support services to local policing to enhance and support investigations, there is some inconsistency in access to specialist support services particularly in rural and semi-rural areas. Divisions in such areas have formed partnership arrangements with local specialist services to address this issue, and ensure more immediate access to meet their needs, and support investigations.
- It is a challenge to balance the resource required to meet the volume of missing person investigations that occur each year with that of other policing demands.

⁶ These protocols have been introduced nationally to improve the information provided to police by people making a missing person report. These are most often used by professionals, however, families can also use them to provide details about their family member to enhance initial investigations. We say more about this in the 'Protocols' section of this report.



Outcomes

- While, Police Scotland has achieved positive outcomes in terms of delivering a largely effective response to missing people, there is no overarching structure in place to set outcome targets and monitor the extent to which these have been achieved.
- Performance reports provide quantitative data, but there is limited information on the quality of service provision. This has resulted in missed opportunities to identify what is working well (or less well), to share learning and good practice, and to further develop this aspect of police services.
- Senior partners from health and local government should do more to collaborate with Police Scotland to ensure that there is a genuine multi-agency response to missing persons, aligning with the aims, objectives and commitments of the framework.
- Our onsite visits to local divisions to meet with partner organisations, senior managers and practitioners provided sound examples of very good local partnership working. We know that this also exists in those divisions not visited during our inspection, however, we are aware that this varies considerably across the country.
- We visited Lanarkshire, Highland and Islands, and Edinburgh City divisions during our inspection and were impressed by the collaborative approach and practical arrangements put in place by police and partners in those areas. There was a clear focus on working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for missing people, to reduce repeat incidents, and to provide support to missing people once returned.
- The development of divisional partnership protocols outlining an agreed strategic approach to missing persons – including focus on early intervention and prevention activity – is essential in achieving positive outcomes and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the multi-agency response.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should promote the national missing person framework's aims, objectives and commitments to officers and staff across divisions, and emphasise that this underpins its strategic direction.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should ensure that there is consistent national leadership in place to direct missing persons policy, establish outcome targets and support effective operational delivery.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should re-establish the missing person strategic governance forum to provide scrutiny, oversight and governance for matters relating to the police and partner response to missing persons.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should bring together all operational practice guidance relevant to missing persons in one place on the police intranet – including protocols and procedures, shared learning, and the national missing persons toolkit – to enable easy access for managers and staff.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should review the training provided to officers and staff regarding missing persons and ensure that it is adequate and meets the requirements of the role.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should develop a role profile and operational guidance for divisional coordinators, and ensure that the role is supported and enabled to fulfil tasks and responsibilities effectively.



Recommendation 7

Police Scotland should develop a version of the national missing persons application that has full functionality on mobile devices, and respond swiftly to any technical problems and potential improvements identified by users.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should continue to engage with partners and service providers at a national and local level to encourage greater adherence to the collective commitments of the national missing persons framework. This should include engagement on the implementation of early intervention and prevention approaches, and the use of national and local protocols.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland should ensure consistent and effective communication and engagement takes place with families, carers and key contacts throughout investigations.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should work with partners to ensure that clear and co-ordinated arrangements are in place to conduct return discussions across divisions. These should align effectively with safe and well checks, and all relevant information gathered from such discussions should be shared between partners.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should routinely evaluate the quality of its missing persons operations to pinpoint areas for improvement, using that knowledge to drive improvement, reduce demand and improve outcomes.



Areas for development

Areas for development	Number
Police Scotland should examine the role of tactical missing person coordinator and provide clarity across divisions on the aims, objectives and overall purpose of the role.	1
Police Scotland should ensure that quality assurance tasks are undertaken competently and consistently at each stage of the process.	2
Police Scotland should examine the level of access to the national missing persons application required by service advisors to improve operational efficiency and service delivery in response to missing persons.	3
Police Scotland should ensure that service advisors are aware of national protocols and their relevance and, where possible, have an understanding of the type of local protocols that are in place and what benefits these can bring.	4
Police Scotland should examine the processes and practice relevant to the management of long-term missing person enquiries, and introduce necessary improvements.	5
Police Scotland should explore opportunities to gather information on the experiences of missing people and their families, to better inform service planning and provision.	6



Areas of good practice

- Missing person co-ordination units exist in Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow divisions, with a clear management structure driving their progress. The existence of these units provides consistency in approach, with a focus on multi-agency prevention and intervention activities to reduce demand and improve outcomes for missing people. Edinburgh City division has a similar structure incorporated within its prevention, intervention and partnership unit.
- Highland and Islands and Greater Glasgow divisions have established quarterly divisional missing person tactical/strategic meetings chaired by superintendents, through which the NMPU can raise divisional issues. This meeting provides focus, scrutiny and oversight of the divisional approach to missing persons, where areas for improvement are identified and addressed.
- The Lanarkshire divisional coordinator holds weekly missing person partnership meetings involving all key agencies and partners. Such practice provides good lines of governance, reporting and accountability, while strengthening partnership arrangements.
- North East and Fife divisions have dedicated officers trained to conduct return interviews with children and young people deemed at risk of harm. These are co-ordinated with partners, so that the child or young person receives the most appropriate intervention.
- Highland and Islands division ensure all adults from mental health hospitals receive a return discussion on return from a missing incident.
- Edinburgh City, Highland and Islands, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, and Lanarkshire divisions, have partnership arrangements in place with local authority social work services or third sector agencies to carry out return discussions with children and young people. The outcome of these discussions is shared with police.



- Highland and Islands division has successfully used harbouring notices⁷ to respond to adults found in the company of missing children and young people. Such notices are deemed valuable by the division and partners as a safeguarding measure, particularly relevant to children who regularly go missing and who are at risk.
- Lanarkshire division's sergeant and inspector forums offer a platform for tactical and operational discussions on missing person enquiries (among other matters) and aim to improve the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of police and partners. Such forums are an opportunity for the divisional commander to highlight the divisional approach to missing persons.
- The Highland and Islands divisional command team regularly warns officers against complacency, clearly stating that all missing person incidents should be considered individually – regardless of how often a person may have gone missing. This serves to promote a positive culture among officers required to respond to a significant number of missing incidents.

⁷ A harbouring notice can be made by police under Section 171 of the Children's Hearing Scotland Act 2011. This provision can be used when it is suspected that a person knowingly and persistently attempts to induce a child to abscond and/or knowingly harbours or conceals a child who has absconded.



Methodology

1. We published terms of reference (ToR) for this inspection in November 2023, which outlined our aims and objectives, as well as the approach we intended to take.
2. The ToR outlined our intention to consider the Police Scotland response to missing persons in Scotland by assessing:
 - how well Police Scotland understands the demand resulting from missing persons and whether there is a well-developed strategy, vision and clearly-defined objectives in place to guide the police response
 - how well Police Scotland provides the necessary guidance, training and support to staff at all levels to enable them to respond effectively to missing persons
 - the effectiveness of Police Scotland's response from initial point of contact by service centres through to the resolution of missing person incidents
 - how well police officers and staff respond to missing person incidents and investigations, including the availability of specialist operational support services where required
 - the effectiveness and value of the Police Scotland NMPA, and how well other police information systems are used
 - the impact and effectiveness of the Police Scotland NMPU and the role of divisional coordinators in improving outcomes for missing persons
 - how well Police Scotland works in collaboration with partners and key stakeholders to share relevant information and to plan for and deliver effective and efficient services for missing persons
 - the extent to which partners, key stakeholders and service providers make an effective contribution in improving outcomes for missing persons, by engaging in partnership agreements with police



- the effectiveness of Police Scotland's involvement in preventative approaches (including national and local protocols and initiatives intended to reduce demand), and the impact on missing persons
 - the quality of Police Scotland's engagement and communication with missing persons once returned, and with their families, carers and key contacts throughout investigations
 - how well Police Scotland evaluates service delivery and captures learning, to drive improvement, reduce demand, and achieve better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.
3. We have undertaken a range of activities to examine and assess progress against these themes, as well as the overarching state, efficiency and effectiveness of the police response to missing persons in Scotland. We have examined this from the perspective of leadership and vision, and delivery and outcomes (all key indicators in the EFQM framework).
4. We have considered the role of partners and key stakeholders in the planning and delivery of services for missing persons, and gathered information on the views and experiences of people who have been missing and of those families who have been involved with police and other missing persons services.



5. Our methodology included the following:
 - a review of existing academic research and open-source documents relevant to the subject
 - an audit of 365 calls made to Police Scotland's service centres by people reporting someone missing, to analyse the quality of engagement, information gathering, risk assessment and resolution of calls
 - analysis of a self-evaluation report and supporting service (provided to us by Police Scotland) on its performance against EFQM indicators
 - an audit of the Police Scotland NMPA
 - over 80 interviews with police personnel at all levels, and with representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders
 - onsite inspection visits to police divisions in Lanarkshire, Highland and Islands, and Edinburgh City, to meet with local partners at both senior and operational level
 - review of information obtained through the Missing People charity and Barnardo's Scotland on the views and experiences of missing people and their families, carers and key contacts.

6. Our methodology has provided sound evidence of police practice and the contribution of partners, which we will refer to throughout this report.



Background

Context

7. The most recent [inspection of police response to missing persons](#) by HMICS was carried out in Aberdeen City and published in June 2015. The inspection report made 11 recommendations, most of which were for Police Scotland and the local division. It was recommended that Police Scotland work with Scottish Government to establish an agreed definition of missing persons and a consistent approach to risk assessment.
8. It was further recommended that Police Scotland should work with local authorities and local child and adult protection committees to develop more routine analysis and sharing of missing persons data to inform shared partnership tactical assessments. The remaining recommendations were, in the main, related to operational practices.
9. Subsequently, Scottish Government published a [National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland](#) (the framework). It was the first of its kind in Scotland and was developed through close collaboration between the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, local authorities, NHS Scotland and a number of third sector organisations, including the charities Missing People, Barnardo's Scotland and Shelter Scotland.



10. The framework provides the following definition of a missing person, as agreed by partners to the framework. It also proposes a consistent response to low, medium and high-risk categories of missing persons with corresponding definitions.

A missing person is anyone whose whereabouts is unknown and:

- where the circumstances are out of character; or
- the context suggests the person may be subject to crime; or
- the person is at risk of harm to themselves or another.

The framework provides the following definitions of risk:

- **High Risk:** the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing person is in danger through their own vulnerability; or may have been the victim of a serious crime; or the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
- **Medium Risk:** the risk posed is likely to place the missing person in danger or they are a threat to themselves or others.
- **Low Risk:** the apparent threat of danger to either the missing person or the public is low (a child should not be graded as low risk).

11. The framework sets out the roles and responsibilities of the respective agencies, as well as key national objectives and commitments on which to focus collective efforts on missing persons. It provides a basis for understanding the underlying issues relevant to missing episodes, and outlines its objectives of 'prevention, respond, support and protect'. It also promotes the ongoing development of an effective frontline response when someone goes missing and encourages a preventative approach to reduce the number of people going missing in the first place.
12. A multi-agency group was established by Scottish Government to promote the implementation of the framework and to provide practical support to police and partners to meet agreed objectives. This is the framework implementation group, referred to in this report as the implementation group. Scottish Government is reviewing the framework with the support of the implementation group to update it and include learning achieved since its initial publication.



13. The establishment of a multi-agency framework for missing persons is a particular strength in Scotland. There is no similar framework in place in other parts of the UK. This provides opportunities for policing and partnership working in Scotland in terms of strengthening collaboration on strategic planning, service delivery and working toward achieving the objectives of the framework.
14. The Scottish Government provides valuable support to promote missing persons policy and provides funding for national coordinators, hosted by a third sector organisation, Missing People, which operates across the UK. Scottish Government staff also undertake secretariat functions for the implementation group.
15. The national coordinators play a key role in raising the profile of the framework across police divisions and provide expert advice and support to police and partners to develop local partnership protocols and a collaborative operational service delivery.
16. The scale of missing person incidents in Scotland is considerable, with Police Scotland recording over 20,000 missing person reports on STORM in the year 2022/23. Following assessment, almost 18,000 missing person investigations proceeded and were recorded on the police NMPA in the same year.
17. The number of investigations reduced from almost 18,000 in 2022/23 to 16,236 in 2023/24. While this represents a significant reduction and positive trend, the number of missing incidents (and subsequent investigations) remain considerable.
18. It should be recognised that these figures include repeat missing investigations; this means that the number of people who are missing each year is fewer than the overall figure. The number of missing individuals reduced from just over 10,000 in 2022/23 to just over 9,000 in 2023/24. This highlights the challenge of addressing the issues related to repeat missing persons, which we refer to in detail in the delivery section of this report.



19. It should also be noted that the figure of 20,000 missing person reports on the police system during 2022/23 is dwarfed by the overall number of calls made to Police Scotland service centres by people concerned for an individual whom they believe may be missing. Approximately 40,000 such calls are made to the service centres each year.
20. This requires a skilled response from service advisors. They use risk assessments to differentiate between calls that most likely fit the criteria of a concern for person⁸ call and those that relate more explicitly to a missing person incident. Overall, service centre advisors carry out this task to a very high standard.

Underlying causes

21. A common consideration made within missing persons research literature relates to the typology of individuals reported missing and some of the underlying causes. The literature has tended to focus on the most vulnerable groups of individuals – such as children, those with mental health issues, or those with dementia. However, it is important to stress that there are a variety of complex reasons why an individual may go missing and one person's reasoning may differ greatly from another.
22. Such complex issues do not disappear once a missing person has returned, especially in situations where an individual returns to their previous situation/s without support to improve/address their circumstances. This can result in further missing episodes.
23. A recent report by [Missing People \(2022\)](#) supported this idea, noting the presence of multiple challenges and pressures that may influence missing episodes, while suggesting that a missing episode could be symptomatic of a stressful situation for the individual.

⁸ A concern for person coding is used where a call is made to the service centres whereby the whereabouts of the person is known, or believed to be known, and there are concerns regarding risk of harm to the individual.



24. An estimated 80,000 children go missing in over 210,000 reported incidents each year in the UK. Missing children are at significant risk of harm, although it is difficult to quantify what proportion come to harm while missing. Research by the [Children's Society](#) found that 11% of missing children had been 'hurt or harmed while away from home on the only or most recent occasion'. Other research has found that one in every eight young people reported missing had been physically hurt and one in nine had been sexually assaulted while away.
25. In Scotland, children and young people are reported missing more than any other category. A significant majority of missing person investigations relate to those aged 17 years and under.
26. Children who go missing and the causes of missing episodes in children are key points of interest in the academic literature. [Maclean and Gillon, \(2022\)](#) reported that children and young people in the 12-17-year-old age bracket had the largest number of missing episodes of any age group in Scotland, for the year 2020/2021. As outlined previously in this report, this trend has continued.
27. Some of the cited reasons relate to difficult family situations and neglect ([Woolnough and Cunningham, 2020](#)) or issues linked to bullying and difficulty following instructions at school ([Maclean and Gillon, 2022](#)). A recent analysis of risks and responses to missing children by [Sidebottom et al. \(2020\)](#) suggested that care experienced children and young people are over-represented in missing persons data. However, this may in part be due to reporting practices, with carers obliged to contact the police when a child in their care is missing.
28. A [Missing People \(2022\)](#) report states that the most common reasons adults go missing are linked to mental health, suicide and relationships with other people. It notes that going missing can exacerbate risk of harm, with 66% of returned missing adults disclosing that being missing had affected their mental health. Three in four adults who responded to a survey for the report disclosed experiencing harm while missing.



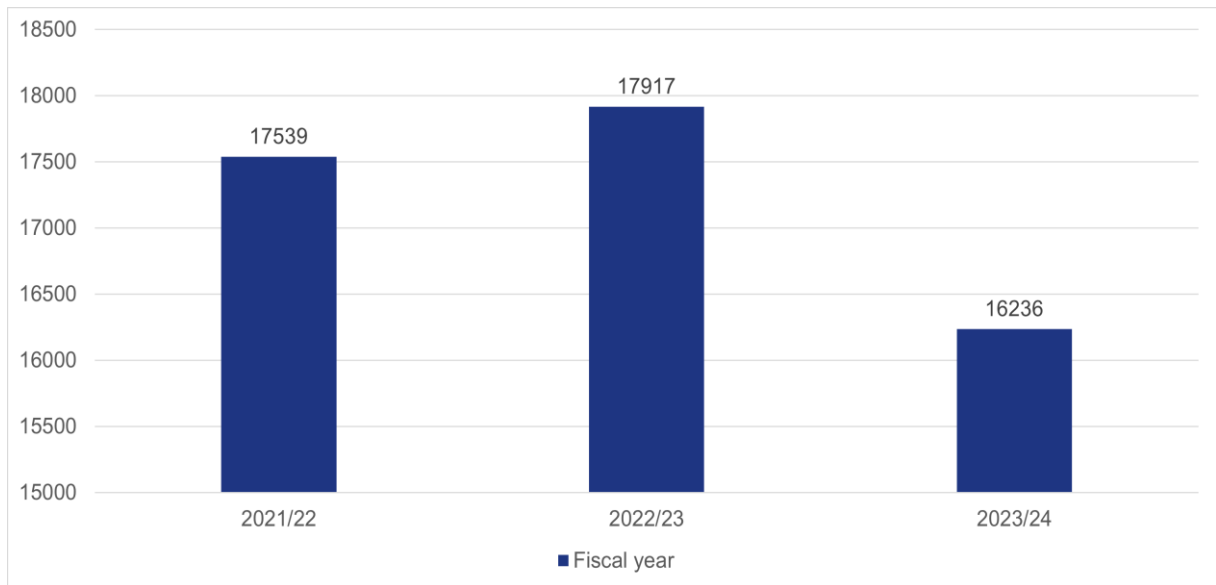
29. A recent report by Alzheimer Scotland focuses on those with dementia and outlines the potential risks for missing people with dementia, including potential exposure to dehydration, hypothermia, injuries and abrasions. [Petillo \(2023\)](#) reports that there are 90,000 people diagnosed with dementia in Scotland, with 40% reported missing at some stage.
30. Relatively recent research found there is a trend of under-reporting regarding missing person incidents by the families of individuals with dementia. [Shalev, Greene, Clarke, Pakes and Holmes \(2019\)](#) suggest that police forces in the United Kingdom are not fully aware of the scale of missing episodes in dementia patients.
31. Research conducted in England and Wales provided an estimate that up to 80% of adults who are reported missing have mental health issues, increasing the risk to their safety ([Harrington et al., 2018](#)).
32. Mental health issues were identified as the most commonly cited vulnerability experienced by adults reported missing ([Missing People, 2022](#)). Police Scotland provided statistics in [Maclean and Gillon \(2022\)](#) covering the year 2020/2021, which showed that 56% of male missing persons and 42% of female missing persons indicated poor mental health (it is likely these figures are higher, as this can be under-reported).
33. The families, carers and key contacts of missing persons can experience considerable upset and distress when a loved one goes missing, so the quality of the police response, engagement and communication with such groups is of high importance.
34. While most people either return by themselves, or are returned by police, the impact and distress caused to families and friends of the relatively small number of people who are not found, or who are not found alive, cannot be underestimated.



Demand profile

35. Missing person investigations are a priority for Police Scotland and, as stated, require a considerable level of commitment from across policing. However, given the high number of calls made to the service centres, and subsequent investigations, this places a significant demand on Police Scotland's resources. Figure 1 outlines the demand profile of missing person investigations recorded by police for the last three fiscal years, 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Figure 1 – Number of missing person investigations by fiscal year



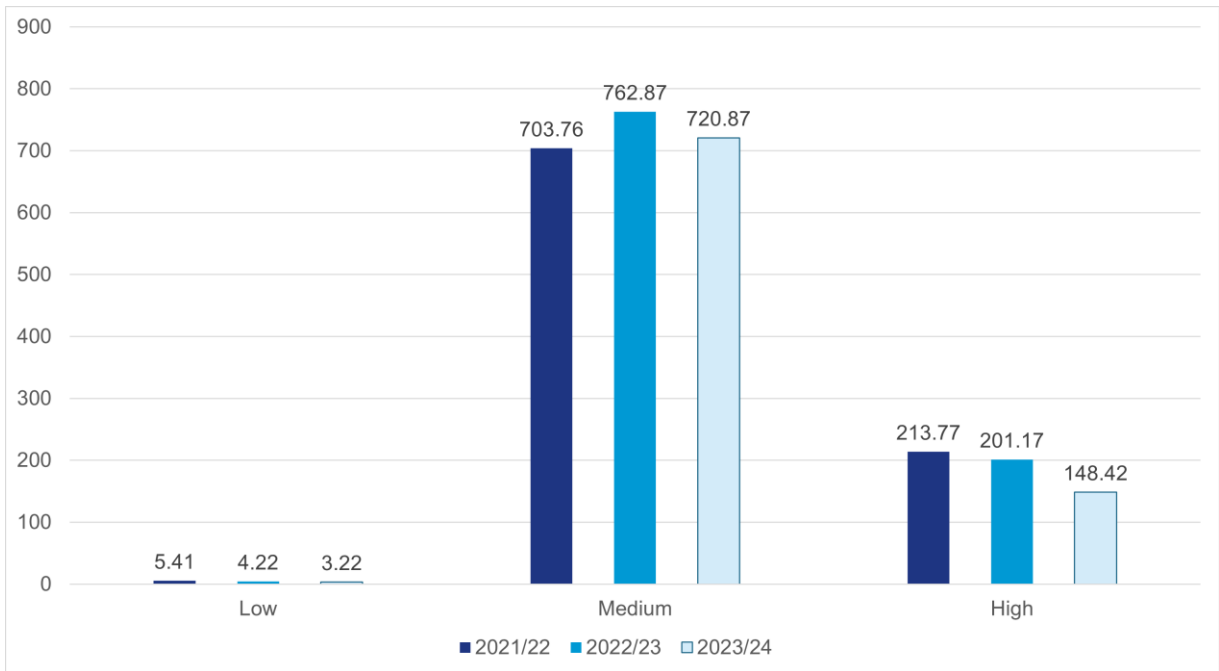
Source: Police Scotland

36. A significant number of officers are needed to undertake investigations to trace people who are reported missing. In particular, the resource requirement for high and medium-risk missing person investigations has the potential to affect the ability of Police Scotland to deliver other policing priorities.



37. To illustrate this demand, it is estimated that the staff resource required to undertake missing person investigations is the equivalent of 900 full-time officers per year, as an average. This is a significant resource demand for a force the size of Police Scotland. Figure 2, below, demonstrates the level of officer resource required to respond to missing person investigations by risk level.

Figure 2 – Level of full-time officer equivalent demand by risk level



Source: Police Scotland

38. Police Scotland records missing person incidents on its STORM command and control system. In 2022/23, there were 20,658 missing person reports recorded on the STORM system, resulting in 17,917 missing person investigations. There are various reasons why incidents do not always result in a missing person investigation. For example, the missing person may return prior to the police being dispatched; a duplicate incident may have been created; or the individual may have been traced prior to investigation. Police Scotland has business rules regarding how this information should be recorded.



39. While there were minor inconsistencies in the way staff applied these business rules, we did not find evidence that such inconsistencies detracted from investigations being appropriately recorded on the NMPA. Inconsistencies can occur as a result of different interpretations of the business rules being applied, particularly regarding the recording of information on the application. Managers should continue to ensure that officers and staff are consistently recording incidents accurately to prevent an unreliable picture of missing people in Scotland.
40. Service advisors gathered good information from reports of high-risk missing persons, and we noted that, in most cases, they were appropriately inquisitive about the circumstances relating to people being reported missing (which has the potential to reduce demand). As Police Scotland correctly identifies in its [Missing Person Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\)](#), its purpose is not to act as a tracing agency, but to find individuals where an element of risk has been identified. Staff should therefore be inquisitive, to identify those cases where risk is present, or can reasonably be assumed to be.
41. Information gathered by staff for high-risk investigations was good and risk assessments were applied appropriately to reports received by service advisors. However, through our call audit, we found service advisors could do more to gather valuable background information regarding low-risk missing persons, to potentially reduce demand on operational officers.
42. In some instances, cases that were transferred to area control rooms (ACR) could have been more fully explored by service advisors, particularly with partner agencies making a report. While we recognise the degree of time pressure placed on service advisors to deal with calls, there is benefit in pressing the reporter for all useful information, as well as querying the existence of protocols and whether they have been adhered to. For example, if they are reporting a person missing from a care facility, it is realistic to expect that the agency has followed their internal protocols to gather relevant information and to search for the individual within reasonable limits.



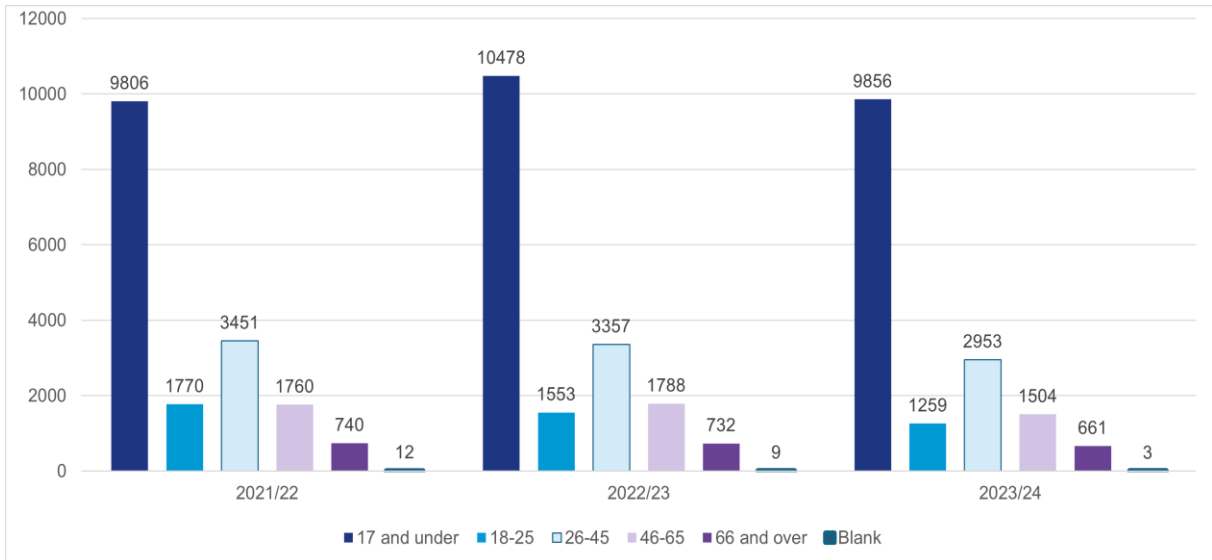
43. It was evident that demand on operational staff can, at times, be greater in rural areas. This can be as a result of differing access to specialist resources. Divisions in rural areas tend to rely more heavily on specialist partner organisations to assist them at the initial stages of an investigation. We acknowledge that any lack of access to specialist resources in the initial stages of an investigation is likely as a result of geography (and the time taken to get specialist resources to the area).

44. In 2019, Police Scotland created a missing person dashboard from information taken from STORM and the NMPA. Development of the dashboard has been a collaborative effort between the demand and productivity unit (DPU) and the NMPU. The aim of the dashboard is to allow police to identify both geographical and demographic information regarding missing person incidents, which includes the following information:
 - location of incident
 - age
 - gender
 - duration of incident
 - repeat incidents
 - number of people found safe and well
 - number of people found deceased
 - number of people still missing.



45. It is clear from data provided by Police Scotland that the majority of missing person investigations relate to children and young people aged 17 years and under. Figure 3 outlines the age ranges of individuals reported missing over the past three fiscal years.

Figure 3 – Number of missing person investigations by age group



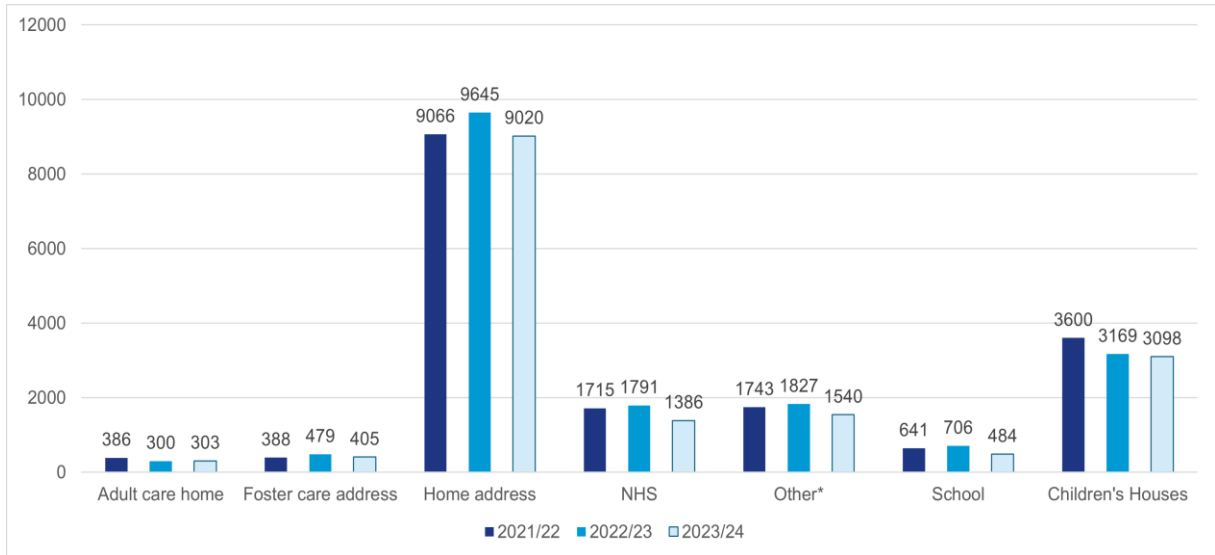
Source: Police Scotland

46. The majority of children and young people are reported missing from home, although a significant number are also reported missing from residential childcare settings.
47. Police Scotland has also identified useful demographic data about other categories of individuals prevalent in missing persons reports, such as those with mental health issues and progressive neurological disorders such as dementia. This is useful, not only for Police Scotland, but also for local authority partners and third sector agencies, to inform internal protocols and procedures.



48. Most people (including children) go missing from their home address. The number of people missing from home has decreased in the past year, as well as reductions in those missing from NHS settings, foster care and children’s houses. This is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 – Number of missing persons by location



*Includes people missing at sea or work address

Source: Police Scotland

49. Police Scotland systems have the ability to analyse and report on valuable trend information, which has identified the following.

- almost 85% of missing person investigations are resolved within 24 hours
- most missing person investigations involve males
- investigations with a dementia/neurological disorder marker on the system have fallen by 13% compared with 2021/22
- missing person investigations with a mental health marker made up over 31% of all investigations in 2023/24.

50. Identifying and understanding these issues and trends provides an opportunity for the development of targeted prevention and intervention measures, in partnership with other organisations, to reduce the number of missing person episodes. We say more about the police and partner response in respect of preventive approaches later in this report.



51. Police Scotland has demonstrated consistent success in resolving missing person incidents over recent years. Performance data for the past four years up to 2022/23, demonstrates that over 99% of missing people are traced alive each year. In addition, 94% of missing incidents are closed within 48 hours, with 58% closed within the first eight hours.

52. While people who have been missing may return of their own volition, the [UK missing persons unit missing persons data report 2021/22](#) highlights that Police Scotland locates 60% of missing people in Scotland. This is double the average rate of individuals located by police in England and Wales (at just over 30%). Reasons for the disparity between results in Scotland compared with England and Wales are unclear, as the report provided by the UKMPU does not provide any contextual explanation. Therefore, it cannot be ascertained if the differences relate to reporting practices or investigative processes and protocols.



Leadership and vision

Purpose, vision and strategy

53. We found Police Scotland to be appropriately aligned to the framework for missing persons. As indicated, partners to the framework include Scottish Government, Police Scotland, local authorities, NHS Scotland and a number of third sector organisations. This particular approach is not replicated elsewhere in the UK.
54. The framework clearly outlines the intended purpose and expected approach that should be taken by partners working collaboratively to respond to and resolve missing person incidents. It also sets out strategic objectives (referred to as commitments in the document) and highlights a vision for a collaborative partnership approach that embraces the principles of early intervention and prevention.
55. The framework aims to share good practice that has been developed locally, recognising that by doing so through a framework with a shared aim, partners will achieve better outcomes for people and their families across Scotland.
56. Police Scotland has been a driving force behind the implementation of the framework. However, more recently, there have been gaps in clear and visible leadership at senior level, as well as in the oversight and governance of operations. This is partly down to previous gaps in senior posts in the Policing Together division (which has oversight of missing persons), but can also be attributed to missing persons sitting within an overly broad and diverse portfolio with potentially competing demands.
57. This has meant the NMPU has lacked the level of oversight that it once had. Nor has it had the benefits of senior manager cover to enable it to influence system improvements and changes that can be required from time to time. For example, where the NMPA has required system changes, the unit lacked the influence senior managers can bring to this type of issue.



58. Police Scotland does not have an internal strategy for missing persons in place to outline organisational purpose and vision across police divisions. Several officers and staff we spoke with during interviews were unclear on the police strategy for missing persons, and were unable to identify the organisation's aims and objectives they were expected to deliver.
59. While we do not consider it essential for Police Scotland to develop a separate strategy, given the aforementioned alignment to the framework, it is important that officers and staff are aware that Police Scotland's strategic position and approach are contained within the framework.

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should promote the national missing person framework's aims, objectives and commitments to officers and staff across divisions, and emphasise that this underpins its strategic direction.

Implementation of the framework

60. The framework provides a sound basis for partnership working in order to plan for and address missing person incidents. However, if it is to be fully effective, it must be implemented as intended. Police Scotland has shown commitment to the implementation of the framework, but there is a lack of collaboration with partners from health and local authorities at a national planning level. There is no national multi-agency forum in place to collaboratively monitor the effectiveness of policy and delivery of the response to missing persons.
61. Although the framework has been in place for several years, it does not have a widely-recognised profile within some key organisations and across police divisions. Because it is non-statutory guidance, this can result in some partners and local authority areas giving it less attention and emphasis than it requires.



62. There is limited awareness of the collective aims and objectives of the framework across divisions and among operational officers and staff. As such, the importance and relevance of the framework should be shared more widely across relevant personnel within Police Scotland. The framework should be seen as more of a priority by officers and staff with involvement in missing persons work.
63. The implementation group provides valuable oversight of the development and implementation of the framework. It is principally made up of representatives from Scottish Government, police, third sector and academia. However, the group has no representation from senior personnel from local authorities or health services, which limits its influence as there is no direct route to communicate developments to senior leaders outwith policing. The implementation group should invite representation from these bodies.
64. Several partners and partnership areas have made considerable progress in adopting the framework and have worked effectively with Police Scotland on its implementation at a divisional level. However, this is not consistent across the country.
65. We are aware that the framework is being revised and updated by members of the implementation group. This has included considerable work by the group to incorporate learning from what has worked well since its initial publication. The revised version will, no doubt, provide very useful guidance on partnership working at a strategic and operational level, to achieve the best possible outcomes for missing people and their families.
66. We outline the extent to which the current framework has been implemented effectively at a divisional/local authority level in the delivery section of this report.



Leadership, governance and oversight

67. Police Scotland demonstrates effective divisional level leadership in the oversight of missing person investigations, but there are gaps at the national level. It is important that national and local divisions are connected through clear policy and strategic leadership. This has been hindered by a lack of clear governance structures at national level, which would help to progress its aims and objectives for missing persons.
68. There is a disconnect between local policing and the Policing Together division at a senior level. Police Scotland's missing person strategic governance forum aimed to provide scrutiny oversight and strategic leadership and governance for matters relating to the policing response to missing persons, but this has not operated in recent years.
69. Although Policing Together hosts a regular partnership superintendents forum, it does not provide strategic oversight of missing persons to ensure local initiatives and activities across Scotland are effective, aligned to the framework, and implemented nationally. There is inconsistency in the resourcing and remit of divisional partnership superintendents. For example, where governance and oversight of missing persons is given to an operational superintendent, they would not ordinarily be invited to attend this forum.
70. Police Scotland highlighted its intention to revive the missing person strategic governance forum that had previously been in place. We would support its reintroduction to oversee the strategy and direction for missing persons work. This has the potential to fill the gaps identified and to promote improvements in governance.
71. There was little evidence of regular strategic multi-agency missing person meetings taking place within divisions. The topic of missing persons is discussed in some local authority areas at their chief officers' group, as well as at child and adult protection committees. However, as this is part of a much wider agenda, we could not be confident that all relevant issues relating to missing persons were being addressed within these structures.



72. There was no indication that Police Scotland had identified and introduced specific outcome targets for missing persons work and was monitoring progress against these. This appears to be a missed opportunity, as we have identified several areas where police were performing well. More importantly, the introduction of outcome targets and measures would enable the service to understand more fully what aspects of missing person response are working well and why, so that learning can be shared and embedded across the service.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should ensure that there is consistent national leadership in place to direct missing persons policy, establish outcome targets and support effective operational delivery.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should re-establish the missing person strategic governance forum to provide scrutiny, oversight and governance for matters relating to the police and partner response to missing persons.



Performance management and reporting

73. Police Scotland provides quarterly performance reports to the SPA. These reports are used to highlight trends and changes in the number and type of incidents that are investigated each quarter and, subsequently, each year. Reports are made available to the public on the SPA website.

74. Current performance management data outlined in performance reports includes a range of demand-related information relevant to demographics and geographical differences. This provides a helpful picture of the potential increase or decrease in incidents that have taken place for specific groups, including adults, children and young people, and those missing from settings including NHS facilities and children's services.

75. However, there is no overarching internal mechanism in place to evaluate the quality of the police response for missing persons. Police are able to provide valuable quantitative data, but performance reports make little reference to the quality and effectiveness of service provision and the outcomes achieved.



Delivery

Key stages involved in the police response

76. There are a number of different stages involved in missing person investigations, which align to the various stages of an enquiry. For example, when a member of the public, or someone from a professional setting or agency, contacts Police Scotland via phone or online, the contact goes to one of its national service centres overseen by the Contact, Command and Control Division (C3). Each call is automatically directed to the next available service advisor.
77. Service advisors engage with the individual to gather as much relevant information as possible and apply risk assessment tools to assess the required level of response. Service advisors will often refer to an ACR, which is staffed by experienced police officers who will review the circumstances and prioritise the deployment of police officers.
78. Where the deployment of police officers is not considered necessary, an incident can be passed to the resolution team for non-immediate investigation, advice and direct crime recording. There is good co-ordination within and across C3 regarding missing person enquiries and we found the system to be effective. As part of our methodology for this inspection, we undertook an extensive audit of calls made to police service centres, details of which are outlined later in this report.
79. When the deployment of local policing officers is necessary, the division from where the individual is reported missing is designated as the investigating division. The investigating division is responsible for carrying out enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the missing person, including the management, governance and risk grading of the enquiry. These tasks are guided by, and recorded on, the NMPA. The division is also responsible for keeping the person making the missing person report up to date with the progress of enquiries.



80. In some circumstances, specialist resources from the OSD will be required to progress the investigation. OSD can provide advice, support and assistance to the investigating division regarding the missing person investigation. This can include assistance with searches using trained dog-handling teams, drones and helicopters, specialist teams such as mountain rescue and, in some circumstances, engagement with the Coastguard.⁹
81. The NMPU provides oversight and co-ordination of missing person issues on a national basis. Local divisional coordinators can also be involved in investigations, often from the perspective of providing insights to the command structure meetings that take place to direct and oversee high-risk investigations.

Provision of guidance

82. There is a suitable range of guidance available to allow operational officers and staff to carry out effective missing person investigations. The guidance documents that Police Scotland has produced include the following:
- Missing person investigation SOP – provides details of roles and responsibilities of those involved in a missing person investigation. It provides general information rather than practical advice on how to investigate.
 - Missing Persons Additional Investigative Considerations – a guide in the form of a detailed checklist listing topics that would be expected to be covered during any enquiry.
 - Missing Person Aide Memoir – covers information that should be recorded while compiling a missing person report. It also contains a risk assessment aid to identify and assess the presence or absence of risk factors to assist in the appropriate risk grading to be applied.
 - [Looked after & accommodated children who go missing from residential & foster care in Scotland national guidance](#) – provides detailed guidance relating to vulnerable missing children who are looked after by local authorities. It covers aspects of the documents mentioned above, but with a more specific focus on children and young people.

⁹ HM Coastguard is responsible for the initiation and co-ordination of all maritime search and rescue within the UK Maritime Search and Rescue Region. This includes the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons either in distress at sea, or to persons at risk of injury or death on the cliffs or shoreline of the United Kingdom.



83. Additional guidance exists for role-specific tasks within the specialist divisions (for example, C3 and OSD) and for operating the NMPA.
84. The framework also provides important guidance on good practice approaches, with a particular focus on partnership working, return discussions and risk assessments. However, as previously indicated, awareness of its existence among those we interviewed was limited. It was not referred to as a prominent guidance document by officers and staff outwith the NMPU.
85. There was no specific guidance in place for officers conducting the role of divisional coordinator within local policing divisions, other than for those located within divisional missing person co-ordination units. This has led to inconsistencies across divisions in the way the role is conducted.
86. Although each of the documents outlined above fulfil a slightly separate function for missing person investigations, we found significant repetition. Having several separate documents covering similar information on the one topic is potentially problematic; efforts to resolve this would most likely be beneficial for operational officers and staff.
87. The consensus among those interviewed was the need to have missing person guidance in one place. At least two local policing divisions have developed their own missing persons toolkit in an attempt to address this. However, such an approach creates a risk that these may exist outwith Police Scotland's national policy document set and therefore not comply with quality assurance standards.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should bring together all operational practice guidance relevant to missing persons in one place on the police intranet – including protocols and procedures, shared learning, and the national missing persons toolkit – to enable easy access for managers and staff.



88. There are gaps in the guidance available to officers within criminal investigation departments (CID) in respect of their involvement in a missing person investigation. The SOP outlines that CID should be notified of all high-risk missing persons and states that CID should consider carrying out reviews of low and medium-risk missing persons after 48 hours. It is therefore important that CID officers who become involved in investigations should have clear guidance on what their role entails and what level of enquiry they would be expected to make while reviewing investigations.
89. We were pleased to see that Police Scotland was following National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) policy and guidance documents on missing person investigations where required. These have specific relevance for national issues and include the following advice notes:
- [NPCC – advice to police forces on tasking other forces to conduct missing person enquiries and the transfer of investigations](#)
 - [NPCC – guidance to police forces on missing migrant children.](#)
90. These documents have clear cross-border implications and include legislation specific to Scotland. It is therefore important that all UK forces work together in these areas and Police Scotland continues to be involved in updating and maintaining those parts relevant to Scotland within these documents.

Provision of training

91. Missing person investigations can be complex in nature and are, without doubt, a high-risk area of policing. Decisions made at the initial stages of any enquiry can have significant implications on the outcome of the investigation. Therefore, it is important that officers and police staff at all levels are trained to a high standard.
92. There are, however, significant gaps in the training that officers and police staff receive on missing person investigations. This was particularly evident in the case of operational officers, who receive no formal refresher training on missing person investigations once they leave the Scottish Police College (SPC).
93. Practical learning on how to conduct missing person investigations was described by officers as on-the-job, peer-to-peer learning and included supervisory support.



94. All new probationary officers attend an initial training course at SPC, where they undergo training on various areas of policing, including missing persons. This training is supported by peer-to-peer learning once they leave the college.
95. However, there should be a mechanism for continuous professional development for all officers and staff involved in missing person investigations, to ensure they are able to maintain consistent and up-to-date knowledge and understanding of procedures and expectations.
96. There is also a lack of training for operational supervisors involved in missing person investigations and therefore a reliance on peer-to-peer learning. Again, we recognise that this can at times be useful, but there is also a risk that incorrect practices are being passed on. The NMPU has attempted to address the lack of supervisor training by delivering training to newly-promoted sergeants, but this has been limited due to capacity issues within the NMPU and is not therefore widely available in all areas across the country.
97. Moodle¹⁰ training modules exist for C3 staff, operational officers and supervisors, providing background context to missing person policy, which requires completion before access to the NMPA is authorised. The content of the Moodle packages provides clear guidance on expectations placed on officers and supervisors involved in missing person investigations.
98. While the training material, where followed, should promote a consistent approach to missing person investigations, officers and staff reported feeling insufficiently trained. Officers stated that it is often a considerable challenge to find time during their increasingly busy working hours to complete Moodle training, which reduces the value and effect of the online approach to training.

¹⁰ Moodle is an online training platform that is used by Police Scotland to provide training courses on a wide range of topics.



99. Supervisors who attend the police operational command training course are tested against a complex scenario in respect of leadership, assessment and decision-making abilities, among other relevant aspects. In recent years, a missing person enquiry has been used as the scenario for the exercise. While no doubt valuable as a training exercise, there is no specific requirement for specialist knowledge in respect of managing a missing persons enquiry, nor does it focus on the guides and tools used to oversee a missing person incident.
100. Police Scotland provides an element of missing person training to senior investigating officers (SIO), as part of their course. This takes the form of a scenario within the training programme, which examines the SIO in dealing with high-risk issues relevant to missing person enquiries.
101. We identified that many of the published Police Information and Review Commissioner (PIRC)¹¹ reviews relate to issues associated with risk assessments made at the first point of contact. The success or failure of an investigation relies on the quality and training of the supervisors overseeing any or all aspects of investigations, including risk assessments. It is important that Police Scotland supervisors are appropriately equipped to manage missing person investigations effectively.
102. Notably, Highland and Islands divisional command team, regularly warns officers against complacency in respect of missing person investigations, highlighting that all missing person incidents should be considered individually – regardless of how often a person may have gone missing. This effort to address the issues resulting from repeat missing persons seems worthy of adoption across the service.

¹¹ The Police Investigation and Review Commissioner (PIRC) carries out independent investigations into certain incidents of concern involving the police. The PIRC also reviews how policing bodies in Scotland have handled complaints made about them by the public.



103. It was evident that Police Scotland has invested in the training it provides to its specialist support officers such as police search advisors (PoISA) and mountain rescue teams. The training provided is comprehensive and subject to regular recertification processes to ensure officers remain proficient in the specialism. We consider that this level of proficiency should also apply to operational officers conducting investigations.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should review the training provided to officers and staff regarding missing persons and ensure that it is adequate and meets the requirements of the role.

The national missing persons unit

104. The NMPU is a national resource located within Police Scotland's Policing Together division. The unit consists of an inspector, sergeant and two constables, managed as part of a wider portfolio overseen by a chief inspector and superintendent. As a result of having a relatively limited resource, the NMPU relies heavily on a cadre of divisional coordinators, who have varying degrees of capacity, to drive national approaches at a local level.

105. Members of the NMPU are experienced and knowledgeable on the subject of missing persons and have a clear desire and determination to drive improvement in the organisational approach and response. The unit provides effective oversight and support for missing person enquiries. In particular, it provides scrutiny, specialist advice and assistance to complex or protracted high-risk missing person investigations. It also supports and contributes to delivery of training through the police leadership programme and to operational officers and supervisors, where it has the capacity to do so.



106. The NMPU has a role in the quality assurance of input and compliance with business rules in respect of the NMPA. The unit is the third layer of quality assurance regarding missing persons. Operational supervisors perform the first layer of quality assurance and are required to check submissions made by officers to ensure they are accurate. Thereafter, divisional coordinators should undertake additional compliance checks. It was clear from our review that the NMPU was spending a significant period of time on quality assurance processes as the other layers of quality assurance were not as robust as they should be.
107. The police inspector at the NMPU represents Police Scotland on the implementation group, through which there is regular engagement with other group members to drive improvements in line with the aims and objectives of the framework. The NMPU is highly regarded within this group for its commitment to improvement and co-ordination of activities in respect of partnership working, policy development, and training.
108. The NMPU also collaborates with the UKMPU to promote consistent and effective practice across divisions. The role of the UKMPU is to provide support and advice to police forces investigating missing person incidents. It also provides the following range of services:
- national and international cross-matching of missing individuals with unidentified people, bodies and remains
 - co-ordination of enquiries with our network of partners
 - procedural assistance on effective retrieval and retention of forensic material
 - tactical advice and support regarding suspicious cases, such as suspected homicide, 'no-body' murders, and cold case reviews
 - access to specialist advice from experts in a range of fields
 - collation and dissemination of good practice in missing person enquiries.
109. The UKMPU reports having positive and increased engagement with the NMPU and local policing divisions seeking support and assistance in respect missing person-related issues. However, it questions the reasons behind the increase in divisional queries on policies and procedures, which should be directed to divisional coordinators or the NMPU.



110. The established route for local policing divisions should be to seek support and assistance through their divisional coordinators in the first instance, and thereafter through the NMPU. While this process can work well at times, a disconnect exists between the unit, divisional coordinators and local policing divisions, with some areas seeking advice and assistance on missing persons policy and procedures directly from the UKMPU.
111. While this may be appropriate in some circumstances, the process of bypassing the NMPU and seeking advice and assistance from the UKMPU creates a potential risk for the organisation, as advice provided and followed may not align directly with existing policy. In addition, it is unlikely that such advice will be recorded by the person making the enquiry and shared with the NMPU, so that it may be considered in any potential changes made to internal guidance documents. Senior officers should consider why local police divisions are, at times, not seeking answers to their queries within the organisation.

Police Scotland missing person coordinators

112. The role of the divisional coordinator was introduced by Police Scotland to provide divisional access to officers with enhanced knowledge of missing persons, to improve understanding and operational approach locally. Divisional coordinators are expected to act as a conduit between national policy and local policing practice. This includes a focus on partnership working and the development and implementation of strategies aimed at early intervention and prevention.
113. As indicated, divisional coordinators are also expected to provide a robust quality assurance function for divisional recording processes and practice in relation to STORM and the NMPA.
114. Each of the 13 local policing divisions has a designated missing person coordinator. While the responsibilities of the role are guided by the NMPU, how the post is expected to operate within the division is a decision for divisional commanders. This includes whether the role is dedicated and protected as a full-time role or whether it is held by someone with a range of other tasks and responsibilities. Similarly, commanders may decide to add additional resources by creating a divisional coordinators team, sometimes with a sergeant and police constables in post.



115. As there has been a lack of strategic planning regarding this issue between local divisions and the Policing Together division, the NMPU relies heavily on the extent to which divisional commanders recognise the business benefit of ensuring that coordinators have capacity and the correct skill set to fulfil the role.

116. We found some divisional coordinators balancing the demands of the coordinator role with various other operational tasks and responsibilities. This affected their ability to perform key tasks such as ensuring that compliance checks were undertaken consistently. It also limited their ability to undertake work with local partners to develop and implement approaches aimed at reducing and (where possible) preventing further missing person incidents.

117. Police Scotland has an approved role profile for the role of a divisional coordinator based within a divisional missing person co-ordination unit. However, only three divisions have such a unit – Edinburgh City, Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow. This means that the majority of divisional coordinators do not have a recognised post profile on Police Scotland’s resource management system (SCOPE). This can result in the responsibilities associated with their existing operational post profile taking precedence over those of a divisional coordinator, which further limits their ability to perform the coordinator function effectively.

118. The guidance document relating to looked-after and accommodated children, and the NMPA business rules, make brief reference to the role of divisional coordinator. However, the role of the divisional coordinator is not included within the missing persons SOP. This omission has contributed to a lack of clarity across divisions about the role, functions and expectations of divisional coordinators. This has resulted in an inconsistent approach to how missing persons policy and practice is followed in some divisions.



119. There is no bespoke training for divisional coordinators. Quarterly missing person coordinator forums, which are organised and chaired by the NMPU, provide a degree of learning and development input. The NMPU also arranges inputs from the UKMPU, which are missing person-focused and include information on a wide range of investigative opportunities. However, the extent to which this can influence national practice depends on the availability of divisional coordinators to attend. Evidence suggests this learning is not being cascaded as well as intended, with some divisions continuing to seek guidance on the approach to missing persons from the UKMPU.
120. In the three divisions we visited, it was clear that the role of the coordinator was protected and that divisional leaders recognised it as being crucial in instilling consistency in local and national practice. Coordinators in these areas were also supported to establish and strengthen partnerships working arrangements, which can result in reducing demand. We are aware that similar good practice exists in other divisions that we did not visit as part of this inspection, however, it is also evident this is not sufficiently consistent across the country.
121. Where we found the coordinator role being dedicated, protected and supported within divisions, this correlated with evidence of effective and innovative practice, and strong partnership working.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should develop a role profile and operational guidance for divisional coordinators, and ensure that the role is supported and enabled to fulfil tasks and responsibilities effectively.



Police Scotland tactical missing person coordinators

122. Local policing divisions have a designated tactical missing person coordinator (tactical coordinator), but we found a lack of clarity and understanding of this role among the officers and staff we spoke with. This is likely due to the lack of a role profile for the tactical coordinator. There is also wide variation in the rank of officers tasked with the role, ranging from police inspector to superintendent, as well as variation in where they were located within divisional structures.
123. The NMPA business rules refer to the post of tactical coordinator as being responsible for ensuring that divisional coordinators are effective in respect of data input (with the caveat that their line manager may also cover this role). The tactical coordinator role is absent from any other Police Scotland missing person guidance. The absence of a role profile has resulted in a disparate approach in how the role is performed across police divisions.

Area for development 1

Police Scotland should examine the role of tactical missing person coordinator and provide clarity across divisions on the aims, objectives and overall purpose of the role.

National missing person coordinators

124. Scottish Government provides funding for two national coordinator posts and have done so since 2019. These posts are hosted by the UK Missing People charity. The national coordinators report to, and receive support from, the aforementioned implementation group. They play a key role in raising the profile of the framework and promoting good practice across local authority areas.
125. The implementation group created a model whereby national coordinators are tasked with engaging with police and partners within local authority areas to embed the framework in practice. This model is referred to as the implementation project. The implementation project was principally introduced to improve engagement and collaboration between partners, establish effective partnership working arrangements and protocols, and provide specialist advice and support where required.



126. The national coordinators have also worked closely with the NMPU, divisional coordinators and multi-agency partners within localities to provide support on the following tasks:

- journey mapping to examine local processes in detail and to work through hypothetical missing person profiles to identify effective practice and gaps in the multi-agency response
- ensuring partners are aware of the support available for missing people and families in their area
- return discussion training (including train the trainer)
- developing good practice guidance, informed by learning captured from engagement across Scotland
- promoting good practice nationally via webinars, an annual good practice conference and the online toolkit
- providing support in the development of a multi-agency partnership protocol.

127. There is no cost to police or partners for the services provided by national coordinators. To date, they have provided support and assistance in 26 local authority areas. Recent funding approved by Scottish Government, will allow national coordinators to work with the remaining six local authority areas during 2024-25.

128. The previously outlined inconsistencies in the arrangements for divisional coordinators have had a negative impact on progress made by the national coordinators in those areas where divisional coordinators are not fully supported to undertake the role. For example, national coordinators have found it more challenging to engage widely across a division and with all relevant partners where these relationships have not been established and fostered. However, where the divisional coordinator operates within a protected role, engagement with national coordinators is described as very effective in establishing the necessary links with local partners to further embed good working arrangements.



The national missing persons application

129. The NMPA is the single live management system for missing person investigations conducted by Police Scotland. It was introduced in 2019 as a standalone, web-based system to replace legacy police systems and the interim National Missing Persons Database, which was housed on SharePoint¹² between April 2016 and March 2019.
130. The application holds information on all missing person incidents and allows police to analyse critical missing persons information that can enhance investigative opportunities. It is administered by the NMPU and is supported by business rules that formalise conditions of use, alongside a separate user guide.
131. The NMPA is used by police officers to manually record data relevant to a missing person incident, on to the application. Officers can add and update actions in live time and, importantly, this can be viewed and read by anyone within policing with a legitimate interest or involvement in the investigation.
132. An additional benefit of the application is the ability to pre-populate saved missing person data into subsequent missing person reports relevant to the same person. It also provides officers with information on a missing person's key contacts and associates, as well as locations where they may previously have been found. Integration with a geographical information system provides a map view of all current missing people and where they were located on previous occasions.
133. The NMPA has been imported into Police Scotland's insight search system along with other police systems including iVPD. It can utilise information from the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) system, which is managed by Disclosure Scotland. This technology provides the user with quick access to brief consolidated information on previous missing episodes, including key addresses, associations and level of vulnerability, to support timely decision-making. However, as the NMPA and iVPD are standalone systems, the information available through insights is minimal, resulting in the need to access those systems individually.

¹² SharePoint is used by Police Scotland as a secure place to store, organise and share information that can be accessed either nationally, locally and/or departmentally, dependent on business need.



134. The NMPA integrates with the Police Scotland Criminal History System (CHS), to identify information on any warning signals associated with the missing person. It also integrates with the Police National Computer (PNC) system, enabling a missing person's details, when saved in the NMPA, to be simultaneously added on to PNC, saving time and duplication of work.
135. NMPA has been welcomed by many across Police Scotland as it brings increased consistency to the process and provides a platform on which to carry out a more comprehensive missing person investigation.
136. However, the application does not work well on the mobile hand-held devices routinely used by police, as the system was developed for desktop use. We found that the application was only used by officers on mobile devices in eight per cent of missing person investigations. This has introduced time inefficiencies, since officers often travel to and from offices to record information (rather than being able to use the equipment available to them). This is a system development issue, which is outwith officers' control.
137. We also learned of difficulties in the transfer of accurate information from the NMPA to the major incident room standardised administrative procedures (MIRSAP), in instances where cases may become a serious crime enquiry. This results in a manual transfer of information, leaving the process open to potential human error. In addition, there is no policy guidance on when an enquiry should be transferred from the NMPA to MIRSAP.
138. In recent years, the NMPU has encountered barriers to the improvement and development of the NMPA, and only incremental changes have been achieved. This has been attributed to a lack of availability at senior management level within the division, to drive development. However, it was also highlighted that the systems developer resource is very limited and thinly spread (in terms of the number of police systems that require similar attention), so that is likely to be the central problem.
139. This lack of progress on much-needed improvements to the application can further limit its use, resulting both in a lack of confidence in the system and the risk of it falling behind other advancing technology.



140. The NMPA is relied on for missing persons statistics and accuracy of data and is dependent on the accuracy of use. The statistical reports produced by the application are used by analysts as the basis for publication of performance information. We have referred earlier in this report to gaps in the quality assurance process regarding the application. It is essential that competent quality assurance is undertaken appropriately – and at each stage of an enquiry/investigation – to ensure high standards of reporting.

Area for development 2

Police Scotland should ensure that quality assurance tasks are undertaken competently and consistently at each stage of the process.

Audit of the national missing persons application

141. We undertook an audit of the NMPA to consider its value and effectiveness.

Inspectors selected and analysed a random sample of 36 records from the application. These were reviewed alongside the associated STORM incidents. The process was supported by members of the NMPU to facilitate system access.

142. The sample was drawn from the overall number of calls analysed previously by inspectors as part of a comprehensive audit of calls made to police service centres. We audited 365 calls that had been made to police service centres between August 2022 and August 2023. Therefore, the 36 records analysed from the application represents 10% of our call audit. We outline further details and findings from our call audit later in this report.

143. While our sample of 36 records from the application is relatively small, it provided useful information on how the system was being used and where gaps existed. We found that the application was largely being used appropriately by officers. In most cases with the sample, there was an appropriate level of supervisory oversight and quality assurance at both sergeant and inspector levels. However, this is not reflective of wider quality assurance practice. As previously highlighted, the NMPU has to review a significant number of cases to ensure compliance with NMPA business rules.



144. Risk assessments recorded on the system were largely of a good standard, though a small number were poor. Nevertheless, it was clear those risk assessments that did not meet adequate standards were brought up to a good standard by effective supervisory intervention. This demonstrates the importance of quality assurance within the system and the supervisory element of the process.

145. We found inconsistencies in the use of the STORM and NMPA systems by police officers. Business rules state that where police officers are deployed to a missing person incident, this should be recorded on the application as the incident would meet the criteria for a missing person enquiry. However, we found examples where a missing person is found by police relatively quickly, the incident can, at times, be finalised on STORM with no corresponding missing person form being submitted on the application.

146. Running a missing person investigation on STORM rather than correctly on the NMPA creates a risk of information being lost when the STORM incident is closed. This can be problematic as – should the same person become missing again – relevant information from the previous incident would not be available. It should be stressed that this scenario occurs in a small number of instances, but it is worthy of ongoing attention from the NMPU and senior officers with strategic responsibility.

147. Our audit of the application also confirmed that the mobile hand-held devices used by police have limited functionality in respect of the application. For example, they do not have an auto-save function, which can result in officers losing data, particularly where connectivity to the system is lost. In addition, the action filtering tool and function for downloading tasks on to a PDF document, were found to be faulty.



148. These issues were discussed with members of the NMPU and were highlighted by the unit for attention by system developers. However, as indicated within this report, the mobile devices are not operating effectively, and a solution needs to be found to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the process.

Recommendation 7

Police Scotland should develop a version of the national missing persons application that has full functionality on mobile devices, and respond swiftly to any technical problems and potential improvements identified by users.

Initial response process

149. There are a number of ways that Police Scotland can receive a missing person report. These include a member of the public [reporting](#) a missing person to an officer on patrol, or directly to a police station. The main way to report a missing person is to call police service centres via **101** or **999** (depending on the circumstances). Police Scotland thereafter adopts a [call handling](#) system to assess and prioritise calls.

150. A service advisor based at one of the police service centres will usually take the initial call and will create an incident on STORM. If reported directly to a police station, the incident is created by front counter staff and transferred to the ACR for assessment. The service advisor and/or controller will then assess the circumstances of the incident by using a risk assessment process called [THRIVE](#), to ensure the call gets the most appropriate response. The risk assessment process includes the following considerations:

T	Threat	Is there a threat and who or what is the threat?
H	Harm	If the threat is carried out, what is the likely level of harm?
R	Risk	What is the likelihood of the threat occurring and what is the level of risk?
I	Investigation	What investigative opportunities can be identified? This could involve known contacts, previous locations found, or use of CCTV, for example.
V	Vulnerability	Adversity can affect anyone at any point in their life. It can be physical, mental or emotional. Identifying indicators of vulnerability is key to an effective assessment.
E	Engagement	What is the most appropriate response?



151. As detailed in THRIVE, the last element of the assessment is for service advisors, and ACR staff, to determine the most appropriate response by the police. Police Scotland has devised a process where four levels of response are considered and available to the service centres, as outlined below.

Type of police response	Rationale for response
Immediate	Where circumstances dictate that there is a threat to life, property or an ongoing incident that requires a dynamic police response.
Prompt	Dispatch as soon as possible, supervisor will review after 45 minutes.
Standard	A local policing appointment is made.
Other resolution	Advice and signposting provided.

152. If a service advisor determines that there is a requirement for an immediate or prompt attendance by police, they will transfer the incident to an ACR. Staff within the ACR will, on receipt of the incident, carry out a review of the THRIVE assessment to determine what type of police response, if any, is required. If the incident requires a police response, the most suitably located and equipped police officer/s will be dispatched to the incident.

153. Any incident that is not deemed appropriate for immediate or prompt attendance will be passed on to the resolution team for non-immediate investigation, advice or further assessment, as required. However, missing person incidents are predominantly dealt with by police being dispatched to gather information and commence an investigation.

154. Missing person investigations are thereafter managed through the structural processes outlined in the '**Key stages involved in the police response**' section of this report.



Audit of calls made to police service centres

155. To allow our inspectors to examine the quality and effectiveness of the initial response process, we carried out an audit of 365 calls relating to reports of missing persons, received by service centres between August 2022 and August 2023. The audit allowed us to examine the consistency of risk assessment, risk management and the appropriateness of decisions regarding operational response and final resolution. The calls audited were randomly selected, with a spread broken down evenly across the following categories:

- adult care home
- children's residential care
- NHS establishments
- PW25 – other¹³
- other – PW25¹⁴.

156. The 365 calls represent a sample of wider call data. Assistance was provided by statisticians within the Justice Analytical Services Division of Scottish Government, who calculated the figure to be a large enough number to provide reasonable representation of the overall data. The sample was randomised, which is the most robust method of sampling and the best way of reducing sample bias.

157. Given the randomised sampling and initial sample size calculation, the findings from our call audit are likely to be representative of practice across the wider number of calls made to service centres.

158. We found that Police Scotland's initial response to reports of missing persons was of a very high standard. The vast majority of calls were dealt with by service advisors in a polite, helpful and professional manner and demonstrated that they were accurately obtaining and recording information in accordance with guidance. There were also examples of good, probing questions being asked by service advisors to gain clarity on some of the details provided by the caller.

¹³ This relates to a call generated as a missing person report and concluded under another STORM coding.

¹⁴ This relates to a call generated under another STORM coding and concluded as a missing person incident.



159. There were some instances where service advisors did not accurately record information. These related, in the main, to calls made from adult care homes and in the PW25-other category. This seemed to be as a result of service advisors attempting to speed up the process and expedite answers before the caller was finished. This can result in key information being missed or inaccurately recorded, but this only related to a small number of calls within our sample.
160. There was a lack of follow-up questions from service advisors – again, in respect of a small number of calls. This was predominantly evident in calls that were made from NHS establishments, where the service advisor could have asked further questions about the type of medication a person might be receiving. There is also an opportunity to ask the caller about the extent to which they have used their own internal protocols in terms of undertaking initial searches within the facility, but this was not done in around 40% of the calls received from NHS settings.

THRIVE assessment and system access

161. THRIVE assessments were being used in almost all calls reviewed as part of the call audit. However, similar to our findings from the [HMICS review of the contact assessment model \(CAM\)](#) in 2022, we consider that the assessment could be used more effectively and consistently overall. In particular, the model could have been applied more thoroughly to the calls made regarding young people missing from children's houses.
162. Understandably, the focus of service advisors was most often on gathering information on the young person's description, known contacts and places where they may have been found previously, which is commendable. However, as outlined, the THRIVE assessment provides an opportunity to explore the nature and level of risk posed, including the potential level and likelihood of harm resulting from the incident. These factors were not always explored and therefore the assessment was limited as a result.



163. In these cases, there appeared to be a default position to categorise children and young people missing from children's houses as high risk at all times, and to deploy immediate resources. Again, this is understandable as care experienced young people are particularly vulnerable. However, if this is the formal position, guidance for service advisors on the use of THRIVE in these cases should be updated to reflect that a full assessment is not required.
164. Despite the identified issues in the application of THRIVE assessments, inspectors found that, in a considerable majority of cases, the result of the call was appropriate, and an incident was created in accordance with guidance.
165. Police Scotland has revised its THRIVE training as a result of carrying out a training needs analysis. This is being rolled out across all service centres and ACRs to encourage consistency and improve understanding of the model. During training, service advisors and controllers are guided to break down and assess each individual element of THRIVE to better inform decision-making in respect of the most appropriate response.
166. We heard positive reports from those who had received this training, regarding an increase in their confidence in using the tool and in their understanding and application of the assessment approach. However, although delivery of THRIVE training is seen as a strategic priority for Police Scotland, progress on the rollout has been slower than expected. This has been escalated to the contact, engagement and resolution project (CERP) programme board.
167. Service advisors are required to carry out various enhanced checks across multiple police systems, which are of particular importance to the completion of THRIVE assessments regarding missing persons. Service advisors routinely refer to the iVPD and other police systems to gather relevant information on the potential vulnerabilities of the missing person, to enhance the information they provide to investigating officers.
168. However, service advisor access to the iVPD is limited to accessing the number of vulnerability reports recorded on the system. Access is denied to more detailed information on vulnerability relating to those incidents. This results in service advisors having to pass the call on to others, to undertake the task on their behalf, which introduces inefficiencies into the process.



169. This issue was also identified during our aforementioned inspection of CAM in 2022, where we said:

“Police Scotland must improve the resilience and capability of its core police ICT systems to ensure C3 division staff have efficient access to the information required to perform their roles”.

170. Missing person incidents are closed on STORM once a missing person report is generated on the NMPA and there is no further need for deployed resources to be actively managed by the ACR. Service advisors do not have access to the NMPA, which results in the service advisor being unable to access information from previous or ongoing missing person investigations. Should a call be received by the service centre relating to a live missing person investigation being managed on NMPA, a new incident has to be generated to capture the information, which is thereafter linked to the closed/originating incident. This therefore creates the need for additional tasks that could potentially be eliminated by wider system access.

Area for development 3

Police Scotland should examine the level of access to the national missing persons application required by service advisors to improve operational efficiency and service delivery in response to missing persons.

171. When applying the engagement part of THRIVE, service advisors are expected to consider what support could be provided, with a focus on improving service delivery. This support may be in the form of signposting the individual to support services provided by health, social work or third sector agencies. However, we found very little evidence of this taking place. Where this did occur, it was most often in respect of calls received about children and young people.

172. We found that almost all incidents contained an appropriate level of supervisory footprint. We saw good examples of supervisors intervening at an early stage to identify a resolution to prevent the need to dispatch resources unnecessarily.



Protocols

173. As noted previously in this report, Police Scotland works with partners to implement nationally-adopted protocols at a local level, including the Herbert, Philomena and Not at Home protocols. In addition, service providers including NHS facilities, hospitals, children's houses, and older-adult care facilities, may have locally-developed protocols in place, aimed at improving service provision.
174. In most of the calls we reviewed, service advisors did not demonstrate an awareness of the existence of national or local missing person protocols. As such, they were not able to ask questions relevant to the use of protocols in respect of calls that were made by professionals from the aforementioned care settings.
175. We consider it important that service advisors are aware of national protocols and their relevance. Where possible, they should also have an understanding of the type of local protocols that are in place and what benefits these can bring.
176. This would provide service advisors with the ability to ask more relevant and probing questions on, for example, the extent to which a service provider had utilised their local protocols to conduct their own enquiries and searches of premises, in advance of making a call to the police.

Area for development 4

Police Scotland should ensure that service advisors are aware of national protocols and their relevance and, where possible, have an understanding of the type of local protocols that are in place and what benefits these can bring.

177. In reviewing calls made by professionals from partner agencies, it was clear that there were many instances where the person making the report was unprepared and unable to provide often the most basic information relevant to the missing person. This occurred in several calls made from hospitals, NHS care facilities and children's houses. It was apparent, in some instances, that the caller was not a permanent member of staff but was either covering for core staff, working in a place that they didn't usually work, or from an agency.



178. This can, of course, result in delays in information being gathered by service advisors and, at times, delays in a resource being dispatched. We recognise that staffing pressures exist across all public sector services. However, it is essential that professionals working in care settings where the opportunity for a person to go missing exists, are suitably equipped to make a missing person report that reflects the person's details and circumstances clearly and accurately.
179. As stated previously in this report, there is no structure in place whereby Police Scotland can engage at a senior level with health, local authority and independent sector leaders to address this type of issue. At a divisional level, we saw that police were working effectively with partners from health and social work settings to develop and improve protocols, but this was not taking place consistently across the country.

Incident coding

180. The call audit identified that a combined absconder/missing person opening code was being used by service advisors. This code seemed to be considered and used differently between service advisors and the ACR. Service advisors informed inspectors that they apply the code as determined by their training, but stated that this is often overturned by the ACR due to a difference in interpretation. Service advisors believe that the code should be separated, as someone missing is different from someone who has absconded.
181. The issue also has the potential to affect the count in terms of overall missing person incidents in any given year, especially if some of these could have been more appropriately recorded as a person having absconded from a care setting but not actually missing. Having a single tab that includes two different things seems to be causing unnecessary confusion and should be reviewed and resolved by the C3 division.



Local policing response

182. Once police attendance is decided, missing person investigations are thereafter managed by one of the 13 local policing divisions in Scotland. An officer will be dispatched by the ACR to take further details relevant to the missing person. Once an officer is dispatched, they will collate information and carry out an initial risk assessment using the Police Scotland aide memoir. Once completed, the information gathered is used to initiate and guide the investigation. The officer will also record the details on to the NMPA.
183. Each missing person incident will then be graded by officers, based on the circumstances and vulnerability of the individual. Risk gradings available to officers, outlined in the following chart, are contained within the framework and Police Scotland's missing person SOP.

Risk Category	Rationale for grading
High	Where the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the missing person: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ is in danger through their own vulnerability; and/or ■ may have been the victim of a serious crime; and/or ■ the risk posed is immediate and there are substantial grounds for believing that the public is in danger.
Medium	Where the missing person is likely to place themselves in danger or is a threat to themselves or others.
Low	Is deemed as any person that goes missing where there is a low risk of harm to that person or others (a child should not be graded as low risk).
Concern for person	Is defined by Police Scotland as a person, whose whereabouts are known or believed known and there are concerns of risk of harm to the individual. An incident classified as a 'concern for person' will be recorded on command and control until their safety/wellbeing or otherwise is established.



184. There are various roles involved in a missing person enquiry. The first is the investigating officer/s who will be assigned to the investigation and carry out enquiries to establish the whereabouts of the missing person. The investigating officer's first line supervisor (sergeant) will manage the investigation and ensure that appropriate actions are being carried out. They will liaise with their line manager (police inspector) on any additional resources that may be required. The inspector will have management responsibilities for all high, medium and low-risk missing person investigations in their area.
185. The divisional senior management team also plays an important role in the process, as they are required to oversee all divisional missing person investigations. In high-risk investigations, they will convene gold group meetings and maintain an overview of actions and enquiries. We outline the gold, silver and bronze command structure below.
186. Police Scotland applies a command structure for the oversight and co-ordination of incidents, including missing person investigations, ([Critical Incident Management National Guidance](#)). The command structure is separated into gold command (strategic), silver command (tactical) and bronze command (operational), defined as follows:
- **Gold** – The gold commander is the strategic lead, setting overall strategy that all other plans defer to. The gold commander has responsibility for both the incident and investigation
 - **Silver** – This designates the tactical commander function. The silver commander co-ordinates individual strategies in accordance with the strategic aims
 - **Bronze** – This designates the operational commander function. There may be several appointed, each occupationally competent in a relevant discipline, for example, in diversity or community reassurance.



187. Each of the command levels used in policing are role specific rather than rank specific. Different ranks of officers can undertake these roles depending on the risk category assigned to the missing person. In general, Police Scotland will have either a chief inspector or superintendent acting as gold command for a high-risk missing person. In contrast, an inspector would normally fulfil the lead role in medium and low-risk missing person enquiries. This structure allows for detailed scrutiny of the investigation, allocation of resources and oversight of progress against the actions established.

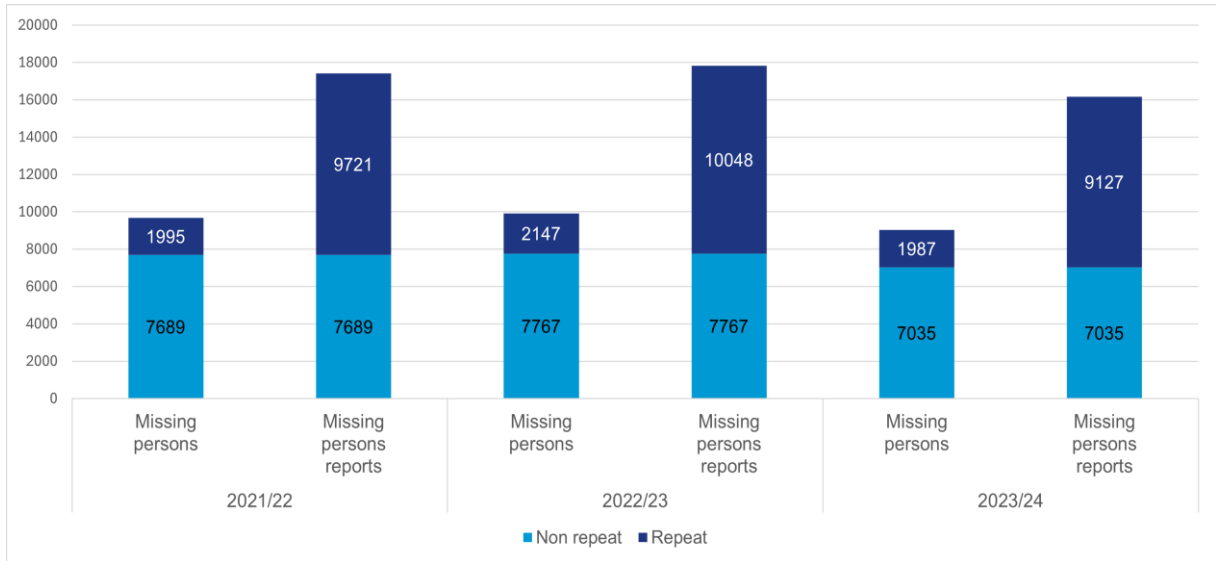
188. We found the command structure approach, as applied to missing person investigations, to be robust and effective. We noted it was used to good effect in cases reviewed as part of our call audit. The local policing response was very strong overall, with clear evidence of visible leadership at a divisional level. Partner organisations in the areas we visited, were very complimentary about the valuable contribution made by police officers, middle managers and divisional leaders. In particular, partners highlighted their positive engagement, collaboration and commitment to address missing person issues.



Repeat missing incidents

189. Police Scotland has effective mechanisms in place to identify the number of individuals who are reported missing on more than one occasion, often referred to as 'repeat missing persons'. Some of these individuals are reported missing on numerous occasions. Figure 5 demonstrates the number of individuals reported missing and the proportion of those that are repeat missing persons.

Figure 5 – Number of individual and repeat missing persons by fiscal year



Source: Police Scotland

190. Almost a quarter of individuals reported missing are reported on more than one occasion, and sometimes on multiple occasions. Children and young people make up a significant proportion of repeat missing persons. However, repeat missing persons also include people with mental health problems and older adults with dementia. Due to the often high level of vulnerability of people in these categories, the police response is, quite rightly, comprehensive. However, addressing repeat missing incidents has a considerable impact on police resources and demand.

191. There is no distinct Police Scotland strategy, or force direction in place, for dealing with individuals who go missing on multiple occasions. Most of the work to reduce repeat incidents is led by local divisions and therefore the approach taken by individual divisions can be variable.



192. Some of the divisional coordinators had a very good understanding of who the repeat missing people in their area were and they collaborated effectively with partners to plan an appropriate response. The response to repeat missing persons is supported by the use of guidance and protocols; however, these were not applied consistently across divisions. Encouragingly, we found that divisional coordinators in some areas were able to demonstrate where they had achieved a reduction in demand by working closely with partners to target repeat missing person incidents.
193. We found good examples of partnership working to address issues relevant to repeat missing persons during our onsite visits to Lanarkshire, Highland and Islands, and Edinburgh City police divisions. We met with police and partner agencies in these areas to explore a wide range of related issues, including how repeat missing incidents were being addressed.
194. As an example, police and partners in Lanarkshire held regular meetings to discuss individuals who were repeatedly reported missing. Often, given their level of vulnerability, children and young people were a primary focus of partnership meetings where individual cases were discussed and reviewed in detail. This resulted in action plans being developed to provide support for children and young people to address related issues and reduce missing incidents wherever possible.
195. Having reliable information regarding individuals who go missing on multiple occasions can help considerably in subsequent investigations. The NMPA provides officers with very useful information on all previous incidents, which can help to locate a missing person more quickly.



Specialist resources

196. The vast majority of specialist resources for missing person investigations are provided by the OSD. The main role and function of OSD is to provide advice, assistance and support to local policing. Search advice regarding missing persons is provided by a PoISA. They are accessible to operational supervisors on a 24/7 basis, through an on-call system. While PoISA support is focused on high-risk missing persons, they are available to advise on lower-risk enquiries when capacity allows.
197. The OSD is able to provide a wide range of specialist resources to support missing person investigations. These include the following:
- PoISA – there are over 60 trained officers located throughout Scotland (based at Aberdeen, Dundee, Fettes, Fife, Govan and Inverness)
 - police search teams – which consist of a team leader or PoISA, and between six and ten search pairs
 - air support – helicopter and drones
 - dog units – these consist of seven hubs of eight sergeants and 66 constables
 - police mountain rescue teams
 - dive and marine unit resources.
198. Specialist resources are located across the country to provide wide coverage, and any requests that local policing have for these are made through the C3 division, which has access to all relevant contact details for teams, officers and resource sites.
199. We spoke with divisional commanders from several areas across Scotland and found that the quality of service from OSD was very highly regarded. It was highlighted that the level of expertise of officers providing support services was often exceptional.
200. However, it was also highlighted that rural and semi-rural divisions did not always have the same level of access to specialist support services as urban areas. Understandably, in some instances, it can take time to get the correct resource to the more remote parts of Scotland. This can be particularly challenging at the early stages of an investigation, where the swift availability of resources can significantly improve investigative opportunities.



201. We found that divisions with more rural geography have formed partnership arrangements with civilian organisations providing specialist services, in order to support their investigations.
202. Police Scotland has access to a wide variety of civilian organisations that can provide specialist support and assistance with missing person searches. Requests for external resources will usually be made for high-risk incidents. Resources available to Police Scotland include:
- HM Coastguard
 - Civilian and military mountain rescue teams
 - Civilian cave/mine rescue
 - Scottish Fire and Rescue services
 - Scottish Ambulance Service special operation response team (SORT)
 - Search & Rescue Dog Association Scotland (SARDA).
203. These organisations provide essential support services to enhance search options and capability, and are highly regarded and valued by Police Scotland.
204. We recognise the need for balance between where specialist resources are geographically located and the varying levels of demand for their services across the country. There should, however, be sufficient flexibility to ensure specialist support services, officers and equipment can be deployed quickly to support missing person investigations in more rural areas. The OSD should continue to liaise with local policing divisions to ensure they are providing the necessary level of support to these areas.
205. Due to the level of public concern that some missing person incidents can understandably cause, Police Scotland will, at times, be required to manage members of the public who want to assist in the search for missing people. On occasion, police can be inundated with hundreds of civilian volunteers wanting to assist with searches. It is, of course, essential that such volunteers are utilised in an appropriate and focused manner, so as not to impede trained search teams.



206. Police Scotland is very experienced, skilled and knowledgeable in this regard and clear about when information and support from the public can be helpful, and in which circumstances the involvement of non-trained individuals may be detrimental to an investigation.
207. Police divisions have their own divisional intelligence units, which can provide information on any activity being generated by, or in the name of, the missing person. This usually relates to activity on electronic devices such as mobile phones. The monitoring of activity on social media platforms can also be a key tool in investigations. These approaches provide a crucial line of enquiry for investigating officers and, in high-risk situations, can be used to identify information on the location of the missing person.
208. Requests to obtain information relating to a mobile device belonging to a missing person are strictly controlled, with several levels of authorisation required to obtain information. Requests are dealt with by the communication investigation unit (CIU) who act as gatekeepers between the police and telecommunication providers. All authorisations are recorded and subject to scrutiny by independent external bodies.

Partnership working

209. Positive outcomes for people reported missing are reliant on effective partnership working arrangements that ensure services are planned and delivered collaboratively and efficiently, with a person-centred focus.
210. The framework is clear on the need for a well-planned and co-ordinated partnership approach to respond effectively to missing people in Scotland. It provides clarity on the expected roles and responsibilities of each partner and emphasises that addressing the issues surrounding missing person incidents cannot solely be the responsibility of Police Scotland. It contains several wide-ranging commitments that partner organisations have signed up to and that, if enacted fully, would make a significant improvement to outcomes for missing people.
211. However, we found considerable variation in the level of engagement of partner organisations and the extent to which they were meeting the expectations of the framework. As outlined, key partners include health and care services, hospitals, local authority social work services, and third sector agencies.



212. As stated earlier in this report, we saw examples of very positive and effective partnership working arrangements in the areas we visited, but this was not consistent across the country. This is a complex issue; there are a substantial number of services being provided by partners across the country, any of which could potentially make a report regarding a missing person. As with policing, partner organisations need to have a strong element of strategic leadership from senior officers to plan missing person responses – as well as an effective operational response from staff across a vast range of service settings. Unfortunately, this was not always the case.
213. While we consider the framework to provide crucial guidance for partners, it is not statutory guidance, which can result in some partners giving it less attention and emphasis than it requires. The framework does not have the consistent profile that it should have among some partner organisations.
214. In Lanarkshire, for example, the missing persons co-ordination unit acts as an effective conduit between operational policing and partners. Any issues regarding partnership or policing arrangements and activities are reported to the unit to resolve. Any areas for improvement or learning opportunities are captured and subsequently shared with partners.
215. Regular meetings take place between police and partners to co-ordinate their missing person response at a senior level (attended by strategic leaders from police and the local authorities that make up the Lanarkshire division). Operational meetings between partners take place on a weekly basis. These often focus on the most vulnerable individuals, and repeat missing persons. At times, daily communication is maintained between police and partners regarding children and young people at risk of becoming missing, in order to plan an appropriate response.
216. The division was able to provide tangible evidence of the impact of this approach where it had reduced instances of children and young people going missing from children's houses, particularly for those likely to be repeat missing persons. This demonstrates a positive preventative approach. While this level of regular engagement with partners will come at a cost, in terms of time and resources, we are confident that the cost and resource of responding to potentially high-risk missing person investigations would be greater.



217. Reducing and, in some cases, preventing missing episodes can also improve outcomes for children and young people, as the result of being missing can be very damaging. Partners in the divisions we visited were clear about the potential risks for missing children and young people, including sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. We saw a considerable level of commitment between police and partners in the areas we visited to prioritise these issues, and we heard about very strong partnership working arrangements aimed at targeting the most at-risk children and young people.
218. Multi-agency partner meetings do not take place consistently across police divisions. This can result from a combination of factors, including: the level of buy-in from senior managers from health and social work services; the availability of operational partners to engage with police; and the lack of structures and protocols in place to support this approach.
219. Some divisional/local authority areas have entered into partnership protocols, which set out their strategy and agreed operational approach to missing persons in their area. These can come about through the support and advice provided by national coordinators from the Missing People charity. Partners we spoke with generally welcomed the opportunity to be actively involved in a multi-agency group to discuss and address the aims and objectives of the framework; however, partnership protocols were not in place in most areas.
220. We heard about particular progress being made on a partnership protocol for missing persons in the Forth Valley police division, which includes Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire local authorities. At the time of our inspection, partners were at an advanced stage of formalising agreements and arrangements to improve their collaborative approach to the issue. We consider that the learning achieved as a result of this process could assist other divisions to establish similar partnership protocols, aligned to the expectations of the framework.



Third sector

221. Police Scotland has a good working relationship with third sector organisations involved in missing person investigations. This includes a strategic partnership with the charity, Missing People. There is a formal protocol in place between Police Scotland and the charity to provide several services relevant to missing persons and their families. Police Scotland and Missing People are also in the final stages of developing an information sharing agreement to support the wider use of available services.
222. Missing People offers a range of support services across the UK to assist in investigations and support missing people once returned, alongside their key contacts. It can provide the following:
- [Text Safe](#) – a text message system whereby a text is sent to a missing child or adult to let them know about confidential helpline services available to them. These messages are sent by the charity and not the police. In 2023/24, the system sent 600 messages to missing people. This a free service, which we believe is not being used to its full potential. Police Scotland can also send text messages directly to missing people to ask them to get in touch – however, the use of a third sector partner has the potential to increase the response level.
 - [Family Support](#) – police can refer families to the charity for advice and support. However, Police Scotland does not use this service widely and there is limited uptake of it in Scotland. The charity has offered support to around 30 families in the past year, which is a small fraction of the number of families affected each year.
 - [Appeals](#) – public appeals for a missing person can assist an investigation considerably. Missing People are able to use digital billboards, social media, print media and local partners to share public appeals – with a potential reach of millions. In addition, the charity can utilise its Safeguarding Briefing Network, with over 120 Scottish partner agencies, which is available to the police when a public appeal is not appropriate. Through this network, the charity can share briefings about missing people with professionals and services that a missing person is likely to use, such as train stations and homeless outreach services, without making the appeal public.



- [Return discussions](#) – the charity can provide training to police officers and staff from partner organisations to enable them to conduct return discussions more effectively. At the time of our inspection, the charity had trained over 700 individuals in carrying out return discussions.

223. We suggest that Police Scotland explore all of these options to ensure that they are being used, to an appropriate extent, to improve outcomes for missing people.

Early intervention and prevention

224. As outlined previously in this report, police and partners work collaboratively to introduce early intervention and prevention approaches; this happens in varying degrees across the country. In some instances, they are provided with support by national coordinators in developing approaches based on their experience of what can work well.

225. Several national protocols have been introduced over recent years aimed at improving partnership working – particularly to reduce and/or prevent missing person incidents wherever possible.

226. Police Scotland and partners in local authority areas/divisions have also collaborated to develop a range of local protocols and approaches focused on issues of concern identified in their own area – such as a spike in missing incidents being reported by a particular service, facility or setting (e.g., a hospital, care home for older adults, or children’s house).

227. Police Scotland has adopted the following approved national protocols:

- Not at Home Protocol (relevant for children and young people)
- Philomena Protocol (relevant for children and young people)
- Herbert Protocol (for people living with Alzheimer’s and dementia).

228. The NMPU is the driver behind the development and implementation of national protocols. However, responsibility lies with local divisions and partners to deliver these effectively.



Not at Home Protocol

229. This protocol has been in operation for two years, with the aim of reducing the number of missing person reports made from children's houses. The processes and procedures to be adopted are outlined in Police Scotland's 'Looked after & accommodated children who go missing from residential & foster care in Scotland' guidance.
230. The protocol places responsibility on care providers, as corporate parents¹⁵ to gauge the level of tolerable risk when a child or young person in their care has not returned home. The intention is that carers should only report them as missing when their whereabouts are unknown and there is a potential threat, or risk of harm posed to the individual.

Philomena Protocol

231. Police Scotland adopted the Philomena Protocol as best practice following the introduction of the protocol in England and Wales.
232. It was subsequently launched across Scotland in May 2023 and is relatively well established. The protocol is a scheme that asks carers to identify children and young people who are at risk of going missing, and to record vital information about them that can be used to help find them quickly and safely. This information should include:
- physical description
 - recent photograph
 - details of friends/associates
 - places frequented
 - access to mobile phone/money
 - medical information
 - habits/routines/missing episodes.

¹⁵ The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 define corporate parenting as "the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers".



233. Having this crucial information to hand at the time of reporting a young person missing assists the reporter giving the information and provides more comprehensive details to service advisors (and thereafter to investigating officers), enabling them to progress enquiries swiftly.

Herbert Protocol

234. The Herbert Protocol was introduced by Norfolk Constabulary in 2011 and is now adopted by many forces across the UK. Following its introduction, the protocol was used by some of the police divisions in Scotland and rolled out nationally in September 2021. The purpose of the protocol is to help police and other agencies quickly locate people who are living with dementia.

235. The Herbert Protocol operates in a similar way to the Philomena Protocol, in that it asks carers or family members to complete a form containing relevant information on a vulnerable person's personal details; places where they may have been found previously, as well as the potential level of risk or harm posed. Responsibility for updating the form rests solely with families and/or carers of a vulnerable adult at risk of going missing.

236. We found evidence of several divisional coordinators working effectively, in collaboration with their local partners, to embed preventative measures at a local level. However, the success of such preventative approaches was found to correlate with the extent to which the division had a dedicated coordinator with a protected role and support from divisional leaders.

237. There appears to be heavy reliance by partners on Police Scotland to drive progress on the implementation of the various protocols. While, quite rightly, police are the lead agency in terms of investigating missing person incidents, partner organisations have a shared responsibility for implementing an early intervention and prevention approach, as outlined in the framework.

238. Anecdotal evidence suggests that – where divisional coordinators do not have the capacity to promote these protocols and assist in the delivery of training to partners on the subject – organisations can, at times, revert to their legacy practices.



239. Despite this, we found good examples of where national and local protocols were being implemented effectively by some local authority/divisional areas.
240. The Highland and Islands division, in partnership with social work services, has embedded the Philomena Protocol into practices and procedures relating to the placement of asylum-seeking children and young people placed within their locality.
241. Divisional coordinators in Highland and Islands, Argyll and West Dunbartonshire, and Lanarkshire carry out daily reviews of missing person incidents to identify those who meet the criteria of the Herbert Protocol and thereafter link with partners, carers and/or families to raise awareness of the protocol.
242. The Highland and Islands division has used existing harbouring legislation to respond to adults found in the company of missing children. This practice has been captured by the NMPU who are looking to share learning across Scotland.
243. Care providers in Lanarkshire routinely collate information on when and how often the Not at Home Protocol has been used by children's services, and share the resulting information with divisional coordinators. This provides valuable information on where missing person incidents have potentially been prevented, which can also result in reduced demand. It is often argued that it is very difficult to measure something that may have been prevented as a result of an intervention, or activity. However, in this instance care providers in the region can draw a comparison to the use of the protocol and a reduction in reports being made by their services.
244. We would suggest that divisional coordinators and the NMPU share this good practice with care providers in children's houses across the country.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should continue to engage with partners and service providers at a national and local level to encourage greater adherence to the collective commitments of the national missing persons framework. This should include engagement on the implementation of early intervention and prevention approaches, and the use of national and local protocols.



Engagement with missing people and their families

245. Police Scotland has no overarching communication strategy to engage with missing people, once returned, and their families, friends and key contacts during the course of an investigation. It relies on guidance contained within the missing person SOP, aide memoire and Moodle training packages to direct officers on the requirement of effective engagement and communication with families and key contacts throughout investigations, and with missing persons once returned.
246. These documents have very limited detail on what is expected of officers in this regard. The SOP includes information on the need to identify a single point of contact in the family, and a corresponding officer, to facilitate regular engagement and communication. More detailed information is available within missing person Moodle training packages, but these are not available to officers at the time of responding to an incident.
247. There is guidance for gold group commanders, which aims to ensure that a single point of contact is in place to facilitate regular communication and engagement with family members throughout the duration of a high-risk missing person enquiry. However, this does not routinely capture those enquiries assessed as medium or low risk.
248. There is a lack of information available to officers on the provision and availability of support services that families and/or missing persons may be able to access.
249. Police Scotland can make a follow-up call or send a letter to a missing person, once returned, with the offer of help and support. This is used in some instances by divisions, usually through the divisional coordinator, but it is not done in all cases.
250. A memorandum of understanding was previously in place between Police Scotland and Missing People, which has now lapsed. Most of the officers we interviewed were not aware of the existence of the charity, nor of the services it could provide. On examination, we found that work is being done to develop an information sharing agreement to capture the range of services offered by the charity.



251. Despite the lack of a distinct strategy, most of the people we interviewed, who worked for organisations other than the police, felt Police Scotland maintained an appropriate level of communication with families and key contacts during missing person investigations. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence to form a view on the level, quality and consistency of engagement between Police Scotland and missing people and their families across Scotland. Police Scotland should examine its performance in this regard to identify opportunities for improvement.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland should ensure consistent and effective communication and engagement takes place with families, carers and key contacts throughout investigations.

Return discussions

252. The concept and practice of carrying out return discussions with missing people, once returned, has been in place within policing for a considerable period of time. More recently, the framework has drawn together research and good practice from a range of sources to promote a more tailored approach to such discussions.

253. The framework sets out expectations for how these are carried out and by whom, with an emphasis on identifying the needs of the missing person and then establishing the most appropriate person and organisation to carry out the interview.

254. The framework makes a strong statement on the subject:

"The importance of return discussions cannot be stressed enough. These are absolutely central to preventing individuals from falling into patterns of repeatedly going missing".

It also encourages the returned person to be given a choice about with whom, and with which agency, they would like to complete their return discussion, with the aim of increasing the chances of engagement, identifying triggers and preventing further missing episodes.



255. Police Scotland considers 'safe and well' checks and return discussions as being part of the missing person investigation, which are included within its missing persons policy and supporting aide memoir.
256. Safe and well checks are the initial interaction between police and missing persons on their return. These are carried out exclusively by police officers. They are followed by a return discussion, which is also referred to as a 'return home interview' in the framework and Police Scotland missing person policy and guidance.
257. Police Scotland national guidance states that the initial safe and well check should be carried out as soon as possible following a person's return. However, we received mixed views from partners on the practical approach taken to safe and well checks, particularly in respect of children and young people living at children's houses.
258. Partners highlighted that the practice could often be very disruptive for the young person returned to the service, but could also upset other children living there as, at times, these visits would be made by police during the night.
259. This issue has been addressed by police and partners in some divisions, resulting in improved outcomes.
260. Edinburgh City division has worked with partners to agree an arrangement whereby the return of a missing young person is confirmed by residential childcare staff at the service, with details provided to local policing. This often takes place via a telephone conversation, with arrangements for a follow-up appointment the next day (or sometimes within a few hours if the incident takes place in the middle of the night). We heard from police and partners that this small adjustment has made a considerable difference to the working relationship, as well as having a positive impact on the children and young people living at the service.
261. We would suggest that Police Scotland examine the learning achieved from this approach, for consideration of wider implementation across divisions.



262. Research suggests that the police are not always the best agency to conduct the more in-depth return discussions required. This is often the case for care experienced children, who may have difficulties with authority figures such as the police. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in the absence of alternative arrangements in some areas, police are conducting the majority of return discussions.
263. The police should always be considered as a competent resource to conduct a return discussion, but officers conducting such interviews need to be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills to complete the role. Local divisions and their partners should introduce a model that meets the needs of missing people.
264. In contrast, in England and Wales, statutory guidance places responsibility on local authorities to ensure that every child is offered a return home interview by an independent, trained individual. This is considered a statutory right of the child or young person (not adults). The College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice (APP) also recommends police forces establish a process for providing return discussions for vulnerable adults at risk of harm.
265. As stated previously, intelligence gathered from return discussions for all missing people can be invaluable in identifying vulnerabilities and can also provide useful information in the event of an individual becoming missing again. We found a distinct lack of co-ordination and information sharing by local partners in some areas regarding return discussions. This can have a negative impact on the success of any prevention and intervention approaches, and can result in unnecessary gaps in police efforts to trace repeat missing persons. Any information gleaned from a return discussion is of benefit to all those potentially involved in the ongoing care and/or support of that missing person.
266. There is no widespread approach to the provision of return discussions for adults. The most compelling example we identified was the model developed by Alzheimer Scotland, in partnership with Edinburgh City division. This is being piloted and will be reviewed for further implementation. During the pilot period, specialists from Alzheimer Scotland will carry out return discussions with missing persons living with dementia and will share appropriate information with the division.



267. Alzheimer Scotland has received funding from the [RS McDonald Charitable Trust](#) to enable this pilot to be extended further to Motherwell and Fife local authority areas. It is Police Scotland's ambition to roll out this pilot nationally to all those living with dementia, but this is currently reliant on the prospective up-scaling of the model and provision of funding for Alzheimer Scotland to continue the work.
268. We found several examples of effective practice in the approach to return discussions carried out by both police and partners, which we outline in the appendix of this report.
269. There is a disparity in the provision of return discussions, resulting in a potential loss of prevention and intervention opportunities. This results from: a lack of focused collaboration between partners on the delivery of return discussions; funding issues for third sector agencies; and a lack of capacity and support for missing person coordinators to drive local improvements.
270. Clear and co-ordinated arrangements, procedures and information-sharing protocols should be put in place to support return discussions, with any resultant valuable intelligence captured and shared between partners.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should work with partners to ensure that clear and co-ordinated arrangements are in place to conduct return discussions across divisions. These should align effectively with safe and well checks, and all relevant information gathered from such discussions should be shared between partners.



Long-term missing persons

271. As previously indicated, the vast majority of people either return by themselves, or are returned by police. However, the impact and distress caused to the families and friends of the relatively small number of people who are not found is considerable.
272. Police Scotland subscribes to the schedule set by the NPCC for the review and management of long-term missing persons. An individual becomes a long-term missing person when they have been missing for 28 days or more. The 28-day peer review of the investigation is the responsibility of the CID, irrespective of risk level. Subsequent reviews are the responsibility of a trained divisional senior investigating officer (which, on occasion, will be of sergeant rank) at intervals of three and six months, and annually thereafter.
273. The appointed senior investigating officer for the long-term missing person investigation is required to record details of the review on the NMPA. The NMPA has a standalone section for archived long-term missing person investigations, however, is unable to separate those which are in the review cycle from those which are archived. This creates difficulties in managing the review cycle. To address this issue, the NMPU has requested that the police digital division create a tab and search function within the NMPA for long-term missing person investigations. We would support this as it could have a positive impact on long-term investigations.
274. The NMPU has national responsibility for providing annual alerts to divisions to carry out a review of their respective long-term missing person cases. We were informed that complacency and inconsistency has been introduced into the approach within some divisions, as they are routinely devolving responsibility to untrained inspectors or sergeants.
275. We were provided with some examples of effective practice whereby, as a result of the commitment of the officer involved, a long-term missing person was traced safe and well, living under a new identity.
276. The current missing person SOP does not include any guidance on the ownership, management and/or review of long-term missing incidents. There is no performance reporting in respect of progress on long-term missing cases.



277. The management of long-term missing cases should be improved by instilling divisional ownership, supported by the NMPU, to ensure there is appropriate oversight, governance and timely reviews in accordance with the review cycle. The NMPA should also be updated to a satisfactory level to afford opportunity for effective record keeping and retrieval of required performance information on status of forms within the review cycle.

Area for development 5

Police Scotland should examine the processes and practice relevant to the management of long-term missing person enquiries, and introduce necessary improvements.

Safeguarding responsibilities

278. An individual being reported as missing could be a sign of wider vulnerability that they may be experiencing or being exposed to. Understanding these issues and attempting to put intervention measures in place could prevent further missing person incidents and reduce harm.

279. This was identified in the aforementioned HMICS inspection report on the approach to missing person investigations in Aberdeen City division. As a result of that inspection, Police Scotland provided guidance to officers in respect of vulnerability issues relevant to missing person investigations. This included the need for officers to submit the following reports relating to missing person incidents, to meet safeguarding responsibilities:

- submission of concern reports for children
- submission of concern reports for adults deemed to be an adult at risk who meets the three-point test, or someone who is a vulnerable person as a result of the situation or circumstances and may require support
- safe and well checks and return discussions
- Single Point of Contact (SPoC)/Family Liaison Officer (FLO).



280. Police Scotland should take the opportunity to review the guidance from our previous inspection on this issue, so that it captures all relevant safeguarding information and relevant practice. The review should ensure that relevant processes related to potential child criminal exploitation are captured and managed appropriately. This should include developing protocols with partners to identify the most appropriate agency to conduct return discussions.



Outcomes

Governance and performance

281. Police Scotland's leadership on missing persons strategy and governance should be clearer and more visible, at the national strategic level. The gaps that exist may be partly due to gaps and changes in previous senior posts, but may also be as a result of missing persons sitting within a very broad and diverse portfolio within Policing Together, with potentially competing demands. Police Scotland should reintroduce the strategic governance forum that was previously in place to oversee the strategy and direction for missing persons work.
282. We found no evidence that there were effective audit and assurance processes in place to ensure all areas were adopting a consistent approach to delivering services relevant to missing persons. There were inconsistencies in how information on missing persons is reported by local policing divisions to national teams. We would expect to see clear criteria in place for how local policing divisions should report on missing persons.
283. Police Scotland provides performance reports on missing person operations to the SPA on a quarterly basis. These are made available to the public on the SPA's website. These reports include quantitative information on a range of factors, including the number of people that go missing from various settings and facilities each year.
284. This missing person information is part of a wider performance report that Police Scotland produces for the SPA performance committee. The missing person section of the report is limited in the information provided and gives no detail about the effectiveness of prevention and intervention measures. We would suggest that Police Scotland provide the SPA with more detailed information regarding what measures and protocols are working well, or less well, and what is being done to achieve improvements.



285. The performance management data in these reports includes a range of demand-related information relevant to demographics and geographical differences. This provides a helpful picture of the potential increase or decrease in incidents that have taken place in respect of specific groups, including adults, children and young people, and those missing from settings including NHS facilities and children's services.

286. There is, however, no overarching internal mechanism in place to evaluate the quality of the police response in respect of missing persons. While as noted, police are able to provide valuable quantitative data, performance reports make little reference to the quality and effectiveness of service provision and the outcomes achieved.

Performance outcomes

287. Police Scotland does not directly gather and report on performance information relevant to the commitments outlined within the framework. Rather, it sets out its objectives and outcomes against those outlined in the [Annual Policing Plan 2023/24](#), which is based on its Strategic Threat & Risk Assessment (STRA) 23/28.

Outcome 1	Threats to public safety and wellbeing are resolved by a proactive and responsive police service.
Objective	Keep people safe in the physical and digital world.

288. We consider it appropriate for Police Scotland to align missing people to its own, wider outcomes concerning threats to public safety and keeping people safe. However, as the service is aligned to the framework and has adopted the commitments outlined therein, it would be appropriate for the service to monitor, measure and report on progress against these.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should routinely evaluate the quality of its missing persons operations to pinpoint areas for improvement, using that knowledge to drive improvement, reduce demand and improve outcomes for missing people and their families.



Partner agency involvement

289. It was clear from information gathered during the inspection, that some partners in health and local authorities could do more to collaborate with Police Scotland on missing persons. The issue is more prevalent at a senior planning level where gaps exist in some areas. Greater collaboration would ensure that there is a genuine multi-agency response to missing persons, aligning with the aims, objectives and commitments outlined in the framework. Partners should also be involved in monitoring progress against the objectives and commitments outlined in the framework.
290. We found that positive outcomes were more likely where local policing divisions had collaborated with partners to develop missing person protocols. The successful implementation of preventative protocols can result in fewer missing person incidents, reducing, in turn, the number of officers required to resource investigations.
291. The collaborative approach and practical arrangements put in place by police and partners in the areas visited during our inspection were impressive. There was a clear focus on working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for missing people, to reduce repeat incidents and provide support to missing people once returned.

Experience of missing people and families

292. While we have outlined evidence of Police Scotland engaging effectively with partner agencies on missing persons on a number of levels, we found no evidence of partners asking for the views of missing persons (or their families) on their experiences. There was no mechanism in place to ask what they felt about the police or partner response to missing incidents. As a result, missing people and their families had no viable route to highlight what had worked well for them and what had not. This lack of enquiry limits the potential for services to improve, and inhibits organisational learning.
293. Police Scotland's 'user experience survey' is undertaken regularly to gain an understanding of the views of the public, communities and partners regarding what is working well (and not so well) for them. However, this does not include questions specific to missing persons.



294. The Missing People charity has developed a lived experience forum and network to provide platforms to hear from those who have experience of being missing, and their families. The aim of these is to gather feedback to help improve the way in which the charity can offer support to people at risk of going missing.

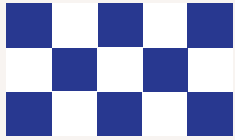
Area for development 6

Police Scotland should explore opportunities to gather information on the experiences of missing people and their families, to better inform service planning and provision.



Appendix

1. During our inspection, we identified the following examples of effective practice in respect of return discussions, carried out by both police and partners.
 - In Fife, two police officers have been nominated as ‘young missing person co-ordinators’ and are trained to carry out return discussions for children and young people. During our audit of the NMPA, we found evidence of one of the divisional coordinators completing a joint return discussion with social work staff, which was deemed thorough and well documented.
 - In Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray, return discussions for children and young people deemed at risk of harm were carried out by police ‘risk and harm reduction officers,’ which can include an adult who has a better relationship with the child or young person. Frontline officers carry out return discussions with those at lower risk of harm. This ensures a partnership approach for those deemed at higher risk of going missing and promotes opportunities for informed prevention and intervention activities.
 - In Highland and Islands, NHS mental health services reported being impressed by the consistency of approach by local police in the completion of return discussions. Social work services also follow up with patients in communities in respect of return discussions.
 - The local authority in North Lanarkshire carries out return discussions with care experienced children and young people, with clear and established reporting routes into the divisional coordinator. This ensures consistent capture of the outcome of return discussions, which is recorded on the NMPA and discussed in multi-agency missing person meetings.
 - In East Renfrewshire, Barnardo’s carry out return discussions on behalf of statutory services, which also includes a follow-up service in the form of support services for children and young people.
 - In Edinburgh, staff within mental health services carry out return discussions for their patients. Intelligence gathered is used to inform risk assessments and is shared with the divisional coordinator and/or the police hospital liaison officer.
 - In Highland and Islands, youth street workers are trained to carry out return discussions, with a particular focus on child sexual and criminal exploitation. Positive relationships have been developed between the street workers and vulnerable children and young people.



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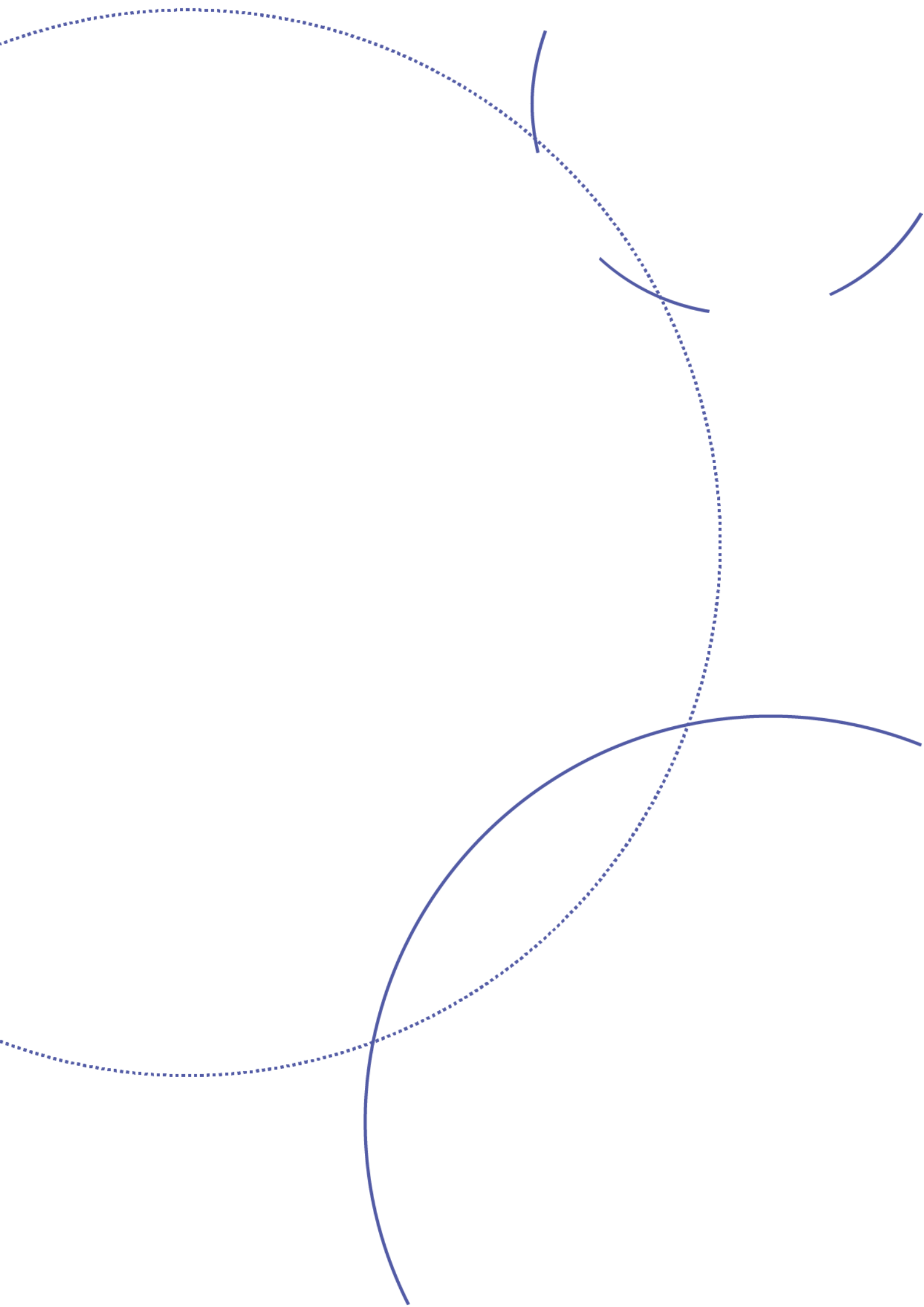


HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

November 2024

Thematic inspection
of road policing
in Scotland







HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) is established under the [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#) and has wide ranging powers to look into the 'state, effectiveness and efficiency' of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

We have a statutory duty to inquire into the arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA to meet their obligations in terms of best value and continuous improvement. If necessary, we can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SPA or Police Scotland as they consider appropriate. We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on policing in Scotland.

- Our powers allow us to do anything we consider necessary or expedient for the purposes of, or in connection with, the carrying out of our functions
- The SPA and the Chief Constable must provide us with such assistance and co-operation as we may require to enable us to carry out our functions
- When we publish a report, the SPA and the Chief Constable must also consider what we have found and take such measures, if any, as they think fit
- Where our report identifies that the SPA or Police Scotland is not efficient or effective (or best value not secured), or will, unless remedial measures are taken, cease to be efficient or effective, Scottish Ministers may direct the SPA to take such measures as may be required. The SPA must comply with any direction given
- Where we make recommendations, we will follow them up and report publicly on progress
- We will identify good practice that can be applied across Scotland
- We work with other inspectorates and agencies across the public sector and co-ordinate our activities to reduce the burden of inspection and avoid unnecessary duplication
- We aim to add value and strengthen public confidence in Scottish policing and will do this through independent scrutiny and objective, evidence-led reporting about what we find.













Our approach is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.¹

This thematic inspection will be undertaken by HMICS under section 74(2)(a) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and a report will be laid before the Scottish Parliament under section 79(3) of the Act.

¹ HMICS, [Corporate Plan 2021-24](#), 1 February 2022.



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Our inspection

It is an exceptionally challenging time for public services across the UK. Police Scotland is not exempt from this and has seen a significant reduction in officer numbers recently. To compound matters, the increasing role of the police in dealing with vulnerable people in society and, in particular, those experiencing poor mental health, has meant other priorities, including road policing, are likely to have received less focus because of hard decisions taken by Police Scotland about resourcing.

It is now a regular occurrence, several deaths per week, to read about another death on Scotland's roads. The total number of casualties in Scotland has increased each year since 2020. In 2023, 155 people were killed on Scotland's roads and 1,930 seriously injured. The impact this tragedy has on the people involved – and on their families and friends – cannot be underestimated. It appears there is a societal acceptance that people will die on the roads, but it is utterly unacceptable and almost every death is preventable.

This inspection shows that – while Police Scotland's purpose and vision on road policing is clearly articulated (and aligned to Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030) – the level of resource dedicated to improving road safety and denying criminals the use of the roads, has diminished. This applies to both specialist road policing officers and to local policing officers.

We found that external partnership working arrangements are well established and very positive, but the police role in carrying out enforcement activity has reduced significantly since the creation of Police Scotland with a 63 per cent reduction in the identification of road traffic offences since 2013/14.

We were extremely impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the officers and staff we engaged with during our inspection. However, the reduction in focus on road policing does raise questions about Police Scotland's contribution, both in reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on Scotland's roads and supporting the objectives of the Road Safety Framework to 2030.



Key factors affecting the ability of Police Scotland to keep people safe on Scotland's roads include: the significant reduction in police officer numbers (in both local and road policing); the reprioritisation of officers away from road policing towards other matters; the number of officers (particularly from road policing) required to attend court, despite rarely being required to provide evidence; and, demand from escorting abnormal loads.

It is, therefore, vitally important that the positive partnership working arrangements are built upon, and that everything possible is done to make Scotland's roads safer. We visited Surrey, Sussex and West Midlands Police forces and identified best practice in making optimum use of intelligence, analysis and technology. I am grateful to the chief constables of these forces for accommodating my inspection team.

We have highlighted two specific examples of best practice we found during these visits that I believe should be progressed and implemented in Scotland. Firstly, the provision of educational courses as an alternative to prosecution, and, secondly, the facility to allow members of the public to directly upload footage from journey-cams to report road traffic offences (Police Scotland are the only UK force who does not have this facility). These are two initiatives that showing significant results in other parts of the UK.

The support we received from the road policing team in Police Scotland has been exceptional and I am very grateful to Chief Superintendent Hilary Sloan and her team. I would also like to thank colleagues from Transport Scotland, UKROEd and Dr Helen Wells, Director of the Road Policing Academic Network, for their support.

Craig Naylor

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

November 2024



Key findings

Leadership and vision

- Police Scotland's purpose and vision on road policing is clearly articulated and is aligned to Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.
- Police Scotland has reduced the number of police resources dedicated to carrying out road policing duties, which raises questions regarding its contribution to supporting the objectives of the Road Safety Framework.
- Police Scotland engages well with external stakeholders on road policing. The relationships are well established and very positive.
- Police Scotland has an effective leadership and governance structure for road policing, as part of the wider Operational Support Division.
- Police Scotland has dedicated officers to a Policing Together Team to enhance the culture across Operational Support Division, including road policing.
- Police Scotland is committed to ensuring public accountability and transparency concerning its road policing service provision.
- Police Scotland has a good system of data gathering, analysis and prioritisation at a strategic level. Analysts review information, including that provided through collaborative partnerships, and provide robust data on collisions and casualties.
- Police Scotland is engaged in a wide range of activities with stakeholders, aimed at creating an organisational learning culture.
- Police Scotland has many creative and innovative projects designed to improve the safety of road users across Scotland, developed and delivered in conjunction with key partners.
- Police Scotland has a communications plan that utilises social media to good effect in promoting key road safety messages.



Delivery

- The specialist training available to road policing officers is of the highest standards.
- There is a considerable backlog and a lack of availability for training courses, which means many road policing officers are not able to fulfil certain aspects of their role, placing more demand on those who have been trained.
- Local policing officers are provided with limited road policing training, despite at times being required to work on the fast road networks across Scotland, increasing the risk to those officers.
- The number of officers required to attend court (and not provide evidence) is having a detrimental impact on the ability of Police Scotland to keep people safe on Scotland's roads.
- The demand from escorting abnormal loads is affecting the ability of Police Scotland to keep people safe on Scotland's roads. Police Scotland is the only UK police force that still performs this role.
- There is a lack of visible presence of road policing resources on Scotland's roads. This adversely affects the ability of Police Scotland to deter dangerous driving behaviour.
- There are often insufficient road policing resources available to conduct pursuits, meaning this tactical option is often not available to the organisation.
- Police Scotland has evidence to suggest that drug driving is a significant risk to road users across Scotland, but is unable to tackle it effectively due to a lack of trained resources and forensic services capacity.
- The reduction in road policing posts has limited the opportunity to recruit people from under-represented groups.
- We found that, while officers and staff in road policing are very committed to their roles, many feel undervalued.



- Road policing vehicles are not equipped in a uniform and coherent manner, and the views of the officers using the vehicles and equipment are not taken into account.
- The road safety equipment fitted to, and available in, local policing vehicles is inconsistent and often insufficient.
- Road policing officers are thorough and professional in completing vehicle and equipment checks, whereas local policing officers are not completing such checks as regularly as required.
- Road safety is seen as a matter of priority for local communities across Scotland and features in local policing plans across the country.
- Police Scotland has clearly established road safety and road crime priorities at the local divisional level, which are aligned to national road policing strategic priorities.
- The level of engagement and collaboration between local policing and road policing varies greatly in quality and effectiveness across Scotland.
- The effectiveness of the relationship between the road policing department and the contact, command and control function in Police Scotland varies in quality and effectiveness in different parts of the country.
- Police Scotland has well-established effective relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in relation to road policing. The priorities of these stakeholders are discussed at strategic, tactical and operational levels.
- The Transport Scotland liaison officer roles have contributed positively to partnership working.
- Police Scotland actively prepares for and responds well to major incidents and events on the roads, including during severe weather events.
- We identified acute resourcing issues in road policing, particularly in the north of Scotland during nightshift hours.



- The National Calendar of Road Safety Activity, led by Police Scotland, involves close liaison with Road Safety Scotland on road safety education programmes.
- The number of police referrals by Police Scotland to Brake's National Road Victim Service, has been increasing in recent years, although the percentage of police referrals (as opposed to self-referrals) is still slightly below the UK average.
- Police Scotland is not using ANPR to its fullest effect compared with other UK police forces.
- Police Scotland has not sustained its fleet of safety camera vans, which has, at times, reduced its ability to fully deploy that resource.
- Police Scotland is the only UK police service that does not have a facility to allow members of the public to report road traffic offences by directly uploading journey-cam footage.
- Enforcement activity is carried out in line with the National Calendar of Road Safety Activity; this involves both road policing and local policing.
- We identified that local policing officers have limited opportunity to carry out proactive road policing enforcement activity.
- Police Scotland's planning and performance processes are currently undergoing a review.
- There is a lack of dedicated analytical staff for road policing, and more analytical focus is required for road crime.
- There is a lack of effective tasking and coordination, and gaps in intelligence support, meaning limited evidence of proactive tasking to address road safety/road crime concerns.
- Police Scotland was slow to react to the introduction of The Road Traffic Act 1988 (Police Driving: Prescribed Training) Regulations 2023, which may have contributed to the backlog in police driver training courses.



Outcomes

- There is a strong perception among officers, staff and some partner organisations that road policing is a low priority for Police Scotland.
- The total number of casualties in Scotland has increased each year since 2020. In 2023, 155 people were killed and 1,930 people seriously injured on Scotland's roads.
- Identification of road traffic offences has reduced significantly over the last 10 years (Scottish Government data shows a 63% reduction).
- The provision of educational courses, as an alternative to prosecution, has not yet been implemented to best effect in Scotland.
- We heard that the challenging targets set out in Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030 are unlikely to be met.
- Road policing officers contribute to tackling serious and organised crime groups, with regular Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 cash and drug seizures.
- Police Scotland uses public surveys to help understand where improvements are required and to recognise good practice.
- There are insufficient family liaison officers to deploy to every fatality, meaning the service provided to the families of victims is inconsistent.
- It is imperative that a trauma-informed approach is adopted by officers who are supporting people affected by a serious road collision.
- Police Scotland engages with a range of partner organisations who represent vulnerable road users, to ensure their lived experiences inform future policing activity.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should review its commitment to and investment in its road policing function, to ensure it is effectively supporting Scotland's Road Safety Framework and that road crime is being actively addressed.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should take urgent steps to address the backlog in specialist driver training.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should review its policy position, and the training and equipment provided, for local policing officers responding to incidents on the fast road networks.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should engage with its criminal justice partners to explore options (including virtual appearances) to reduce the time requirement for officers attending court.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should engage with Scottish Government to progress a legislative change that will allow the escorting of abnormal loads in Scotland to be carried out by another agency.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should progress the implementation of a road policing performance framework that provides an indication of progress towards achieving the targets set out in Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.

Recommendation 7

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority should create and implement a joint action plan to identify and address the risk posed by drug driving.



Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should implement a process to ensure vehicles are equipped in a consistent manner. The views of officers who will be using the vehicles should be taken into account when considering the type of equipment to be fitted, and how and where it is fitted.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland should identify and adopt best practice in the deployment and use of ANPR.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should progress the facility for members of the public to report road traffic offences by directly uploading journey-cam footage.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should review its intelligence and analytical commitment in relation to road safety and road crime, to improve focus on these areas.

Recommendation 12

Police Scotland should engage with UK Road Offender Education and other key stakeholders to progress the full implementation of educational training courses for people who commit driving offences that may be appropriately addressed through learning.

Recommendation 13

Police Scotland should review its policy on the deployment of family liaison officers, to ensure a consistent level of service to people who have been bereaved following a fatal collision.



Areas for development

We have identified several areas for development across key processes. They are designed to improve policing services in Scotland. We expect these will be included in the improvement plan for road policing in Scotland.

Section	Areas for development	Number
Leadership and vision	Police Scotland should monitor and evaluate the impact of the Policing Together Team, particularly in relation to the recruitment and retention of people from under-represented groups into Operational Support Division.	1
Leadership and vision	Police Scotland should strengthen its internal and external communications plans, using a range of media platforms to reach the widest possible audience and to focus on prevention messages.	2
Delivery	Police Scotland should ensure that it is fully prepared for any legislative changes, and that officers and staff are trained and equipped to implement legislation within appropriate time-frames.	3
Delivery	Police Scotland should review the road policing training provided to local policing officers.	4
Delivery	Police Scotland should consider the career development opportunities available to road policing officers and staff.	5
Delivery	Local policing divisions should take steps to ensure officers conduct regular vehicle and equipment checks and that such checks are recorded.	6
Delivery	Road policing and local policing should take steps to ensure a level of consistency and positive engagement between these two functions across Scotland.	7
Delivery	Road policing and C3 should take steps to ensure a level of consistency and positive engagement between these two functions across Scotland.	8



Delivery	Police Scotland should review the Safety Camera Unit to improve the manner in which this important resource is managed and deployed.	9
Delivery	Road policing should review its on-call arrangements to ensure a consistent approach across Scotland.	10
Delivery	Police Scotland should develop a means to measure the level of prevention activity, focusing on the 'fatal five' causes of death and serious injury.	11
Delivery	To ensure more families receive the support they need following serious road collisions, Police Scotland should review its information-sharing protocols and referral processes, and consider a 'consent based, opt-out' approach.	12
Outcomes	Police Scotland should ensure a trauma-informed approach is adopted when supporting people who have been affected by a serious road collision.	13



Background and context

1. HMICS has committed to a thematic inspection of Operational Support Division (OSD) during the period of our [Scrutiny Plan 2022-2025](#). OSD is a national division within Police Scotland that provides a number of different specialist services across the country.
2. Before publishing our scrutiny plan, we conducted a consultation and engaged in discussion with key stakeholders and partners. The main themes that emerged during our scrutiny planning consultation were road policing, air support and armed policing. During the scoping for this inspection, it became apparent that it would be beneficial to adopt a phased approach to the inspection. This first phase of our inspection focused on road policing.
3. The aim of this thematic inspection was to assess the state, effectiveness and efficiency of road policing arrangements in Scotland.
4. Road policing services across Scotland are delivered by local policing officers, and by officers and staff from the road policing department. The road policing department is part of OSD and provides a wide range of specialist road policing functions across Scotland.
5. In 2014, only 10 months after the creation of Police Scotland, HMICS conducted a [Thematic Inspection of road policing in Scotland](#). This inspection made five recommendations to Police Scotland and one recommendation to the SPA.
6. In 2020, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published [Roads policing: Not optional – An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales](#). This report found that the importance of roads policing in England and Wales had been in decline for some years with less enforcement of drink/drug driving and seatbelt offences, alongside an increase in deaths attributed to these offences. The report made 13 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of road policing in England and Wales.



7. The Police Scotland Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment (STRA) 2023/28 document aims to 'provide a risk based assessment of the threat, risk and harm, complexity of demand and organisational challenges/opportunities facing police Scotland to inform the Operational and Organisational Policing Priorities and recommendations'. The STRA states that Police Scotland remains committed to working with key partners to reduce those killed or seriously injured as a result of road traffic collisions (RTC), by targeting the identified contributory factors and priority risk groups.
8. In 2021, Transport Scotland published [Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030](#), which set out an ambitious long-term goal for road safety where no one dies or is seriously injured on the roads by 2050. This framework states that road safety will remain a key priority for Police Scotland, and that senior police officers are involved in the Strategic Partnership Board, which was established to govern the framework.
9. The road safety framework identified speed, motorcyclists, young drivers, older drivers, cyclists and pedestrians as the priority focus areas for further consideration.
10. Our inspection sought to establish how effectively Police Scotland is contributing to the STRA and to the road safety framework, as well as to local policing plans across Scotland.
11. We sought to examine how enforcement and preventative approaches are being best used to make Scotland's roads safer. We also considered how effectively technology and innovation are being used.



Methodology

12. We interviewed officers and staff from across Police Scotland, staff associations, trade unions, partner organisations and other key stakeholders.
13. During our inspection, we visited West Midlands, Surrey and Sussex police services, and we engaged with the National Police Chiefs' Council, to identify best practice in other parts of the UK.
14. We set up focus groups and interviewed officers and staff based in the north, west and east command areas of Police Scotland. One division from each command area was identified to gain an appreciation of the issues in contrasting parts of the organisation, as follows:
 - North – North East Division (A Division)
 - West – Greater Glasgow Division (G Division)
 - East – Fife Division (P Division).
15. We issued a self-evaluation to Police Scotland and, on its completion, we reviewed an extensive range of relevant documentation including policies, procedures, performance and management information, strategies, plans and training course materials.
16. During our inspection we were assisted by a number of charitable organisations who support vulnerable road users and people who have been affected by serious road collisions.



Leadership and vision

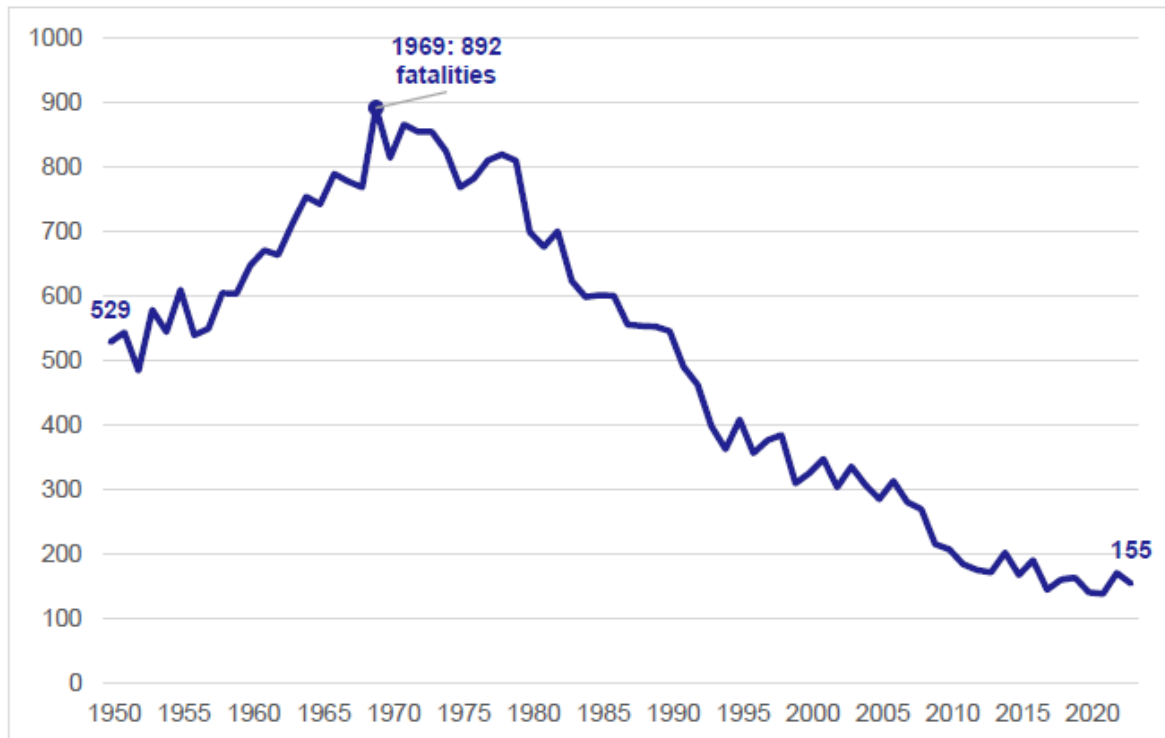
17. Police Scotland understands its purpose and vision of improving road safety and tackling road crime. It has clearly articulated these roles and laid out how it intends to continue providing policing services towards them. However, during our inspection we found that, in practice, other priorities (such as protecting the vulnerable in society) are preventing officers and staff from focusing on road safety and road crime, and fulfilling this commitment.

18. It is important to understand the current and historical picture for road safety in Scotland. Data from [Transport Scotland](#) in 2023 shows a clear and significant downward trend in the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) on Scotland's roads since 1969. As seen in the graph below, the trend shows a reduction from a high of 892 fatalities in 1969 to 155 in 2023 (a similar downward trend has been replicated across the rest of the UK). While such a reduction is significant and welcome, too many people continue to be killed and seriously injured on Scotland's roads.

19. Police Scotland and its partners continue to have a key role in reducing Scotland's KSIs. They achieve this through enforcement and education, to improve driver and road user standards and behaviour, and by supporting engineering changes, making both roads and vehicles safer.



Figure 1: Total Number of reported road fatalities, 1950 to 2023



Source: Transport Scotland

20. We were pleased to find that Police Scotland aligns its strategic road safety priorities to that of the Transport Scotland Road Safety Framework to 2030. This, in turn, drives Scottish progress towards the Safe System approach and Vision Zero, an international concept with the aim of eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries in road users by 2050.
21. During our inspection we interviewed many officers and staff in Police Scotland, key road safety partners, road safety subject experts, and representatives from UK and Scottish governments and other UK police forces. There was a common perception that much of the reduction in KSIs over the past seven decades could be attributed to:
 - the development of safer vehicles (which are better maintained and equipped with more internal and external safety features); and
 - work done to design and build safer roads (through analysis and engineering to identify and design better roads, barriers, lighting, junctions and speed limits, etc).



22. There was also a perception that many improvements were down to a change in public acceptance and tolerance towards drink driving and the wearing of seatbelts.
23. Despite the downward trends, 155 people still lost their lives on Scotland's roads in 2023. While that was a reduction from the previous year (171), there was a 9 per cent increase in those seriously injured in 2023 – rising from 1,778 in 2022, to 1,930. In fact, road casualties (i.e., deaths and injuries) have increased in Scotland since 2020 and the downward trend in KSIs appears to have stalled or, in some categories, increased.

Competing priorities

24. Improving road safety and tackling road crime are among the many different types of services provided by Police Scotland to the people and communities of Scotland. We found that Police Scotland has appropriately assessed and articulated the threat, risk and harm associated with road safety and road crime in Scotland and that the key issues and concerns have been set out in writing at strategic, tactical and operational levels in a language that is appropriate and understandable.
25. From documentation submitted to us as part of this inspection's self-evaluation exercise, we are content that Police Scotland has appropriately assessed the threats and risks associated with road safety, and note it has identified this as a high priority at both national and local levels.
26. HMICS acknowledges that police resources are finite and, as noted above, there are many competing matters requiring officers' and staff's time and commitment on a daily (and longer term) basis. Improving road safety was found to be positioned among other police priorities such as tackling hate crime, counter-terrorism, and violence and disorder. Very high priorities were noted as community wellbeing, violence against women and girls, serious organised crime and cyber-crime. In tackling these priorities, Police Scotland is also required to act with a policing purpose of improving the safety and wellbeing of persons, localities and communities in Scotland, as set out in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012.



Annual Police Plan

27. In its [2023-24 Annual Police Plan](#), Police Scotland addressed road safety:

“Outcome 1 – Threats to public safety and wellbeing are resolved by a proactive and responsive police service’, where Police Scotland sets an objective of ‘designing services jointly to tackle complex public safety and wellbeing challenges”.

To achieve this, Police Scotland proposed to reduce deaths and serious injury on Scotland’s road network through the increased use of intelligence-led policing and proactive engagement with all road users. Four progress milestones were set out:

- review of engagement and enforcement undertaken in support of the National Calendar of Road Safety Activity
- use of proactive enforcement, including speed enforcement and targeting of impaired driving, to protect all road users (particularly vulnerable road users)
- flexible deployments of Safety Camera Unit resources to address emerging casualty trends
- optimise understanding and maximise learning through an in-depth roads fatality study.

28. We found these activity descriptors and milestones to be unhelpfully vague and suggest they could be achieved with the minimum of effort, which would be unlikely to make any genuine impact on improving road safety or tackling road crime. We also found a lack of effective tasking and coordination, and gaps in intelligence support, meaning limited evidence of proactive tasking to address road safety/road crime concerns.

29. In its [2024-25 Annual Police Plan](#) (published March 2024), there is no detailed mention of road safety or commitments to any other specific types of police work. There is, however, a commitment to improve the culture of Police Scotland alongside increasing its front-line strength and improving service delivery. There are two further priorities about supporting workforce wellbeing and redesigning and reshaping its internal support functions.



30. While the 2024/25 Annual Police Plan has changed in style and content, the Chief Constable, in her foreword, commits to finding a balance with key partners to minimise police officer engagement with vulnerable people once the moment of crisis has passed and public safety is assured. The Chief Constable further states that Police Scotland should focus on its core duties and what matters to the people of Scotland, highlighting road traffic enforcement as one of the areas of police work that she will ‘be a champion and voice for’.

Scotland’s Road Safety Framework to 2030

31. In 2021, Transport Scotland published its Road Safety Framework to 2030, a strategic document setting out its continued ambitious plan to work towards Scotland having the best road safety performance in the world. Key interim targets, to be achieved by 2030 (in comparison to a baseline period of 2014-18), were:
- 50 per cent reduction in people killed;
 - 50 per cent reduction in people seriously injured;
 - 60 per cent reduction in children (aged <16) killed; and
 - 60 per cent reduction in children (aged <16) seriously injured.
32. [Transport Scotland’s latest update](#) on progress against the targets (published 29 May 2024), shows that only the second target (50 per cent reduction in people seriously injured) was tracking to be achieved by 2030. The other three reduction targets were marked as ‘not on track to meet the framework target for 2030’.



Road Policing Delivery Plan

33. Police Scotland's Road Policing Division is part of one of Police Scotland's national divisions, namely Operational Support Division (OSD). It is a singular function which provides a specialised road policing service on a national basis. This means that – while road policing officers and staff are based and work all over Scotland – they are managed by a single senior management team, who may be based elsewhere.
34. In its Delivery Plan 2023-24, Road Policing Division stated it will work with internal and external partners to tackle road safety and road crime issues and address shared priorities. The plan sets out the following four objectives:
 - effective patrolling of the roads
 - influence driver behaviour and road user behaviour
 - deter and detect all types of criminality on our roads
 - combat the threat in terrorism.
35. We found no numerical targets against any of these objectives, so suggest it may be difficult to correlate police activity to any improvements or otherwise in Scotland's road safety picture. The plan also provides that Road Policing Division will address these objectives by targeting priority routes (those with a history of road collisions where people have been killed or seriously injured) and focusing on 'fatal five' enforcement. This is police enforcement of the main causes of collisions:
 - careless driving
 - speeding
 - drink or drug driving
 - not wearing seatbelts
 - being distracted while driving (mobile phone use, etc.).
36. Road Policing Division further state it will tackle the objectives using the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, with enhanced enforcement and intelligence-led targeting of offenders, by conducting high-visibility operations on priority routes and working collaboratively with partners.
37. Road Policing Division, through its plan, is central in providing Police Scotland's commitment to contribute to the Road Safety Framework to 2030.



Local Policing Plans

38. It should be noted that Road Policing Division makes up around just 3.5 per cent of Police Scotland's current police officer numbers and, as such, it would be unreasonable to expect Road Policing Division alone to be singularly responsible for Police Scotland's continued efforts to improve road safety or tackle road crime.
39. In almost every community in Scotland, road safety is noted as a local concern and priority policing issue. Territorial local policing divisions, which make up the bulk of Police Scotland's front-line officers, have each developed [Local Policing Plans](#), which tend to be limited to four or five key issues specific to the areas and communities they concern. Police Scotland's website notes these plans were developed through feedback from local authorities and other partners, as well as from the views of members of the public in those areas (via Police Scotland's 'Your Police Survey' submissions).
40. Despite road safety being a priority in almost every local plan, we heard repeatedly and consistently during interviews with local policing officers that they were unable to dedicate time to improving road safety, or tackle road crime. This was down to a lack of available police officers, or their being tasked to other, often non-core, policing duties (involving protecting vulnerable people in society).

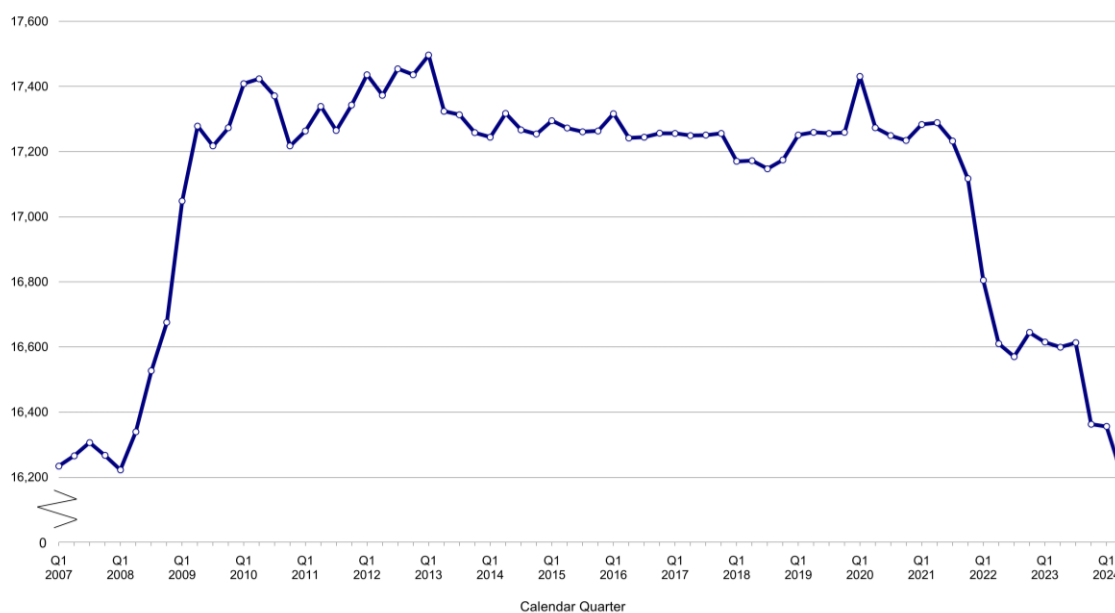
Resources

41. We heard repeatedly during interviews, and noted in documentation submitted during the self-evaluation process, that police officer numbers in Road Policing Division have reduced significantly since the creation of Police Scotland (with a further reduction in recent times). These reductions are aligned to the reduction in both Police Scotland's and Road Policing Division's budgets. In a published [Freedom of Information Response](#), Police Scotland stated that – at the creation of Police Scotland – there were 656 roles/posts in Road Policing Division (although it could not say how many roles/posts may have been vacant).
42. In March 2023, Road Policing Division reported a reduction of another 43 police officers (down from 544 to 501).



43. In November 2023, as a result of this further reduction in road policing officer numbers (combined with increased court abstractions) the senior management team of Road Policing Division decided that:
- its current operating model was no longer sustainable; and
 - its continued effort to fulfil a 24/7, 365 days-per-year model was negatively impacting both operational effectiveness and staff health and welfare.
44. A proposal was therefore put forward to change Road Policing Division’s shift pattern to focus on day and late shifts only. (We note that the proposal for change has been put on hold pending the publication of this report.)
45. The reduction in police officer numbers across Police Scotland is unquestionably significant and will, no doubt, affect all communities in Scotland. In June 2024, the [Scottish Government](#) reported (see below graph) the police officer full time equivalent (FTE) strength to be 16,207, the lowest in Scotland since 2007. By way of comparison, the reported FTE figure on [31 March 2020](#) was 17,431, showing a 7 per cent FTE reduction (1,224 police officers) since then.

Figure 2: Total number of police officers (full-time equivalent) in Scotland, 2007-24



Source: Scottish Government



46. In the self-evaluation process, Police Scotland stated that, 'the allocation of funds to road policing continues to be challenging. In 2022/23 this led to a reduction in the number of full time posts within road policing'. Police Scotland further stated that, 'at the time of writing, the challenging targets set by the Road Safety Framework to 2030 are unlikely to be achieved'.

Visibility, local policing and Contact, Command and Control Division (C3)

47. As may be expected from such a significant reduction in police officer numbers across Police Scotland and Road Policing Division, there has been a significant reduction in the visibility of both road and local policing officers on Scotland's roads, dealing with road safety and road crime matters. During our interviews with local and road policing officers, as well as interviews with partner organisations and key stakeholders, interviewees consistently noted a considerable reduction in the number of road policing vehicles patrolling Scotland's roads.
48. This reduction in availability and visibility will inevitably lead to a reduction in enforcement and prevention activity. It will also lead to a reduction in the public's fear of being caught, which – in turn – is, as highlighted by a [2023 systematic review on the effectiveness of police presence](#), likely to lead to an increase in the type of activity and driver behaviour that leads to serious and fatal road collisions.
49. The HMICFRS Road Policing – Not Optional report, published in 2020, made the following recommendation to all chief constables in England and Wales.
- “With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that the resources allocated to policing the strategic road network within their force areas are sufficient. As part of that process they should make sure that their force has effective partnership arrangements including appropriate intelligence sharing agreements with relevant highways agencies.”
50. The review of road policing instigated by Police Scotland has been paused pending the publication of this report. Given the importance of detecting and disrupting criminals who use the roads, we consider that any future review of road policing by Police Scotland should consider its ability to properly resource and police (on a 24/7 basis) the road and motorway networks that connect major cities, towns, airports and ports across Scotland.



Police priorities

51. In addition to the impact of the reduction in police officer numbers, we believe that – since the creation of Police Scotland – there has been a change in focus away from road safety and road crime, towards other matters.
52. In our [Policing Mental Health in Scotland report](#) (October 2023), we noted that – over time and for a variety of reasons – Police Scotland had shifted its focus away from what could be considered the more traditional, core policing roles of preventing and detecting crime and antisocial behaviour, towards supporting the vulnerable in society. In that report, we did not provide specific examples of the type of police activity reduced or stopped, but it is clear from this inspection that road policing activity (both in terms of improving road safety and denying criminals the use of the roads) is one of the areas of policing that now receives less focus.
53. Prioritising the response to calls from the public can be difficult. Police Scotland uses the THRIVE risk assessment process that asks those receiving, reviewing and prioritising calls to consider the six elements of threat, harm, risk, investigative opportunity, vulnerability and engagement. To highlight the difficulty in applying this methodology, we highlight two specific examples that were provided to us.
54. Drink/drug driving is one of the ‘fatal five’ enforcement priorities, but we heard that calls from the public about suspected drink/drug drivers were often not routinely tasked to officers to trace and establish whether any crimes or offences were being committed. Instead, we heard that such calls were often broadcast over the police radio channels for officers’ awareness. This appeared a common response, as there were often other calls that were considered higher priority than a suspected drink or drug driver. If no further calls were received from the public about the vehicle in question, the call would often then be closed, without further police attention or action.
55. We heard that a report of a pedestrian on a motorway or other fast road would receive a swift police response as the THRIVE risk assessment may lead to it being considered a more important call than a report of a drink/drug driver.



56. Given the complex nature of prioritisation of calls, we are pleased to note the progress Police Scotland is making in providing additional training to control room staff following our [Assurance Review of Police Scotland Contact Assessment Model](#) (2022).
57. While road safety is, in theory, a high local and national priority, we found it to be the lowest of priorities for local policing officers. Local policing officers said that due to the reduction in officer numbers and the type and nature of calls they normally dealt with, they were already operating at maximum capacity. They told us that the bulk of their day is taken up by what they described as demand-type calls (such as missing person investigations, concern for persons and mental health-related calls). We heard that there is an expectation that everyone takes their fair share of demand-type calls, which they said reduced their capacity to be proactive about road safety and road crime matters.
58. We also noted that few local policing officers were aware of the term ‘fatal five’ or ‘fatal five enforcement’ and while some had, no one was able to name all five enforcement activities. Local policing officers said there was little to no encouragement from supervisors or management teams to be proactive on road policing issues.

Decline in identification of road traffic offences

59. Notwithstanding the work of the Police Scotland Safety Camera Unit, which manages the average, fixed and mobile speed detection cameras in Scotland, most road traffic offences are detected and recorded through police officer pro-activity.
60. Interviewees also told us that speed detection activity by police officers has become rare, despite this being one of the fatal five enforcement activities.



61. As we will highlight later in this report, there has been a 63% reduction in the number of all road traffic offences recorded in Scotland since 2013/14. Road traffic offences, which include all of the fatal five enforcement activities, as well as some other offence types, are set out below:
- Dangerous and careless driving
 - Driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
 - Speeding
 - Unlawful use of motor vehicle
 - Vehicle defect offences
 - Seat belt offences
 - Mobile phone offences
 - Other road traffic offences
62. The road safety charity [Brake](#) highlights excessive speed as a contributory factor in one in three fatal road collisions, and speed as a critical component in road collisions. They note that the kinetic energy of a car hitting someone or something at 30 mph has twice as much energy as a crash at 20 mph. Given this, it is concerning to note that speed detections by police officers in Scotland have reduced by 75 per cent since 2014/15.
63. Prevention activity must always be preferred over road deaths/serious injuries and subsequent investigations and prosecutions. We heard from people with experience of losing loved ones to road collisions, and the impact this has on the families and friends cannot be understated.
64. The financial cost to the Scottish and wider UK economies is also significant. [Transport Scotland](#) 2020 data showed that, in Great Britain, the costs to the economy was approximately:
- £2m per fatal collision;
 - £246k per serious injury collision; and
 - £24k per slight injury collision.



65. By applying these estimates to the recent KSI statistics, the total cost for fatal and serious collisions in Scotland in 2023 would be around £784m.

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should review its commitment to and investment in its road policing function, to ensure it is effectively supporting Scotland's Road Safety Framework and that road crime is being actively addressed.

Leadership with Road Policing Division

66. During our inspection, we found that the Road Policing Division had a clear and effective leadership structure, with many experienced and highly dedicated officers and staff. While we found the structure to be an appropriate size, we heard that the levels of engagement and visibility across the division was mixed, with some members of the leadership team being more visible and engaging with staff more than others.
67. Within Police Scotland's executive team, an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) has responsibility for Road Policing Division (as part of a wider portfolio of responsibility and oversight). Again, we found this clear and appropriate, and noted that the ACC holds informal meetings with road policing officers and staff.
68. There were mixed views about whether having past road policing experience was beneficial in being part of the division's senior management team. Most road policing officers we spoke to felt that while it was helpful to have some past experience in the role, since this would provide a better understanding of day to day duties, it was not essential.
69. The scale of the national Road Policing Division means that there are very few officers of Chief Inspector and above available to regularly engage with operational road policing teams unless they are based in the same buildings.
70. In terms of senior management team (SMT) resilience, we heard countering views about the relatively small SMT of Road Policing Division. While some felt the size was appropriate, others felt it could be increased by at least one additional officer at superintendent rank.



71. Police Scotland has recently widened the role of the support superintendent and chief inspector to provide oversight across all of OSD, including road policing. Albeit the support superintendent may provide better resilience, it should be noted that the chief inspector post was previously dedicated to road policing, and is now OSD wide which may impact resilience at that level, although the impact of this change should be monitored.

Governance, risk assessment and prioritisation

72. Road Policing Division has well-established and appropriate systems of internal governance in place, monitoring both Police Scotland's and Road Policing Division's support of the Road Safety Framework to 2030, as well as day-to-day operational, developmental and wellbeing-related matters.
73. Road Policing Division tracks operational activity and outcomes, and provides support and direction on a daily basis, controlling and driving progress with internal and external partners through the Road Safety Governance Board and the Tactical Operations Working Group.
74. The threat, risk and harm associated with road safety issues has been well identified, correlated and assessed. Data on road safety is routinely gathered, quality assured and assessed to establish any changes in trends that require further police attention or reprioritisation.
75. Police Scotland also works closely with Transport Scotland to understand trends and identify emerging threats associated with collision classes, and to identify specific casualty types (with a focus on vulnerable road users). This data is shared with partners at meetings, allowing resources to be dedicated in a collaborative manner to the areas of greatest risk. (That said, we noted that the data-sets of Police Scotland and Transport Scotland do not align in terms of the dates used to define a year.)
76. Analytical and intelligence work in support of road safety issues across road and local policing was found to be very limited. A lack of staff in relevant units, alongside a lack of direct tasking to develop road safety and road crime packages, has led a reduction in road safety intelligence-led taskings or briefings for officers. In the divisions we visited, and the officers we interviewed, there was little understanding of road safety picture/trends/hotspots, etc. in their areas.



77. Understanding the causes of KSIs on Scotland's roads can only assist Police Scotland and its partners improve road safety. The publication of the jointly-authored [In-Depth Road Traffic Fatalities Report 2015-2020](#), was a significant step towards understanding that picture; however, society changes its behaviour regularly and there are frequent road safety innovations and improvements. We believe that maintaining a good understanding of the causal factors for KSIs is vital and we note that the current in-depth fatalities study has been paused due to funding issues. We understand a staff member has now been appointed to progress this work.

Culture

78. Road Policing Division is not representative of either Police Scotland or Scottish society, being largely made up of white, male officers. As part of this inspection, we visited a number of other road policing units in forces in England and Wales (and spoke to representatives from other forces online), and found that this non-representative picture was the norm in both road policing and firearms units.

79. We heard that the leadership team within the division has made efforts to address the issue and to seek a more balanced model, through communications and management of resource deployments. However, despite such remedial measures, we heard reports of:

- female officers feeling uncomfortable;
- cultural issues possibly preventing new female officers joining road policing; and
- a female road policing officer leaving the department due to feeling discriminated against by male colleagues.

80. Police Scotland's [Policing Together](#) strategy was launched in June 2022. Subsequently, former Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone acknowledged institutional discrimination within Police Scotland. The Policing Together strategy reflects both his and Chief Constable Jo Farrell's commitment to become an anti-racist and anti-discriminatory service with an inclusive environment where people know they belong, and which delivers for all Scotland's communities in accordance with its [values and standards](#).



81. We heard that female officers may be disproportionately affected by centralised driver training. This was described as ‘un-family-friendly’ and it was suggested local training availability would boost the retention of female officers, since it would reduce the need to stay at the Scottish Police College (SPC) for the duration of the training course. We heard that the decentralisation of specialist driving courses would also allow for better access for officers in rural areas, where lack of local availability is potentially discouraging officers from pursuing the specialism.
82. We support the concept of Policing Together and do not underestimate the challenge (to both Police Scotland and wider UK police services) of the non-representative nature of many road policing functions. We believe that Police Scotland should monitor and evaluate the impact of the Policing Together team and consider progress made towards improving the representative nature of the division.

Area for development 1

Police Scotland should monitor and evaluate the impact of the Policing Together Team, particularly in relation to the recruitment and retention of people from under-represented groups into Operational Support Division.

83. Good work in Road Policing Division is recognised through personal interaction with supervisors and divisional SMT, and through a monthly bulletin. There is also an internal system to acknowledge good work through the OSD Recognition Awards.
84. During our inspection we found almost every officer and staff member engaged with us in a positive, open and honest manner. Most had a genuine hope that their participation could lead to improvement in Police Scotland and the service it provides to the communities of Scotland. We are very grateful to all those who engaged with us during the inspection and would also note the Road Policing Division inspection liaison team were found to be capable, professional and helpful throughout the inspection.



Accountability

85. Police Scotland regularly and publicly reports road safety data to the SPA. We found the information provided to be limited and not fully reflective of the overall contribution the organisation is making towards Scotland's Road Safety Framework.
86. Accountability and transparency in local policing divisions is formally provided through local scrutiny panels, where a range of information and statistics are provided, normally by the relevant local policing divisional commander.

Innovation

87. Police Scotland has been (and continues to be) innovative in creating projects and activity to improve road safety in Scotland. It conducts analysis of road collision and road casualty data and has attempted to focus on those groups of road users most at risk of being killed or seriously injured on Scotland's roads. This includes vulnerable road users such as cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists and older or newer/younger drivers.
88. Police Scotland also dedicates some focus in support of UK-wide issues, such as summer and festive drink/drug driving and national speed campaigns.
89. Operation Close Pass, designed to support vulnerable road users such as cyclists (by encouraging wider and safer overtaking by motorists) was a well-known and understood innovative programme among police officers and staff, with evidence provided of it being implemented positively in a number of areas.
90. However, there appears to be limited evaluation of such innovative programmes. We support innovation – and the focus given to it, but would expect better evaluation of any such programmes, with a view to rolling them out nationally, should they be considered worthwhile.



Communication

91. During document reviews and interviews, we found little evidence that Police Scotland communicated road safety as a force and local priority anywhere other than within Road Policing Division.
92. We found that most local policing officers did not know who their local senior lead for road safety was. In the divisions we visited, we found that responsibility for road safety was held by a member of the local senior management team, normally at the chief inspector level. We also found a lack of road safety-specific tasking, performance management activity or briefings. We did hear that road safety tasking was commonly provided to officers as a result of specific issues raised by the public, local/pressure groups, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), or local elected officials. Such tasking normally fell to the few dedicated community policing officers to try and tackle the specific issue.
93. In terms of public engagement, Police Scotland uses social media to promote key road safety messages. Its corporate communications function helps to deliver key messages throughout the year and also maintains a road safety communications calendar, with messaging supporting events occurring or likely to occur in different parts of Scotland (e.g. motorcycle safety campaigns from spring to early autumn, and drink driving campaigns during peak summer and festive periods). Other campaigns (pavement parking, Get Ready for Winter (along with Transport Scotland), Operation Close Pass and mobile phone campaigns) are all delivered to a schedule to limit any overlapping with other Police Scotland media campaigns and messaging. The close relationship with communications partners, coordination and planning means Road Policing officers are actively taking part in marketing campaigns led by Road Safety Scotland and Cycling Scotland. Road Policing officers are doing broadcast interviews, radio interviews and being quoted in traditional print media from Police Scotland issued press releases, as well as contributing to partner press releases. Other benefits of contributing to marketing campaigns mean Police Scotland feature on paid-for radio adverts, national TV adverts and bus advertising (e.g. Operation Close Pass) to maximise the audience reach and work efficiently with partners.



94. The impact of social media cannot be underestimated. It provides an effective and efficient medium for Police Scotland (and other key road safety partners) to influence road users, raise awareness and help improve road safety, on a daily basis. Given the lack of priority on road safety matters, and the still-high numbers of people killed and seriously injured on Scotland's roads each year, greater use of social media (in all its forms) could reach many drivers who might not otherwise come into contact with police messaging on road safety and improved driving. The use of social media should not, however, be solely relied upon otherwise people who are unable to use digital technologies would be excluded.

95. Given the significant number of people killed and seriously injured each year, we believe Police Scotland should upgrade and increase its communications plans to encourage preventative action and better driving behaviour, which should improve road safety.

Area for development 2

Police Scotland should strengthen its internal and external communications plans, using a range of media platforms to reach the widest possible audience and to focus on prevention messages.



Delivery

Training for road policing officers

96. Road policing officers are given in-depth training in specialist road policing and road safety aspects such as pursuit management, hand-held speed detection and vehicle pursuits. There are also inputs on protecting of the scene of road collisions (locus protection) and the policing of the fast road network. This specialist training is highly valued by road policing officers.
97. A fully-qualified Police Scotland road policing officer must complete the following, as a minimum:
 - road Patrol Officers course (RPO) module (5 days)
 - RPO module 2 (10 days)
 - advanced driving course (20 days)
 - pursuit management tactics course (5 days)
 - work towards completing the Road Policing Award Portfolio.
98. On completion of the minimum requirements, officers are then entitled to apply to attend further specialist courses. These include:
 - motorcycle training
 - crash investigation
 - driving/motorcycle instructor
 - hollow spiked tyre deflation system (HOSTYDs) (tire deflation tactics) instructor
 - large vehicle prohibition
 - tachograph analysis
 - pursuit tactical advisor.
99. All courses delivered by driver training/road policing training are overseen, governed, monitored and audited by Police Scotland Quality Assurance Department. Courses are regularly inspected and audited to ensure compliance and accurate delivery.



100. Police Scotland driving instructors must complete the accredited Police Driving Instructor course, which is only available at the SPC and runs for eight weeks (i.e., above the recommended seven-week course length). This fully prepares instructors to coach, mentor and assess students, and to prepare and give classroom lessons.
101. Robust systems are in place to record and manage training profiles for each officer, and this is reviewed on a regular basis. Officers are prompted to arrange mandatory refresher training to carry out certain tasks. For example, police drivers require a High-Speed Driving Assessment (HSDA) every five years; pursuit authorised drivers require refresher training every three years; and HOSTYDs refresher training is carried out every three years.
102. Our inspection revealed that specialist training for road policing officers was of the highest standard across the multiple disciplines within the department. This view was reflected both in the information gleaned from Police Scotland and during focus groups conducted with police officers and staff. We consider this to be good practice, in view of the elevated complexity and physical risk associated with policing of the roads.
103. However, a lack of available courses (particularly driver training) was also highlighted as a concern. Many people we spoke with felt there was insufficient importance being placed on standard and advanced driver training, which they considered to be a key training priority. Some people expressed the opinion that Police Scotland reform programmes have resulted in chronic underinvestment in training – particularly for road policing training delivery. It was suggested that this did not receive the volume of training allocation the force required.



104. There is a growing backlog of training needs across multiple specialisms, including collision investigation; family liaison officers; and pursuit management officers. This backlog has been linked to a number of contributing factors, such as:
- the continued implementation of Police Scotland's post-pandemic training needs prioritisation plan;
 - the ongoing impacts of general staffing shortages, which limit opportunities for officers to address training needs;
 - the impact of the implementation of the Police Driving (Prescribed Training) Regulations 2022, which were legally enacted on 30th November 2022.
105. The head of Police Scotland training recently estimated it would take 12 years to eliminate the backlog in training. The requirement to train armed police officers to the same level as road policing officers will reduce the cost allocation to road policing from the 2025/26 year onwards. Consequently, we understand recent figures estimate the backlog to be over 17 years.
106. Since most driver training instructors are also operational road policing officers, they (and their respective teams) experience disproportionate abstractions in servicing driver training backlogs.
107. Officers also brought up the apparent policy decision by the Police Scotland executive giving firearms and surveillance officers priority access to advanced driving courses (over and above road policing officers). Again, this is compounded by road policing officers also having to perform the required training roles.

Police Driving (Prescribed Training) Regulations 2022

108. The Police Driving (Prescribed Training) Regulations 2022, enacted in November 2022, deal with training obligations for police drivers, including refresher training. The regulations are critical in helping support any defence in the event a police officer faces prosecution as a consequence of driving a police vehicle. In the lead-up period to enactment, Police Scotland driver training amended its training products to ensure they met (and in some instances exceeded), the standards required in the regulations. Police driver training has responsibility for the allocation of training and output, as well as a legal requirement for driver re-authorisations.



109. It was apparent that Police Scotland could have been more proactive in increasing the number of trainers to accommodate the increased demand associated with the new legislation. Relying on the existing cadre of trainers placed additional strain on training capacity for driver training and other courses.
110. Due to the enforced changes to training requirements, there is a legal responsibility on the police to assess and re-assess police drivers within specified timeframes, or risk having their authority removed. Pursuit-trained officers must attend a two day refresher every three years and all trained police drivers are required to complete a one day high-speed driving assessment every five years. This aspect of re-certification is now delivered locally by road policing instructors. These additional requirements have led to a reduction in business-as-usual police driver training, with limited resources deployed within driver training.
111. We heard that Police Scotland was among a number of UK forces who took longer than necessary to come to terms with the implications of the emerging legislation. This was particularly the case in fully understanding which parts of the legislation would apply, and whether the organisation would be required to comply with all the terms of the new Act. This created delays in implementation, which may have placed Police Scotland at a disadvantage, facing a significant challenge to reduce or clear the backlogs.
112. The changes to prescribed driving classifications resulted in the “intermediate trained road policing drivers” (a temporary qualification in Scotland gained via enhanced driver training input, prior to full advanced driving course) not being recognised as a prescribed course. This significantly reduced the number of deployable road policing drivers (as previously, such ‘intermediate’ qualified officers could still perform many functional road policing roles).
113. We heard during interviews with officers and staff that the training backlogs and loss of intermediate qualification status was placing additional strain on the cadre of qualified advanced drivers. We were told that it could take over two years for officers to attend an advanced driving course. While some short-notice cancellations are available, these can be very challenging for officers in more distant locations, as they need time to make arrangements for residential training away from home.



114. There is a risk that road policing officers may not be in a position to perform to the legal standards expected because of the backlog of officers requiring essential driver training. Police Scotland should urgently take steps to address the critical training issues highlighted in this report. This should include consideration of conducting courses locally, rather than all students having to attend the SPC in Fife.
115. We acknowledge the good practice of the Road Policing Training Board meeting regularly (quarterly) to conduct senior management reviews of the training demand. We are also aware that Police Scotland has highlighted driving training courses on its corporate risk register (because of the training backlog). However, we consider that Police Scotland could have been better prepared to deal with the implications of the legislative change and the resultant backlog of critical training is an area in need of urgent prioritisation.

Area for development 3

Police Scotland should ensure that it is fully prepared for any legislative changes, and that officers and staff are trained and equipped to implement legislation within appropriate time-frames.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should take urgent steps to address the backlog in specialist driver training.



Training and Development

116. Road policing-related training for local policing officers begins with the initial probationary training course at the SPC, where students are given basic instruction on mostly legislation and criminal justice-related matters. This is supplemented by practical topics such as scene protection and dealing with drivers. The largely classroom-based curriculum also includes some practical training and includes activities on police considerations at RTC scenes, where they consider aspects pertaining to safety and use of locus protection methodology.
117. Police Scotland implemented a policy whereby local policing officers, in the absence of available road policing officers, could be requested to attend incidents on 'fast roads', which are typically 'A' Class single or multi-carriageway roads with national speed limits such as trunk roads and motorways.
118. At the time of our inspection, training for local policing officers engaged in operational duties on fast roads consisted of online Moodle training. This was created by driver training for all police officers and covers locus protection, safe stopping of vehicles, and health and safety advice. It is mandatory for all officers attending the standard response driving course, and officers can complete this package as many times as they feel is required, via a refresher.
119. Many local policing officers report they are being deployed to fast road loci on an ever-increasing basis. They consider the available equipment, vehicles and training to be insufficient and ineffective in preparing them for adopting safe working practices in such hazardous environments. Officers suggested no amount of classroom training could replace in-person, practical training with instruction and demonstration of the various procedures.
120. We consider that Police Scotland should not focus on the minimum standard of safety for policing fast roads, but should ensure the health and safety of its officers by utilising better equipped and trained road policing officers on the fast road network. On those occasions where road policing officers are not available, only local policing officers who are properly trained and equipped should be deployed.



121. Officers and staff we spoke to within C3 shared the common opinion that local policing officers were poorly equipped, trained and lacked the confidence to safely manage incidents on the fast road network. This view was shared by local policing sergeants we spoke to, who felt the benefits to officer safety would be matched by improvement in overall standards of investigation if direct practical training was provided by experienced road policing officers.
122. During our inspection it became apparent that the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) has, on multiple occasions during regularly scheduled road policing forums, expressed concerns about the significant reductions in Police Scotland's road policing capability since the creation of Police Scotland, which has meant that more non-specialist local policing officers are being deployed to operational incidents on the fast road network without what they considered to be appropriate or sufficient training or related equipment.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should review its policy position, and the training and equipment provided, for local policing officers responding to incidents on the fast road networks.

Area for development 4

Police Scotland should review the road policing training provided to local policing officers.

123. Road Policing Division recognises and supports its officers through a range of different approaches. The recently-developed 'My-Career' personal development framework encourages all line managers to complete discussions ahead of defined deadlines and to engage in open and honest conversations with officers about their readiness for promotion or development. The Competency Values Framework is used at every level.
124. We were told that 135 officers within Road Policing Division (i.e. around 27 per cent) did not commence a My Career form in 2022/23. This outcome was attributed to various factors including long-term absence and failure to complete on time.



125. Road Policing Division stated that it provides officers with mentoring and support in the application for promotion process. It uses the services of a 'Mentoring Single Point Of Contact', as well as facilitating online workshops by officers with significant experience of the promotion process (giving officers access to advice and the opportunity to ask questions about what is expected during the promotion process).
126. The division actively supports internal development and seeks to 'promote from within' (due to the level of specialist experience and competence available within the departmental workforce). Officers with suitable experience are also encouraged to apply to the OSD 'temporary promotion pool', which enables exposure to other departments and disciplines, broadening knowledge and appreciation of other roles within the division.
127. Road Policing Division is committed to learn from staff exiting the department. We learned that Police Scotland has an exit interview document that is used for officers transferring from road policing, with questions including the following:
- reason for leaving
 - reason for joining road policing
 - training questions, including recommendations to improve training.
 - culture – positive or negative environment
 - could road policing do better for staff
 - would staff consider returning.
128. We found that officers and staff in road policing are very committed to their roles, although many still feel undervalued as a consequence of a perceived lack of organisational recognition in the roles they perform. We also heard about dissatisfaction regarding wider career development opportunities for road policing officers, beyond the skills required to carry out their specialist roles.



129. We also discovered a lack of desire to undertake specialist training such as collision investigation training, on the grounds that this once full-time role is no longer dedicated and protected from wider road policing operational demands. Given that the post is no longer ring-fenced, less people are attracted to apply for this role, therefore there is now a shortage and road policing officers are having to pick up those duties in addition to their normal workloads.

Area for development 5

Police Scotland should consider the career development opportunities available to road policing officers and staff.

Demand

130. Our 2014 inspection of road policing in Scotland, and subsequent review in December 2015, identified that there were insufficient resources on road policing late and night shifts. There were also additional resourcing challenges surrounding senior investigation cover in the east of the country.
131. A structure review began in autumn 2016 and concluded in 2017, with several key findings and recommendations for further action. Following this review there have been several changes to road policing shift patterns, the last of which was introduced in 2022.
132. Scotland has stricter drink driving laws than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but [2006 research on the effectiveness of reducing illegal blood alcohol concentration \(Fell, J.C. and Voas, R.B.\)](#) tells us that stricter legislation only leads to a reduction in offences when and if it is properly enforced.
133. Officers informed us that the significant reductions in road policing staffing levels since the creation of Police Scotland has had an adverse impact on their ability to perform their role. We heard a lot of frustration from officers about the reductions in officer numbers.



134. We heard about the inability of road policing officers to perform key tasks, such as pursuing vehicles involved in criminality and road crime, due to insufficient resource levels. In addition, it is common for road policing officers to be unable to perform proactive intelligence-led patrols, despite this being a commitment in Road Policing Division's Annual Delivery Plan.
135. A new and concerning area of demand, highlighted to us, relates to the antisocial and dangerous use of off road and electric bikes being used throughout the country. Many officers we spoke to felt that they were unable to tackle their use, due to a lack of guidance and direction from Police Scotland. Many felt the risks associated in attempting to stop the riders was high, and there was an apparent fear of the consequences should something go wrong when attempting to do so.
136. The procurement and use of SelectaDNA (a DNA-based product that marks and protects property) to assist police officers identify users of off-road motorbikes and electric bikes was found to be innovative, but appears underused and under-assessed. The programme was introduced on a pilot basis in the north east of Scotland during 2023, but in interviews, we found very little awareness of the system either being equipped or utilised. Those we spoke to were unable to say whether the system had ever been used anywhere in Police Scotland.

Road safety

137. We found that road safety is seen as a matter of priority for local communities across Scotland and features in almost all local policing plans. Police Scotland has clear established road safety priorities at the local policing level, which are aligned to national road policing priorities. (We also found that the level of engagement and collaboration between local and road policing varies greatly in quality and effectiveness across Scotland.)
138. Limited time and resources means local policing officers are unable to act proactively on road safety, disadvantaging the communities of Scotland, and undermining officers' proficiency. We heard from some officers that they had become largely de-skilled in road policing duties.



Court attendance

139. A significant concern we heard about during our inspection was the impact of road policing officers' attendance at court, and its detrimental effect on the ability of Police Scotland to keep people safe on the roads. Court attendance is an important part of an officer's role in bringing those who cause (or risk) harm to justice, but a combination of increased attendance and fewer resources has affected officers' ability to perform road patrol duties, with a knock-on effect on their general wellbeing.
140. Unfortunately, it has also become common for officers to learn on the day of a court case that the case has been cancelled at an earlier date. Road policing officers receive citations to attend courts throughout Scotland and there is no central corporate function to manage the administration of citations, which is additional work for an already-challenged workforce.
141. During our inspection, we found good evidence of remote evidence provision being used in other sectors of the criminal justice business area.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should engage with its criminal justice partners to explore options (including virtual appearances) to reduce the time requirement for officers attending court.

142. Due to variations in shift patterns and on-call arrangements, we heard that the north of Scotland is often under-resourced, particularly during nightshift hours.

Area for development 6

Road policing should review their on-call arrangements to ensure a consistent approach across Scotland



Abnormal loads

143. We found that the demand from escorting abnormal loads is affecting Police Scotland's ability to keep people safe on Scotland's roads. Police Scotland is the only UK police force that still performs this role. [National Highways](#) performs this function in England and Wales.
144. We learned that escorts of less than one hour are supported by Police Scotland without charge to the haulier, with escorts over an hour charged to the haulier. We also heard it was commonplace for road policing officers to work on rest days to perform abnormal load escort duties. This is inefficient and affects officers' rest days, and because not all road policing officers are qualified to perform this task, this has a further impact on those officers who are qualified.
145. We found the Police Scotland system of processing abnormal load information to be both inefficient and administratively burdensome. A business case was submitted in 2016, proposing the introduction of an electronic management system, but this has not been progressed further. At a time when all Scottish policing resources have been significantly reduced, alongside an increase in deaths and serious injuries on Scotland's roads, continuing to dedicate highly-trained and equipped police officers to routinely support the private haulage industry is untenable.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should engage with Scottish Government to progress a legislative change that will allow the escorting of abnormal loads in Scotland to be carried out by another agency.



Performance management

146. Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030 highlights that enforcement and prevention are essential parts of the Safe System. A report by the European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) found evidence that drivers are more willing to comply with the rules if they feel that they are otherwise likely to be caught and punished. It therefore recommends that police controls should be 'sufficiently publicized, regular and long term, unpredictable and difficult to avoid, and combine both highly visible and less visible activities.'
147. During our inspection we found that there is a lack of performance management information on the levels of enforcement and prevention activity in Police Scotland. There seems to be limited data on how effectively the organisation is contributing towards the challenging targets outlined in Scotland's Road Safety Framework. When conducting our inspection, we found data relative to each campaign, but we struggled to get an overview of all activity that had taken place.
148. Performance reports submitted to the SPA Policing Performance Committee contain information relating to the number of people killed and seriously injured, as well as data relating to specific campaigns that have been carried out. An overview of all enforcement and prevention activity, with a specific focus on the fatal five offences, would provide a more meaningful indication of progress towards the targets outlined in Scotland's Road Safety Framework.



149. Given the importance of enforcement and prevention, Police Scotland should seek to better understand the level of police activity by specialist road policing officers and by local policing officers.

Area for development 7

Police Scotland should develop a means to measure the level of prevention activity, focusing on the 'fatal five' causes of death and serious injury.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should progress the implementation of a road policing performance framework that provides an indication of progress towards achieving the targets set out in Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.

Drug driving

150. We learned that Police Scotland has evidence to suggest that drug driving has become a significant threat and risk to road users across Scotland. However, we also found that Police Scotland is unable to tackle drug driving effectively, due to a lack of trained resources and forensic services capacity. Police Scotland has taken a policy decision to restrict the use of roadside drug testing kits to road policing officers and a limited number of local policing officers on some of Scotland's larger islands (due to the difficulty in maintaining geographical cover from road policing at those locations). This reduction in road policing resources has only exacerbated the risk.
151. We believe that Police Scotland needs to ascertain the current and future drug driving problem in Scotland. This is crucial in order to allow Police Scotland to consider current and future capability and the preventative efforts required. Police Scotland must consider how to incrementally increase drug driving enforcement to local policing teams, which by scale and nature impacts on communities.



152. We conducted an [Assurance Review of Scottish Police Authority Forensic Toxicology Provision](#) in 2022. This followed the disclosure that 384 (later rising to 447) drug driving cases had been marked as 'no proceedings' by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). This review was published in April 2023. We made 25 recommendations for improvement, highlighting a number of key areas, including strategy, planning, process, management, reporting, scrutiny and prevention in relation to drugs driving. There were also 17 areas of development and since we published our report, significant progress has been made. The SPA should, however, continue to work with Police Scotland and should ensure there is forensic services capacity for a potential incremental increase in drug driving cases.

Recommendation 7

Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority should create and implement a joint action plan to identify and address the risk posed by drug driving.

Equipment

153. Police Scotland has not maintained its fleet of safety camera vans, which has at times reduced its ability to fully deploy that resource. Some road policing vehicles are fitted with ANPR and speed detection equipment, while some are not.
154. We heard from road policing officers that it would be beneficial if all vehicles had standard equipment fitted. We also heard that all police vehicles should have front-facing dash-cams and that road policing vehicles should have front and rear facing dashcams.
155. We found that road policing was committed to the health and safety of staff and ensuring vehicles are safe to use. However, we also found that road policing vehicles are not equipped in a uniform and coherent manner and that the views of the officers using the equipment are not taken into account. In addition, we found that the road safety equipment fitted to, and available in, local policing vehicles is inconsistent and often insufficient.
156. We found most road policing officers to be thorough and professional in completing vehicle and equipment checks, whereas local policing officers are not dedicating the time to complete such checks as regularly as required.



157. The complex nature of road policing requires officers to have a variety of clothing and equipment, depending on need. This may include requests for riding motorcycles or working in adverse weather conditions. We were pleased to discover that Police Scotland has a formal process relating to clothing and equipment, allowing officers to report matters for decision, approval or information.

Recommendation 8

Police Scotland should implement a process to ensure vehicles are equipped in a consistent manner. The views of officers who will be using the vehicles should be taken into account when considering the type of equipment to be fitted, and how and where it is fitted.

Area for development 8

Local policing divisions should take steps to ensure officers conduct regular vehicle and equipment checks and that such checks are recorded.

Partnership working

158. We found that Police Scotland has well-established and effective relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in relation to road policing. The partner organisations that we spoke with were extremely positive about the collaborative arrangements that they have with the road policing team in Police Scotland.

159. While all partners were very positive about the relationships with Road Policing Division, many expressed the view that road safety sat low in terms of Police Scotland's wider priorities and most felt that it should be given higher priority. Many cited the number of people being killed and seriously injured on our roads as a simple and obvious prompt that greater attention is required. Most felt that too many people were still dying unnecessarily and avoidably, and that there was a permissive and resigned attitude to road deaths and serious collisions across society.



160. Regular meetings such as the Tactical Options Working Group (with partners) and the Road Safety Governance Board (internal) are both good examples of well-established partnership arrangements, where the views and expertise of partners are brought together in a positive and open manner to inform and support each other.

161. During our inspection, we found good evidence of practical engagement with stakeholders. The priorities of these stakeholders was discussed at strategic, tactical and operational levels, and we found a number of examples found of productive joint working to tackle identified priorities. This included a pilot project in N Division (Highlands and Islands) dealing with issues relating to HGV vehicles, which has provided positive results.

162. We attended a collision demonstration event involving Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Scottish Ambulance Service. This public engagement event involved a demonstration of the emergency services response to a collision. Stalls providing leaflets and road safety advice were supported by other organisations, including the local authority. The event, which was held in the Tayside area (adjacent to the A9), was held after a sustained period of action aimed to improve driver behaviour in an area where there have been a high number of fatal road traffic collisions (18 deaths in 2023 and 8 deaths year to date in 2024). We found this event to be a positive example of partners working together to engage with the public on road safety matters.



Picture 1 – Collision demonstration event



Source: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

163. The relationship between Police Scotland and Transport Scotland is very well established and considered positive and worthwhile on both sides. Police Scotland engages with Transport Scotland on many matters and has aligned its road policing priorities with that of Transport Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030. Interviews with key personnel from both organisations highlighted the positive nature of the partnership working arrangements. This is to be commended.



164. Police Scotland has dedicated one inspector, one sergeant, and three constables as liaison officers within Transport Scotland. This arrangement, whereby officers are embedded in the Transport Scotland control centre and trained to work in partnership with Transport Scotland officers and contracted agencies, ensures each agency has a good understanding of their respective roles. We found that these roles have contributed positively towards partnership working. Such commitment enables good flows of information and has fostered collaborative working and joint understanding. This has been of particular benefit during extreme weather events in Scotland.
165. While we did hear of some good relationships and positive examples of joint working between local policing and Road Policing Division, we also found that the level of engagement and collaboration between local policing and Road Policing Division varied in quality and effectiveness in different parts of the country.
166. While some told us about Road Policing Division assisting local resources when they could, this was often because of strong personal relationships between operational staff in road and local policing teams, rather than organisational structures or arrangements. Others referenced the relationship as ineffective and inefficient, with Road Policing Division addressing national issues as its priority and providing limited assistance on local road safety or road crime issues. A causal factor that was evident in some areas was a lack of understanding of roles, coupled with silo working (road policing resources are often based geographically remotely to local policing, although within the same office complexes).
167. We also found a mixed picture of involvement in local and specific road policing meetings. Although Police Scotland has clearly established road safety and road crime priorities at local divisional level, which are aligned to national road policing strategic priorities, this did not always translate into attendance at key meetings. We found limited evidence of local policing being invited to road policing local or national meetings.



168. Road Policing Division assign an inspector to cover each local policing division geographically who acts as a conduit between the local division and Road Policing Division. It should be noted that each local policing division has a dedicated inspector, with the exception of Greater Glasgow and Renfrewshire and Inverclyde who share an inspector. This officer attends local divisional management meetings, however, we found that their engagement with the local policing division could be more regular and that daily engagement on local issues would be beneficial. The lack of regular communication and engagement may contribute to the lack of understanding that we saw in the tasking process (in terms of how local policing could access road policing resource).

Area for development 9

Road policing and local policing should take steps to ensure a level of consistency and positive engagement between these two functions across Scotland.

169. We found a similar lack of consistency in the effectiveness of the relationship between Road Policing Division and the C3 function in Police Scotland, with variance in the quality and effectiveness in different parts of the country.
170. While we found some evidence of positive relationships and meeting attendance, this was limited. Many people that we spoke to acknowledged this needed to improve and encouragingly, we found examples of a desire to do this, including plans in the east of Scotland to have joint training between area control room and road policing staff.
171. We consider that there is some misunderstanding of road policing roles: C3 staff believe that road policing resources are often 'ring-fenced' for other roles (or that roading police are ring-fencing themselves) – resulting in their either not responding, or being slow to accept, respond or attend calls from C3 staff.



172. We found uncertainty about the types of calls that both road and local policing officers were being asked to attend. Many interviewees told us about instances where road policing officers were sent to attend minor, no injury collisions (sometimes a long way away), while local policing officers were sent to calls on the fast road network, simply because they were closer than road policing resources. Local policing officers were also sent to calls where the expertise and capability of road policing officers was needed. This confusion seems to have led to some distrust and resentment between local and road policing officers, and both felt the issue lay with C3 staff, who wanted to 'clear their screens' as quickly as possible, rather than prioritise and task calls better and more efficiently.
173. In some of the divisions we visited, we found that road policing resources appeared isolated from the priorities and concerns of the local policing areas in which they were based. This apparent disconnect does not foster the best relationship between local and road policing functions.

Area for development 10

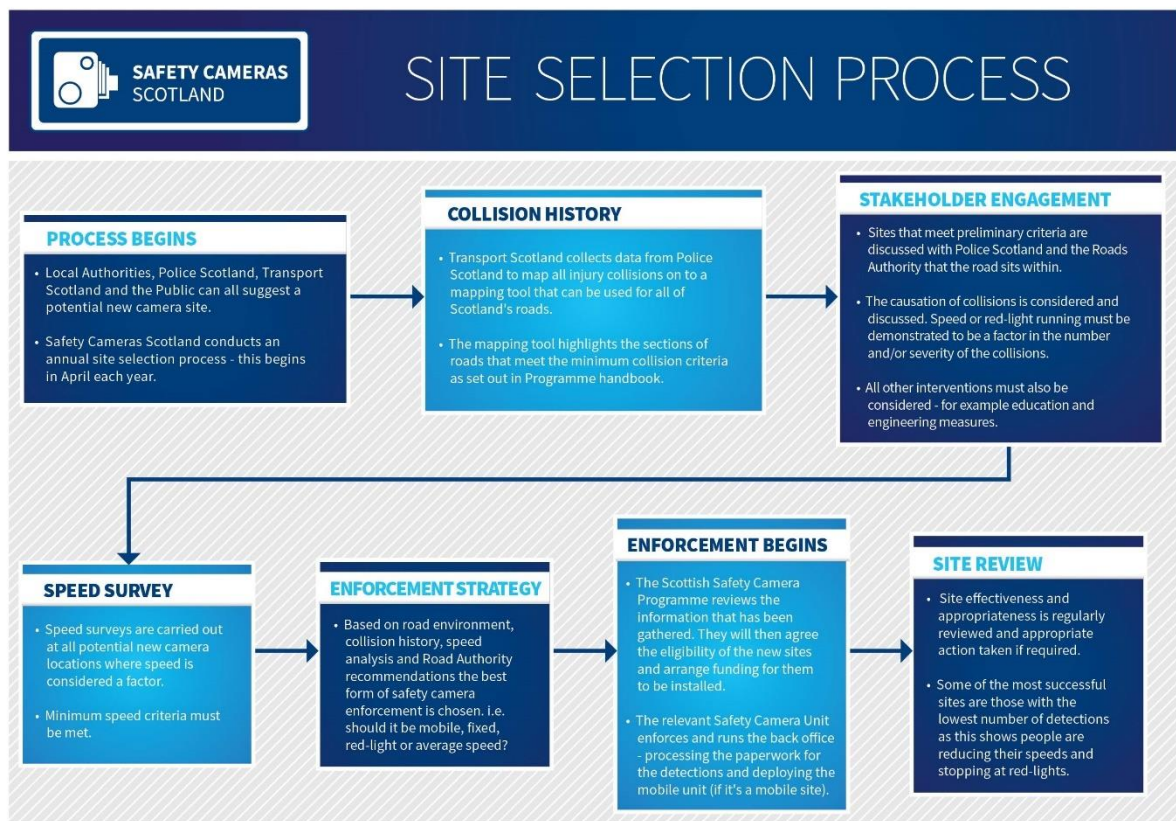
Road policing and C3 should take steps to ensure a level of consistency and positive engagement between these two functions across Scotland.

Safety Camera Unit

174. Police Scotland's Safety Camera Unit (SCU) was formerly the Scottish Safety Camera Partnership and was managed by Transport Scotland. We learned that Police Scotland is also responsible for reviewing applications for new sites and reviewing site effectiveness. It consults with road users on the effectiveness of safety cameras, with the aim of using them to reduce casualties on Scotland's roads by targeted camera enforcement and improved driver behaviour. Cameras are sited in the areas most in need (in terms of road casualty reduction), and are deployed where they will have the greatest casualty and collision reduction potential.



Picture 2 – Site selection process



Source: Police Scotland safety cameras

175. Year-on-year funding is provided by Transport Scotland through the Scottish Safety Camera Programme, which funds the entire SCU. We heard there is a need to improve the manner in which this important resource is managed and deployed. The staff of the SCU appeared uncertain about whether they worked for Police Scotland or Transport Scotland. They felt themselves to be in a difficult position between 'two masters', with Transport Scotland providing annual funding for the SCU and setting operational guidelines to control the unit's daily activity.



176. The relationship between the SCU and local policing divisions was found to be poor. Few local policing officers we spoke to understood the workings of the SCU and there appeared to be no communication between the SCU and the local policing divisions (as to where and why resources were deployed). We would expect the SCU – both as a specialist and dedicated unit within the wider Road Policing Division and a resource of Police Scotland – to be deployed to locations of greatest concern, as an additional tool to improve road safety issues.

Area for development 11

Police Scotland should review the Safety Camera Unit to improve the manner in which this important resource is managed and deployed.

Brake

177. Brake is a national road safety charity. It was set up in 1995, with a remit to prevent deaths, serious injuries and pollution on roads, and to care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes through its National Road Victim Service. In 2023, the National Road Victim Service supported 152 individuals in Scotland who had been bereaved, had suffered life-changing injuries or had witnessed a fatal or serious road collision.

178. In 2022, only 20 per cent of families bereaved by road death in Scotland were given support by the National Road Victim Service; this increased to 62 per cent in 2023. In 2022, 17 per cent of the referrals in Scotland came from police officers; this had increased to 51 per cent by September 2024. This compares with a UK average of 65 per cent.

179. We established that the relationship between Brake and Police Scotland is good, and the establishment of points of contact has been positive. However, officers who have first contact with road victims come from different units and teams (rather than being exclusively family liaison officers) and this has presented logistical challenges in terms of providing appropriate training.



180. We also heard that data protection and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) issues had slowed down the referral process from Police Scotland to the National Road Victim Service, and that it had taken around two years to initiate a data protection agreement (and then two months to finalise it). This affected victims accessing support.
181. Referrals are now made to the National Road Victim Service by Police Scotland in the body of an email sent to a secure account. Brake reports that the quality of information received is generally good, but that using a referral form would reduce the margin for error, while providing a useful structure and process for busy operational officers.
182. We also heard about the referral mechanism adopted by Kent Police – seen by Brake as the strongest example of partnership working – where a six month pilot of “consent based, opt out” (whereby in fatal collisions the family are asked if they would like a referral made to access support from the National Road Victim Service) saw referrals of road victims increase by 160 per cent. As of June 2024, over 80 per cent of road victims in Kent agreed to their details being shared with the National Road Victim Service, so they can be contacted by one of their caseworkers. This approach is considered to give road victims the best possible chance of accessing support.

Area for development 12

To ensure more families receive the support they need following serious road collisions, Police Scotland should review its information-sharing protocols and referral processes and consider a ‘consent based, opt-out’ approach.



Technology

183. Given the reduction in the number of officers in road policing across Scotland, the use of technology to focus on road safety and road crime is more important than ever. We visited West Midlands Police and were very impressed by the manner in which technology is used, particularly ANPR.
184. ANPR technology is used by police forces throughout the UK to help detect, deter and disrupt criminal activity at local, force, regional and national levels. This includes travelling criminals, organised crime groups and terrorists. As a vehicle passes an ANPR camera (fixed or mobile), its registration number is read and automatically checked against database records of vehicles of interest. This information can then be passed to officers on patrol by the control room.
185. ANPR has proved to be important in the detection of many offences, including locating people wanted for arrest, stolen vehicles and uninsured vehicles, and uncovering cases of major crime. It has also proved to be successful in locating missing persons and people who are vulnerable.
186. West Midlands Police has over 300 fixed sites across its force area, and each motorway patrol car is fitted with ANPR technology. The cameras provide great sources of data and intelligence for the police and for partner organisations.
187. Police Scotland has very few ANPR cameras when compared with other parts of the UK. We also found that very few officers in road policing are trained in its use. We heard that the department responsible for supporting this technology in Police Scotland is very under-resourced when compared with other UK forces. Experienced road policing officers we spoke to expressed frustration regarding this technology not being used to best effect.

Recommendation 9

Police Scotland should identify and adopt best practice in the deployment and use of ANPR



Operation Snap

188. [Operation Snap](#) is an award-winning initiative by GoSafe Wales (the Welsh equivalent of the Scottish Safety Camera Programme). It enables the public to submit video and photographic evidence relating to driving offences that they have witnessed, to the police for their use. Since late 2016, there has been an increase in detection rates without significant extra enforcement costs, and the public has reacted positively to this initiative, often viewed as a form of community policing.

Picture 3 – Operation snap logo



Source: West Mercia Police

189. In its 2020 thematic inspection of road policing, HMICFRS recommended that all forces provide 'efficient and effective' systems whereby the public could submit journey-cam footage for police consideration. All English and Welsh police forces now provide the public with the ability to report road traffic offences by directly uploading footage to the police. Police Scotland is the only UK police force that does not allow the public to do this.
190. We were informed that Police Scotland has been considering the introduction of a national dashcam safety portal for some time, and that the introduction of Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC) will provide an opportunity for the public to upload footage. However, we also understand that this will only be accessible once the incident has been reported to the police control room, who will then send the person reporting the incident a link to upload footage.



191. While this would be a step in the right direction, we see the requirement to phone the police before being able to upload footage as an unnecessary additional step that doesn't take advantage of the opportunity to:

- make it easier for the public to report road traffic offences (thereby improving public engagement on road safety matters);
- reduce demand on the police control room;
- expand the scope for enforcement by essentially enabling members of the public to become the 'eyes' of the police; and
- positively influence and change driver behaviour by increasing the likelihood of being caught.

192. As highlighted earlier in this report, there is strong academic evidence to demonstrate that drivers are more willing to comply with the rules if they feel that they are otherwise likely to be caught and punished. We believe that Police Scotland should do everything it can to improve engagement with the public on road safety matters, particularly at a time of shrinking resources.

193. Partner organisations we engaged with were very much of the view that a facility to allow the public to directly upload footage to police should be progressed in Scotland and that it would go a long way towards making roads safer. We strongly believe that Police Scotland should progress the facility for members of the public to report road traffic offences by directly uploading journey-cam footage. This includes dashcam from vehicles, as well as from a broader range of people, including vulnerable road users such as cyclists, equestrians, motorcyclists and pedestrians.

Recommendation 10

Police Scotland should progress the facility for members of the public to report road traffic offences by directly uploading journey-cam footage.



Analysis of data

194. It is important that Police Scotland makes evidenced-based decisions, by using data to place the most appropriate officers in the right places at the right times. This will improve both effectiveness and efficiency. While we heard that there was regular high-level analysis of road safety data, we found limited use of operationally-focused intelligence and analysis to support officers.
195. As part of this inspection, we visited West Midlands Police, which serves around 2.8 million people over 348 square miles. We found it maintained around 14 dedicated intelligence/analytical/ANPR staff to support roads and local policing teams on road safety and road crime matters.
196. By way of comparison, Police Scotland serves around 5.5 million people over 28,168 square miles and its wider OSD – of which road policing is a part – maintains three analysts, of which one has a (non-dedicated) focus on road safety. Its intelligence function dedicates around eight staff to the wider OSD portfolio, but with limited focus on road safety or road crime matters in comparison with other crime types. Additionally, as of September 2024, Police Scotland now have a dedicated OSD analyst who is focused on road safety and road crime, conduction analysis to support objectives of the Road Safety Framework.
197. We also noted little to no engagement with other UK forces and little engagement between the road policing analytical/intelligence staff and local policing divisions on road safety or road crime.
198. There is a high demand for both OSD's analytical staff and those dedicated to OSD and Road Policing Division from its intelligence function, but this is focused at a strategic level towards road safety matters only. Road crime-related issues seem to be addressed infrequently, with an apparent disconnect between intelligence and analytical products developed for road safety and road crime. This is despite their apparent importance to Police Scotland, and road safety being a priority for most Scottish communities.



199. Police Scotland is undergoing a National Review of Tasking and Coordinating. We found that, in general, road policing officers are clear about their role and daily focus in tackling road safety issues, but that local policing officers – whilst not discouraged from tackling road safety issues – were not encouraged or directed towards it. We found that intelligence, analytical and tasking and coordinating work on road safety and road crime could be significantly improved.

Recommendation 11

Police Scotland should review its intelligence and analytical commitment in relation to road safety and road crime, to improve focus on these areas.

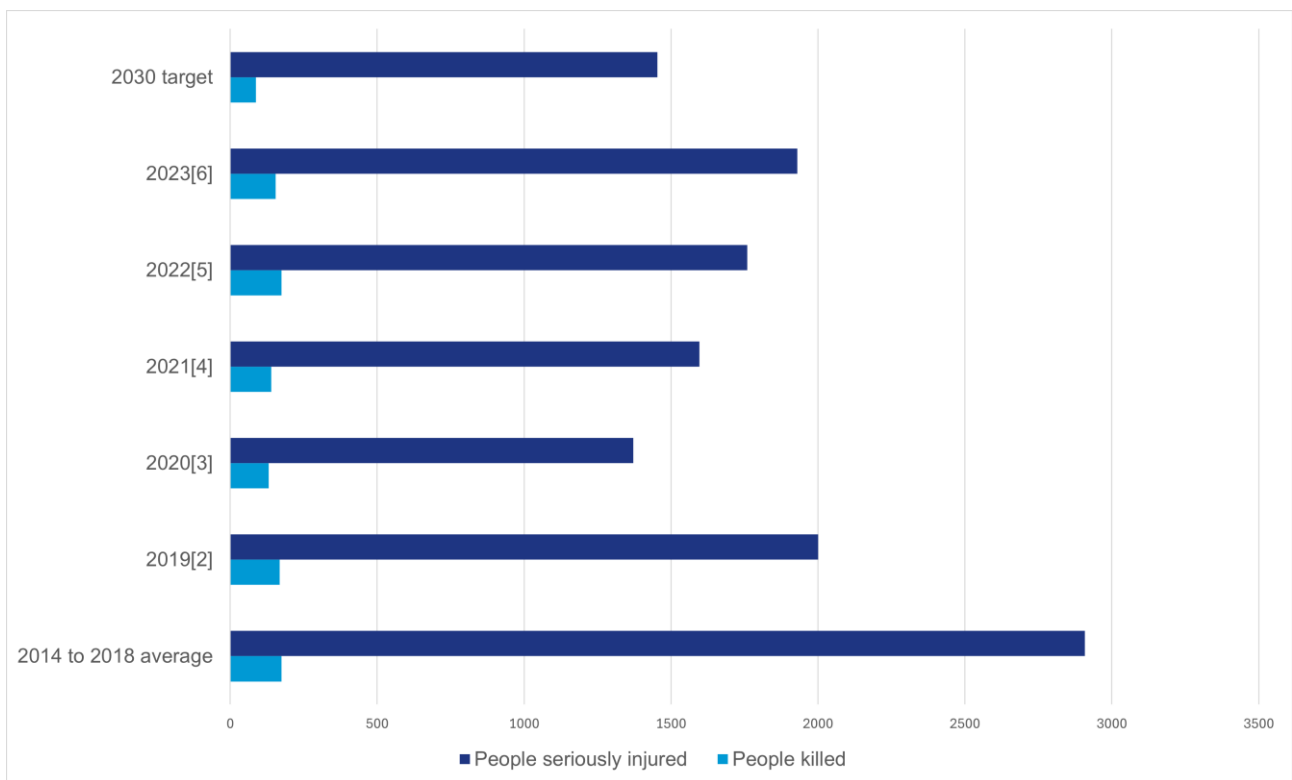


Outcomes

Road Safety Framework to 2030

200. The targets in the Road Safety Framework to 2030 started with a baseline number drawn from average casualty numbers between 2014 and 2018. The illustration below shows the initial baseline, casualty rates for subsequent years, and how they compare against the 2030 targets:

Figure 3 – Initial baseline, casualty rates and how they compare against the 2030 targets



Source: Transport Scotland²³⁴⁵⁶

201. As can be seen above, the number of casualties dropped during 2020, probably as a result of the restrictions imposed due to COVID 19. Since the restrictions were eased the total number of casualties in Scotland has steadily increased each year. We heard that the challenging targets set out in Road Safety Framework to 2030 are unlikely to be met if the current trends continue.

² Transport Scotland, [Key Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2019](#), 30 July 2020.

³ Transport Scotland, [Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2020](#), 27 October 2021.

⁴ Transport Scotland, [Key Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2021](#), 25 May 2022.

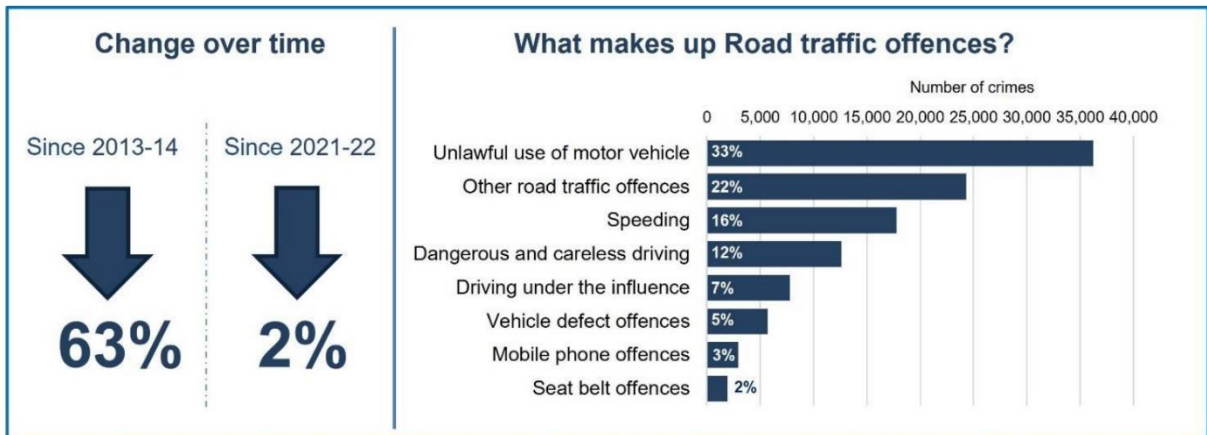
⁵ Transport Scotland, [Key Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2022](#), 24 May 2023.

⁶ Transport Scotland, [Key Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2023](#), 29 May 2024.



202. We also observed that enforcement of road traffic offences has reduced significantly over the last 10 years (Scottish Government data shows a 63 per cent reduction). The extract below is taken from the [recorded crime statistics](#) produced by the Scottish Government.

Picture 4 – Road traffic offences



Source: Scottish Government

203. The data shows that road traffic offences accounted for 63 per cent of all offences recorded in Scotland in 2022-23. Between 2021-22 and 2022-23, the number of road traffic offences recorded by the police decreased by 2 per cent (from 111,987 to 109,320). Over the longer term, there has been a decrease of 63 per cent since 2013-14. As highlighted earlier in this report, it is worthy of note that the overall number of police officers in Scotland in 2014 was 17,254 compared to the current overall establishment of 16,425. This means that there are now less officers available to provide visibility and enforcement on Scotland's roads. This reduction in available resources will be one contributory factor in the reduction in enforcement activity. The 2023 systematic review on the effectiveness of police presence (mentioned in paragraph 48) highlights the likelihood of an increase in the type of activity in driver behaviour that lead to serious and fatal road collisions.

204. The recent increases in road casualties is complex and there is no single factor that has caused the trend to increase. However, we are concerned that – at a time when casualties are increasing – Police Scotland has decreased rather than increased its enforcement activity in this high-priority area. Police enforcement activity and the visibility of police on Scotland's roads is a key component in changing driver behaviour and reducing the upward trend in casualties.



Diversion from prosecution

205. The provision of educational courses, as an alternative to prosecution, has not yet been implemented to best effect in Scotland. There are limited examples of alternatives to prosecution in Scotland for driving offences. One example is the Driver Improvement Scheme (DIS), which police can suggest where someone has been charged with a contravention of [section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988](#) (careless or inconsiderate driving). The DIS incorporates both the National Driver Alertness Course (NDAC) for vehicles and the Rider Intervention Developing Experience (RIDE) for motorcyclists. Such an alternative would be suggested by a police officer in the standard prosecution report (SPR), which is submitted to the Procurator Fiscal after an individual is charged with such an offence. The Procurator Fiscal then decides if an alternative to prosecution is appropriate. The process is outlined in the [Police Scotland DIS Standard Operating Procedure](#), derived from the [Lord Advocate's guidelines](#) on how the scheme should be run.
206. The police and Procurator Fiscal in Scotland also have the option of imposing conditional offers of fixed penalty notice for certain road traffic offences under [Section 75 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988](#). If an individual does not comply with the conditional offer issued by the police, they would then be reported to the Procurator Fiscal for a prosecution decision.
207. We do not believe that these alternatives go far enough, and more measures are required to improve driver education and behaviours on the road. While fines and penalty points have an important place in the criminal justice system in dealing with more serious driving offences, there are offences that could be dealt with in an educational manner, as seen elsewhere in the UK.
208. Police Scotland is, at present, the only UK police force not offering the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme (NDORS) courses as an alternative to prosecution. This scheme is managed and administered by a private not-for-profit company called [UK Road Offender Education](#) (UKROEd) on behalf of the police. The courses are either provided by the police, or contracted out to a registered provider (training and registration of providers is also managed by UKROEd).



209. Courses available through UKROEd offer an alternative to penalty points and fines, and include the following:

- NMAC (National Motorway Awareness Course)
- NRRAC (National Rider Risk Awareness Course)
- NSAC (National Speed Awareness Course)
- SCC (Safe & Considerate Cycling Course)
- SCD (Safe and Considerate Driving Course)
- WDU (What's Driving Us? Course)
- YBYL (Your Belt Your Life Course).

210. As can be seen from the list these courses go beyond the DIS alternative to prosecution, and widens the scope of offences that would be available to educate drivers who have breached the law.

211. Decisions on suitability for diversion from prosecution are different in Scotland compared with other parts of the UK. In England and Wales, the relevant Chief Constable decides on the suitability of the offender to attend a course, but in Scotland any alternative scheme would require approval from the Lord Advocate, with appropriate Lord Advocates Guidelines to determine the operation of the alternative scheme.

212. As with the DIS alternative, there is a cost associated with attending a course. These costs are recoverable from the individual attending the course if they agree to attend, and include an administration fee to both UKROEd and the police for managing the courses provided. The powers associated with this cost recovery are enshrined in legislation within [section 89 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#), which is also applicable in Scotland.

213. We are aware that there is work being undertaken by the Road Traffic Diversionary Course Working Group – Scotland, chaired by Transport Scotland, to discuss diversionary courses. We are also aware that UKROEd has been invited to participate in those discussions and we welcome this development.



214. We would recommend that Police Scotland engages with both UKROEd and other key stakeholders to progress the full implementation of educational courses for people who commit driving offences that may be appropriately addressed through learning.

Recommendation 12

Police Scotland should engage with UK Road Offender Education and other key stakeholders to progress the full implementation of educational training courses for people who commit driving offences that may be appropriately addressed through learning.

Road safety strategic outcomes

215. The criminal use of the roads by organised crime groups transporting illicit drugs is an area that requires constant attention by Police Scotland. We identified that road policing officers play a valuable role in tackling serious and organised crime groups, conducting regular [Proceeds of Crime Act 2002](#) cash and drug seizures. It is vital that intelligence is used on a cross-border basis to target individuals and groups conducting such illegal activity on the roads. We found good examples of road policing officers causing significant disruption activity, carrying out drug and cash seizures through pro-active policing of the road network in Scotland.



Road safety stakeholder perceptions

216. Understanding the expectations and perceptions of the public (specifically, those with lived experience) is vital in ensuring that police are delivering services to a high standard. While there is no direct contact with the public specifically on road policing, feedback is encouraged from anyone who has had contact with Police Scotland. Police Scotland carries out [user experience surveys](#) to collect such feedback. Road policing features regularly in the [Your Police](#) survey, with speeding and vehicular antisocial behaviour being two particular issues of public concern. The feedback received helps Police Scotland to understand where the issues are and what action needed.
217. Police Scotland also attends local meetings and receives correspondence from the public and elected members in order to understand what the local problems are. Vehicular antisocial behaviour of all descriptions is a common theme raised at meetings and in correspondence to the police. We found that, at times, police officers have difficulty managing the demand associated with road safety – in particular vehicular anti-social behaviour. This type of antisocial behaviour is often committed by younger adults and children, which brings an element of risk when trying to tackle it. It is usually community policing officers who are tasked with tackling antisocial behaviour. We found that those officers have limited time to deal with such issues, due to other competing priorities. We did find that there were a number of community groups who have supported the police on speed watch campaigns.
218. Police Scotland also engages with a range of partner organisations who represent vulnerable road users and families of people killed in collisions. Using the experience of victims and/or their families is vital in understanding how best to improve services and meet people's needs. We saw clear evidence that road policing has good engagement with partners in Transport Scotland, including Road Safety Scotland, as well as with third sector organisations such as Cycling Scotland/UK, and Brake.



Family Liaison roles

219. The police have a wide range of functions when dealing with a fatal collision. Their investigative role is to ensure that the facts and circumstances of the fatal collision are established, but they also have an important role in providing support, advice and assistance to the families of those people who have died. It can be difficult for bereaved families to navigate their way through the complexities of a fatal road crash investigation and possible criminal proceedings, at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.
220. Having a family liaison officer (FLO) appointed to the family of a victim can have a significant impact on them, and their experience of the justice system if the case progresses through the courts. This role can facilitate access to other services, including support charities specialising in supporting victims and their families. The FLO also supports the family by ensuring they are kept up to date with information as it becomes available.
221. We identified clear evidence that there are not enough FLOs to deploy to every fatality, so the service provided to the families of victims is inconsistent. There should be a clear policy on FLO deployment, ensuring that there is a consistent level of service available to the bereaved following a fatal collision.

Recommendation 13

Police Scotland should review its policy on the deployment of family liaison officers, to ensure a consistent level of service to people who have been bereaved following a fatal collision.

222. People who have been bereaved through a death on the road told us how important it was that the officers supporting them took a trauma informed approach. Police Scotland has pledged their ongoing commitment to the principles of trauma informed-practices when delivering services, but we found gaps when it came to dealing with fatal road collisions, including language use when dealing with victims or their family.



223. For example, we were told the use of the word 'accident' can be upsetting when someone has died, since this suggests that the collision could not have been predicted, or avoided and that it is just 'one of those things'. Using factual terms such as 'crash' or 'collision' to describe incidents is less likely to cause distress to people. Police Scotland must continue to update its guidance for officers and staff, and ensure that a trauma-informed approach is adopted by officers and staff supporting people affected by a serious road collision.

Area for development 13

Police Scotland should ensure a trauma-informed approach is adopted when supporting people who have been affected by a serious road collision.



Appendix 1: Glossary

ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ANPR	Automatic Number Plate Recognition
C3 Division	Contact, Command and Control Division
COPFS	Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
DESC	Digital Evidence Sharing Capability
DIS	Driver Improvement Scheme
ETSC	European Transport Safety Council
Fast road networks	Typically 'A' Class single or multi carriageway roads with national speed limits such as trunk roads and motorways
Fatal five offences	The main causes of fatal collisions, namely, careless driving, speeding, drink or drug driving, not wearing seatbelts, being distracted while driving (mobile phone use, etc.)
FLO	family liaison officer
FTE	full-time equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HMICFRS	Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
HMICS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
HOSTYDs	Hollow spiked tyre deflation system
HSDA	High Speed Driving Assessment
KSI	killed or seriously injured
MP	Members of Parliament
MSP	Members of the Scottish Parliament
NDAC	National Driver Alertness Course
NDORS	National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme
NMAC	National Motorway Awareness Course
NRRAC	National Rider Risk Awareness Course
NSAC	National Speed Awareness Course
OSD	Operational Support Division
Police Scotland	Police Service of Scotland
RIDE	Rider Intervention Developing Experience
RTC	Road traffic collision
RPO	Road Patrol Officer
SCC	Safe & Considerate Cycling Course
SCD	Safe and Considerate Driving Course
SCU	Safety Camera Unit
SMT	Senior Management Team
SPA	Scottish Police Authority
SPC	Scottish Police College
SPF	Scottish Police Federation
SPR	standard prosecution report
STRA	Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment
THRIVE	threat, harm, risk, investigative opportunity, vulnerability and engagement
UKROEd	UK Road Offender Education
WDU	What's Driving Us? Course
YBYL	Your Belt Your Life Course



Improving
Policing
Across
Scotland

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About His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

HMICS operates independently of Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government. Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, our role is to review the state, effectiveness and efficiency of Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. We support improvement in policing by carrying out inspections, making recommendations and highlighting effective practice.

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