

POLICE REFORM

Introduction

[The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales](#) was published on 8th March 2022. This independent review was chaired by [Sir Michael Barber](#) and hosted by the [Police Foundation](#). The Review has identified 56 reform recommendations for the 43 police services in England and Wales. It aims to set a long term strategic direction for the police services in England and Wales so that they are better able to tackle crime in an age where it is [being transformed by new technology and wider social change](#).

This briefing outlines the background, key outputs and learning from police reform in Scotland when a single national police service was created in 2013.

5 Key Recommendations from Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales

- Creation of a new Crime Prevention Agency;
- Expansion of the role of the National Crime Agency so it in effect becomes a new FBI for the UK;
- Introduction of a new licence to practice for all police officers that is renewed every five years and subject to strict conditions;
- Merger of back office functions across the 43 forces that would save hundreds of millions of pounds;
- Investment in front line policing, training and technology to modernise the service from top to bottom.

Purpose

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands now and in the future Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt new ways of working, policies and technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly factsheets have been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of new policing approaches and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.

Police Reform in Scotland

The 2012 Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act brought about some of the most radical public sector reforms for a generation and, by establishing a single national force, is arguably the biggest change policing has experienced in the UK in this century.

The reform also led to the creation of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), a non-departmental public body which holds Police Scotland to account.

Prior to these reforms, Scotland's policing services were delivered by eight separate and relatively autonomous regional organisations and two national bodies.

Today, Police Scotland is the second largest police service in the UK by officer number – with over 17000 officers and 5000 staff. It polices across a third of the [UK's land mass with a diverse geography](#) including large cities, extensive rural and remote areas and 92 inhabited islands.

What are the benefits?

At the time of its creation, the intended strategic benefits of Scotland's single national service included reducing the duplication of regionalised arrangements, improving equity of access to specialised expertise and equipment, and enhancing opportunities to strengthen connections with local communities.

It is now almost ten years since the establishment of Police Scotland and the Authority, and a number of benefits have been realised. These include:

- [£200 million per year saved from policing budget through efficiencies;](#)
- Police officer numbers maintained and at a significantly higher ratio per citizen than England and Wales. [Scotland has 33 officers per 10,000 citizens compared to 22 in England and Wales;](#)
- [More than 2.5 million hours](#) a year of increased police officer capacity delivered through transformation and operational and technological efficiencies;
- [Overall recorded crime has reduced by 8.8%;](#)
- [Recorded offences have decreased by 52%;](#)
- [Of over 500 murders and homicides committed in Scotland since April 2013, only 2 murders are currently unsolved;](#)
- [Clear-up rates for crime have increased by 4.8%;](#)
- Local policing divisions are now supported by a number of specialist divisions. These ensure highly expert and specialist police services are available to every community.
- [Specialist Crime Division](#) (SCD) provides investigative and intelligence functions such as Major Crime investigation, Public Protection, Organised Crime, Counter Terrorism, Intelligence and Safer Communities. [Operational Support Division](#) (OSD) provides specialist support functions such as Road Policing, Firearms, Public Order, Air Support, Marine Policing, Dogs and Mounted Branch, as well as Emergency and Events Planning;

- Local policing remains focused on both individual and community safety and wellbeing. There are [local scrutiny panels](#) across all 32 local authority areas, with responsibility for scrutiny of an agreed Local Police Plan for the area;
- Public trust in policing is high. The latest [Scottish Household survey](#) reported trust in policing at 87%. Only the Health Service in Scotland was more trusted.

Additionally, in 2021 Police Scotland successfully delivered the largest policing event in the history of the UK: the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26) event in Glasgow. The Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee, which provides scrutiny of policing, reported "Police Scotland and the SPA have adopted a human rights-based approach to policing, which is welcome and helps to achieve the stated aim of policing by consent.

This rights-based approach also underpinned the policing of COP26 which saw Police Scotland enable the right to protest whilst ensuring a successful event and protecting the safety and wellbeing of residents and visitors."

Both the policing of the pandemic and the policing of COP26 have attracted international commendation and are testament to the national coherence, capacity and capability which has come through reform to a single national service in Police Scotland.



Two officers near the Scottish Event Campus, where COP26 was held.

Oversight

To support the creation of a single police service for Scotland a single oversight body was also created - the [Scottish Police Authority](#); a public body with responsibility for the £1.4 billion annual budget for policing and Forensic Services.

The Authority exists to provide oversight to policing delivery, to support continuous improvement and to promote the policing principles set out in the 2012 Act.

The Authority and Police Scotland published a [joint outcomes-based Strategy for Policy in 2020](#), approved by Scottish Ministers, which sets the agreed and ambitious direction for policing in Scotland. Progress towards delivery of those outcomes is reported on a quarterly basis.

The Authority directly delivers Forensic Services for Police Scotland and employs 500 scientists and staff to carry out that function. The SPA's 'crime scheme to court' model is acknowledged to be one of the best Forensic Services in Europe.

The Authority appoints all senior police officers and holds the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of policing.

Lessons learned from police reform in Scotland

The change required for the establishment of Police Scotland was highly disruptive and widely contested. In the view of the Authority the result is a well led, resilient, effective service that is a national asset. Policing will always seek to continually improve but here are some of the 'lessons learned' by the Authority from the major 2012 reform of policing in Scotland.

These include:

Policing through change – The challenge of undertaking such extensive structural organisational change while maintaining day-to-day service delivery cannot be overstated.

Communication - Maintaining and then improving strong relationships with local government and key civil society stakeholders is critical.

Fitting local delivery and priorities within national standards – There need be no tension between delivery of local priorities and nationally set policing standards. This area must be a clear and strategic focus needing respectful listening and dialogue.

Set expectations clearly – It is important for those proposing change to clearly define the expenditure savings (if any) and the policing improvements for citizens' safety and wellbeing that will be delivered as a result of reform. These should be consistently measured and publicly reported for the lifecycle of the reform project.

Conclusions

There are 5 main conclusions drawn from police reform in Scotland.

1. The bringing together of 10 police organisations into a single national service has been an extended, complex and disruptive process, but has ultimately delivered significant benefits to the communities of Scotland and the people whose safety and wellbeing are promoted by Police Scotland.
2. A single national police service is a national asset. The challenges of 'business as usual policing' and the extraordinary and unprecedented challenges of COVID and COP26 were met through the resilience and quality of the reformed single police service.
3. There was an option to create three regional services in Scotland. This was rightly rejected in favour of a single service. A single national service created a relentless national political, civic and media focus on the reform. This was at times overwhelming but ultimately beneficial to the people of Scotland.
4. The purpose of reform was both to create savings for the tax payer and improve the police service to individuals and communities. The savings issue dominated the reform debate in the early years as the policing benefits took time to be fully realised and measured.

5. The stability that Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority have now reached after initial and serious disruption is a stable platform for continuous improvement and tackling the significant further change that is required. These include step-changes to the workforce culture, makeup and skills, addressing the new threats and harms we face, tackling the underreported harms and continual stretch of police officer time and skills created supporting very vulnerable people.

Further reading

You can find out more about topical policing issues in Scotland by visiting our factsheet library. [Available here](#).

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's [website](#) where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter:

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