



SCOTTISH POLICE
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LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL ONLY

Audrey Nicoll MSP
Convenor, Criminal Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
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30 August 2024

CO/086/2024

Dear Convenor

Wellbeing and mental health in policing

Ahead of an evidence session scheduled for 11 September 2024, I am writing to provide an update to the Criminal Justice Committee on efforts to strengthen the wellbeing and support available to officers and staff working within policing.

In January 2024, the Authority updated the Criminal Justice Committee that significant engagement, discussion and action had taken place across the policing system to shine a light on mental health, wellbeing, and support available to our workforce.

Since then, there have been further developments including an independent review of Police Scotland's Health and Wellbeing Framework by Thrivewise, organisational health and wellbeing specialists and a Frontline Focus Wellbeing Review by HMICS.

The findings of these reviews have been considered in detail by Police Scotland, and the Authority's People Committee. Along with the range of insights gathered over the last two years, the recommendations in both reports have informed a single [Wellbeing Action Plan](#) developed by Police

Scotland to focus and strengthen the wellbeing support available to our entire workforce.

The Authority's People Committee is satisfied that the Plan captures the range of wellbeing activities needed and expected of a large modern police workforce. These activities, along with agreed reporting mechanisms, will support ongoing monitoring and provide evidence of progress to future People Committee meetings.

Police Scotland is a large organisation, both in terms of budget and workforce – comparable to some of the Scotland's largest private companies. As a Board of non-executive members, the Authority's oversight of workforce wellbeing centres on three specific areas:

1. **Leadership:** Ensuring there is a clear, public commitment from the Leadership Team and senior staff that the wellbeing of the people working within policing is a priority.
2. **Strategy:** Assessing whether clear organisational plans are in place to address wellbeing.
3. **Delivery:** Measuring progress, overseeing, and reviewing how staff wellbeing is measured, reported, and acted on.

The Authority is in no doubt of the leadership commitment to prioritise the wellbeing of the policing workforce. Police Scotland's Chief Constable Jo Farrell has made an unequivocal commitment to workforce wellbeing which is shared by her Deputy Chief Constables, Assistant Chief Constables, and Divisional Commanders.

The Authority is confident that there are a range of wellbeing activities and initiatives currently available to support our workforce. National initiatives such as, Lifelines Scotland or Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), are balanced alongside local initiatives such Trauma Impact Preventative Initiatives (TIPT) or Paddlewell used in the Highlands and Islands, which support officers and staff to decompress and process traumatic incidents.

The development of a Wellbeing Action Plan will set out how the leadership commitment will be realised with specific, actionable, and measurable steps. The Authority expects Police Scotland's reporting to our People Committee to evidence progress in delivering planned actions and demonstrating resulting impact. This will take further sustained effort over time, however the Authority has assessed that Police Scotland now has the foundations and commitment to improve wellbeing across the service.

The results of the current Employee Engagement Survey will be key in providing a current baseline against which future improvement can be

measured. An update on the results and follow up actions will be reported to a future People Committee.

You requested an update on the following which I have summarised below:

III Health Retiral (IHR) and Injury on Duty (IOD) process review

In January 2024, the Authority's update to the Criminal Justice Committee reported improvements made during 2023 to strengthen and improve the IHR and IOD processes so that applications are dealt with as swiftly as practicable.

2023 saw a reduction in the average wait times for an appointment with a Selected Medical Practitioner (SMP); from 13 months in Financial Year (FY) 2021-22 to 5 months in FY 2022-23. The number of live IHRs reduced during 2023 from 101 to 57. Similarly, the number of IoD cases reduced during 2023 from 48 to 39.

At the end of FY 2023-24, the average wait time for a SMP appointment increased slightly to 6 months. However, the average time for officers going through the IHR and IOD processes from application to decision was 8 months compared to 15 months for IHR in December 2022.

In May 2023, a trial commenced to test the effectiveness of 'fast tracking' IHR cases to Police Scotland's Director of People and Development for approval. The trial aimed to speed up the process where the SMP had determined that an officer was permanently unfit for duty or regular employment. Previously, these cases were considered by a panel for redeployment opportunities.

During the trial (May to November 2023) 7 officers were fast tracked. Approval by the Director of People and Development took on average 27 days compared to an average of 61 days. While the number of eligible officers was small, no issues were reported during the trial and all stakeholders supported continuation of the approach which has now become standard practice.

The number of live IHR and IOD cases on 31 March 2024 was 57 and 39 respectively. On average the numbers that join each process are in line with the number approved by the Authority.

The Authority has assessed that the previous backlogs have reduced, and any current delays are a result of external factors that impact on the process e.g. waiting for specialist reports from medical professionals or the officers' own choice to progress an appeal.

Officer or staff suicide statistics

The Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland are committed and working to ensure focused and preventative support is in place, coupled with proportionate oversight and scrutiny, to support the health and wellbeing of our workforce and suicide prevention activity.

Comparative and reliable official data on the number and details of officers who die by suicide is critical. The only official data on probable suicides in Scotland is collected and published by the National Records of Scotland. This data draws from information recorded on death certificates and is analysed by a range of demographic metrics and standard occupation codes across a very wide range of jobs.

While Police Scotland senior managers will have knowledge of a death by suicide involving a serving officer or member of staff, their focus will be on any lessons to be learned and supporting those left behind. There are also complexities around capturing and retaining such data, and incidences where officers or staff have left the organisation, and the service has not been alerted to a death. For these reasons, the Authority views the National Records of Scotland as the official source for reliable data on deaths by probable suicide. A single source collecting data on a standard method creates reliable information and allows policy comparisons of frequency across public and private services. The Authority does not expect Police Scotland to duplicate the publication.

Notwithstanding the above, the COPFS reported to the Criminal Justice Committee last year that every unexplained death in Scotland, including a death by suicide, is investigated and this includes an examination of the individuals employment, or duties played a part on their decision to take their own life. The outcome of those investigations is shared with the individuals family.

The Samaritans caution against suicide being oversimplified and regularly highlight that most deaths by suicide are extremely complex, where no single event or factor has led someone to take their own life. The Authority's focus is therefore on ensuring there are effective proactive and preventative support available to our workforce to help them manage their wellbeing, and manage the impact of trauma, stress, and burnout throughout their policing journey.

Supporting officers and staff to improve their personal resilience, as a preventative measure, aims to protect against occupational stressors. The Authority is also seeking measurement of progress against organisational stressors such as time taken to deal with complaints, leave lost through court appearances and attendance at mental health incidents prior to handover to more appropriate professionals.

I trust this update is helpful. The Authority looks forward to providing further evidence and answering members questions on 11 September 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

MARTYN EVANS
Chair