



SCOTTISH POLICE  
AUTHORITY  
ÙGH DARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA



# Police Scrutiny in Scotland – Public Briefing

Briefing No. 13



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OFFICIAL

## Summary

The Scottish Police Authority and COSLA are committed to strengthening and enhancing the scrutiny landscape for policing in Scotland.

This public briefing provides an overview of current arrangements and context for policing scrutiny at a local, regional and national level in Scotland.

## Background and context

Scotland is striving to build a robust and effective system where local government councillors and the Scottish Police Authority hold policing accountable. The recent strategic [partnership agreement](#) between the Scottish Police Authority, Police Scotland and COSLA strengthened further our growing collaboration and partnership.

Policing by consent, the foundation of policing across the UK, is derived "*not from fear but almost exclusively from public co-operation with the police, induced by them designedly by behaviour which secures and maintains for them the approval, respect and affection of the public*". In simpler words – Police Scotland's legitimacy rests on policing with the full consent of communities of interest and geography across Scotland.

Local democratic oversight is therefore critical. There is in every part of Scotland a local authority committee or sub-committee focused on the scrutiny of local policing. Effective local oversight ensures that police forces are accountable to the communities they serve. It allows for transparency and scrutiny of police actions, ensuring that the police are acting within the law and in accordance with the expectations of the local population.

Within the Scottish Police Authority, the Policing Performance Committee has a specific responsibility for oversight, scrutiny and assessment of national police performance. This committee bridges the scrutiny responsibility with Local Authorities, with the chair of the COSLA Community Wellbeing Board an active and formal member.

## Building trust

Local oversight promotes community engagement and fosters positive relationships. Elected representatives raise concerns, advocate for change, and ensure that the police are operating in line with the democratic values and principles of the community. Local oversight allows for dialogue and collaboration between local residents, community groups, and the police, which can help build trust, improve communication, and enhance cooperation in tackling crime and maintaining public safety. Local oversight compliments and adds considerable value to the national oversight of the Scottish Police Authority.

In 2021 the Authority, COSLA and Police Scotland undertook a [tripartite review](#) of local police oversight, to identify areas of development and best practice which could then inform future local oversight processes. The review generated a series of recommendations, covering the sharing of good practice, widening engagement processes for the development of local plans, alignment and synergy of plans at a local level, making best use of all local data to inform local priorities, and enhancing data availability. Following the review, the SPA and COSLA published a joint framework document to support Elected Members in their scrutiny of Local Police Plans.

Different areas have unique policing needs and priorities. Local oversight encourages the development of policing strategies that are tailored to address local issues and needs. It allows local authorities and community representatives to determine their own policing priorities and strategies within the national policing framework.



## Local Police Planning

Local Police Plans (LPPs) are drafted for each local authority to set the strategic direction for policing in the local area. Each Plan sets out agreed local priorities and objectives. It also details the arrangements that contribute to the delivery of other relevant local outcomes, strategies and development plans, including those that are defined through community planning, namely in Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIPs). The Plans are drafted by local police command teams, in consultation with local authorities and stakeholders, and require to be approved by the local authority. The LPPs for 2023-26 can be viewed here: [Your Community - Police Scotland](#)

Local Police Plans describe how the local area will deliver on commitments from the national [Strategic Police Plan](#), approved by the Scottish Police Authority, and the Chief Constable's [Annual Police Plan](#), which is endorsed by the Authority. Local oversight enables the development of policing strategies that are specifically tailored to address local issues effectively..

Police Scrutiny Conveners promote accountability, community engagement, tailored approaches, local knowledge, and democratic control. They ensure that policing remains responsive, effective, and accountable to the diverse needs and expectations of different communities across the country. Local authorities and their elected representatives are more familiar with the specific challenges, demographics, and social dynamics of their communities, which can help shape effective policing strategies and resource allocation.

## Working Together

A COSLA Police Scrutiny Conveners Forum meets twice a year. The Forum provides a valuable space for cross local boundary discussion and input on national policy issues by Elected Members. It is an opportunity for regular engagement between councillors, the Chair of the SPA and Police Scotland senior officers.

## Working Together

The Forum has considered a range of matters, including - but not limited to - local police planning, Brexit, the response to Covid-19 and a range of more operational issues, such as spiking and CCTV. The Forum was central to the tripartite review of Local Police Planning, participating in a series of focused workshops during the review process. Specific engagement sessions have also been delivered on key public interest issues such as use of technologies, including body worn video.

The Authority Chair and relevant regional Assistant Chief Constable Authority also host joint regional scrutiny convenor meetings on a six-monthly basis, with councillors engaging in thematic and topical discussion across the three local policing regions of Scotland. These sessions review national support and specialist functions to provide information and engage with convenors on the value to delivery of services to local policing.

## National Oversight

Local oversight and national oversight of policing in Scotland are wholly complimentary. We are working in partnership to strengthen national and local scrutiny to ensure our police service is accountable to the communities it serves and therefore has the robust support of those communities.

The emerging Scottish system seeks to allow for greater transparency and scrutiny of police actions. Police oversight is crucial for maintaining accountability, transparency, trust, and respect for civil liberties. It serves as a vital safeguard and public interest that policing is conducted in a fair, ethical, and lawful manner, promoting all our safety and wellbeing while upholding the rights and dignity of individuals in the community. We will continue working in partnership with Local Government to strengthen these arrangements and ensure that local policing can be effectively shaped by local communities and their needs.

## 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:

@ScotPolAuth

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