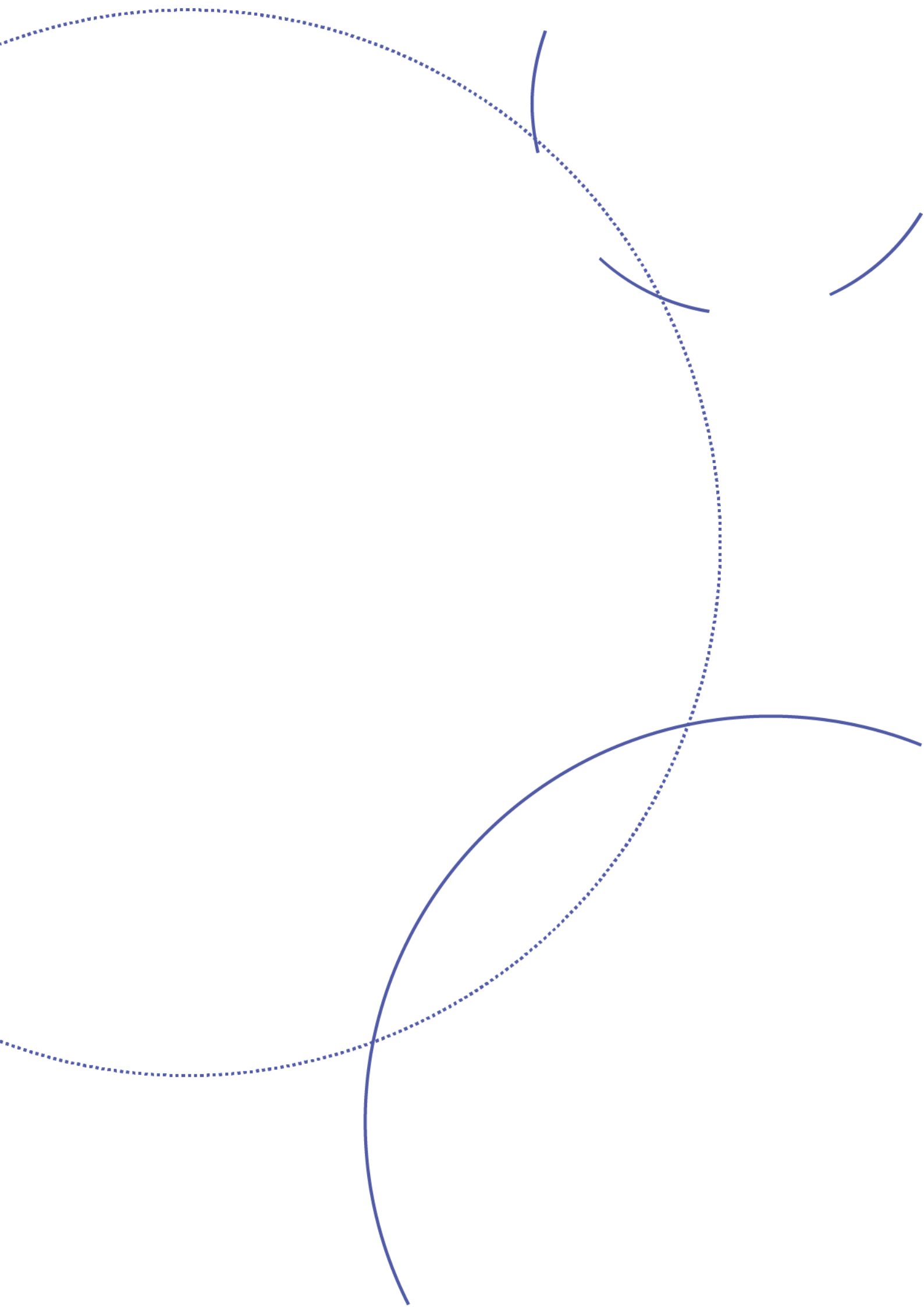




# HMICS Frontline Focus – Wellbeing

April 2024

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# HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

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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).<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> [Chapter 11, Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012.](#)



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.<sup>2</sup>

**This 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.**








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<sup>2</sup> HMICS, [Corporate Plan 2021-24](#), 1 February 2022.



# Contents

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	<b>Page</b>
 Our inspection	4
 Key findings	7
 Recommendations	9
 Areas for development	10
 Examples of good practice	11
 Background	12
 Our findings	16



## Our inspection

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Policing is delivered by people for people. Officers and staff support communities during crisis, witnessing trauma, distress and acts of violence on a daily basis. They are exposed to incidents and experiences that most people will not see or experience in their lifetime, and they do this willingly – often running towards danger as others run away. It is essential that officers and staff are looked after, so they can continue to deliver this service to the people of Scotland.

The purpose of Police Scotland is to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland. Outcome 4 of the joint strategy for policing states that:

*“our people are supported through a positive working environment, enabling them to serve the public”*

To achieve this outcome, Police Scotland has committed to prioritising wellbeing and keeping its people safe, well-equipped and protected.

In developing HMICS’s scrutiny plan in 2022, we committed to engaging with those working on the frontline to better understand the experience of officers and staff who directly provide service to our communities. This was intended to be a short, sharp focus where the voice of the frontline could be heard directly; a ‘frontline focus.’ This intention formed the basis of our inspection design, and focused on engaging with those on the frontline across different geographical and business areas, who deliver services to the public, 24/7, 365 days a year.

During our inspection it was clear from conversations with officers and staff that a light touch approach was not sufficient, and that we needed to do more to reflect their views; we intend to produce shorter reports on future subjects but, in this instance, we recognised that the wellbeing of officers and staff deserved more. As a result, this report maintains the focus on the frontline, but in more depth than initially intended. Having heard about the significant investment of time and effort from those who deliver policing services and the toll that this can take on their physical and mental health, this report draws attention to the concerns raised, highlighting the disconnect felt between the factors which negatively impact on wellbeing and current wellbeing provisions.



We learned from research and subject matter experts that most people will be well most of the time. It is generally accepted that trauma, distress and other negative operational experiences are expected by officers and staff, and are accepted by them as part of the role. However, it is essential that, when trauma is experienced, there is a supportive environment around them to aid recovery; where this support is absent, what would be generally accepted becomes more difficult. We were repeatedly told about the impact of resourcing, how the reduced numbers of officers and staff on the frontline was significantly affecting absence levels, work-related stress and job satisfaction. This is compounded further by the inability to take time off, rest days being disrupted, which impact on recovery and time with family and friends, and feeling unsupported by leadership and the wider organisation.

This lack of resources on the frontline not only impacts on the ability to deliver the levels of service aspired to, but also affects time spent decompressing with colleagues, the ability to build trusting relationships with supervisors and, more practically, to access and engage with the range of wellbeing information and resource that is on offer.

We heard consistently that more needs to be done internally to ensure that the pressure associated with the dynamic and demanding nature of policing does not disproportionately impact the frontline and that the load should be more evenly shared.

On a practical level, we found examples of dilapidated buildings – with holes in the roof, water running down walls and barely functioning furniture. This lack of physical comfort and security in the workplace is draining, and damaging to feelings of psychosocial safety (which is crucial to a sense of wellbeing in the workplace). Fundamentally, officers and staff felt this showed they were not valued by the organisation.

A key element of what we were told was that there was a lack of understanding, or acknowledgement, of these difficulties in the workplace, and that wellbeing provision – although welcomed did not respond to or mitigate these factors.



Police Scotland is making significant efforts and has initiatives in place to address wellbeing. Such initiatives are often laudable and we are not, in any way, dismissing them – such efforts will have impact on those who take them up. However, it is often the ones who need help most – who described to us the significant stressors they are under who don't have the time or capacity to look for wellbeing support, since they are struggling to complete daily tasks on time, without incurring overtime. There needs to be a more fundamental understanding of what is causing difficulty and how this can be addressed.

We welcome the recent announcement of the Chief Constable, in seeking to focus less on officer numbers and more on prioritising what should be done by police officers, working collaboratively with other services to reduce inappropriate demand on officers and staff. Such a focus should help ease the pressure of expecting the frontline to do more with less. The challenge remains, of course, for policing to live within its budget, while delivering a high quality of service and protecting the wellbeing of the staff and officers. This is not a new area of scrutiny and we have commented before on strategic workforce planning and the need to define a future target operating model. A new people strategy and strategic workforce plan are now in place, but must be driven hard to deliver a new model of policing that is sustainable, both financially and operationally.

The value and the importance of the frontline must be recognised and acknowledged; accepting that demand is relentless and resources finite and then taking steps to balance those competing claims.

**Craig Naylor**

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary

April 2024





## Key findings

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- We found inconsistency across Scotland in the level of resource (human and financial) dedicated to support officer and staff wellbeing.
- We found little evidence of a cohesive wellbeing strategy and while we found a great deal of effort, well-intentioned activity and wellbeing initiatives, we found no evidence of a mechanism to evaluate the worth of these, or to share best practice.
- Officers and staff cited organisational stressors as the primary factor they perceived as impacting negatively on their wellbeing, however we found no recognition or reference to this in any of the work currently being undertaken in relation to wellbeing.
- We heard that resourcing levels on the frontline are having a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of officers and staff, with those on the frontline feeling unable to provide the level of service they would wish. This results in diminishing job satisfaction.
- Cancellation of rest days and the inability to take rest days when requested has a significant impact on the wellbeing of frontline officers and staff. This impact is not the same throughout the organisation, with those on the frontline most affected by it.
- We found inconsistency in the standard of physical working environments across the country. Working environments for frontline officers and staff were, in some cases, significantly lower in standard than those used by corporate functions and specialist divisions.
- Interviewees repeatedly cited that family, peer and line management support was critical in maintaining good wellbeing, when experiencing life or work challenges.
- We heard mixed views on the extent to which officers and staff felt that wellbeing was an organisational priority. While many considered that the organisational commitment to wellbeing had improved, many felt it was simply paid lip service.



- When those on the frontline we spoke to experience points of crisis, they feel supported by their line managers and the wider organisation.
- We heard that line managers have not received training in respect of wellbeing and that they rely on experiential learning. This has resulted in inconsistent levels of support from line managers.
- We found an absence of face-to-face management conversations between line managers and those they supervise, at all levels in the organisation.
- We did not find any evidence of a wellbeing impact assessment approach in considering how decisions or policies would impact on staff and officer wellbeing.
- Frontline officers and staff we spoke to had only a vague awareness of wellbeing provisions and services provided by Police Scotland.
- We found an absence of engagement with officers and staff about their wellbeing needs and a lack of evaluation of existing wellbeing provision.



# Recommendations

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## Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should develop a wellbeing plan that has appropriate governance, structure and activity, reflecting the People Strategy, and delivered equitably across the organisation.

## Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should implement effective actions to understand and address organisational stressors, including those caused by perceived unfairness in application of process/procedures.

## Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should demonstrate flexibility in the deployment of resources across the entire organisation to reduce the impact of low resourcing levels on the wellbeing of frontline officers and staff.

## Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should ensure that its Estates Strategy promotes parity and ensures an appropriate standard of facilities are provided across its estate.

## Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should conduct wellbeing impact assessments when developing new and existing strategies, policies and procedures.

## Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should ensure that wellbeing training is provided to all line managers to ensure a supportive, proactive and preventative approach. Existing training should be reviewed and amended to reflect the new People Strategy.

## Recommendation 7

Police Scotland should promote a culture and embed a process of carrying out and evidencing frequent conversations with line managers, which includes a discussion on wellbeing.



## Areas for development

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Areas for development	Number
Police Scotland should re-visit the proposal to join the National Police Wellbeing Service and the subsequent adoption of the Blue Light Wellbeing Framework.	1
Police Scotland should improve awareness of wellbeing services among frontline officers and staff.	2
Police Scotland should improve engagement with officers and staff to address real time challenges, enable ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of wellbeing services and identify gaps in service provision.	3



## Examples of good practice

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Examples of good practice	Number
Officers and staff are supported by their line managers and the organisation in times of personal crisis. There are a range of policies and procedures in place to facilitate this.	1



## Background

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1. The [HMICS Scrutiny Plan 2022-2025](#) highlighted that there had been a significant number of comments received in our consultation about the challenges faced by frontline officers and staff. In response to these, HMICS committed to conduct a series of strategic reviews, focusing on the frontline, with the purpose of exploring those challenges, identifying issues and providing recommendations to drive improvement. Wellbeing was selected as the first review of this nature, given its significant priority to Police Scotland and its impact on officers and staff.
2. The aim of this review was to engage directly with frontline officers and staff to identify the issues they consider support or impact on their wellbeing, and to assess the work undertaken by Police Scotland to improve wellbeing.

### Definition of frontline

3. The term 'frontline' can mean different things to different people. HMICS have chosen the commonly used and accepted definition used in [Demanding Times](#) – HMIC's frontline and police visibility report.

*"The police frontline comprises those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law."*

### Wellbeing

4. Wellbeing encompasses a number of factors and is understood to be defined as how people feel and function on a number of levels. Recent research has focused on the psychological wellbeing, resilience and mental health of police officers, but wellbeing also encompasses physical, social and financial factors.



## Methodology

5. We used the latest HMICS Inspection Framework, based on the [European Foundation for Quality Management \(EFQM\) Excellence Model and Best Value characteristics](#), to structure a risk-based and proportionate review, focused on improving the delivery of policing in Scotland. Our objectives were to:
  - Identify the factors that officers and staff consider support or impact their wellbeing
  - Assess the approach taken by Police Scotland in comparison to recognised professional guidance and approaches elsewhere
  - Engage with frontline officers and staff to assess their awareness of Police Scotland's approach to wellbeing, associated activities and the effectiveness of this approach.
  
6. We used a range of tools to gather information for this inspection, including:
  - Engagement with organisations such as the SPA, the Scottish Police Federation and Lifelines Scotland (a project supporting the health and wellbeing of emergency responders)
  - Review of relevant documents, including policies, procedures and survey results
  - Consideration of professional guidance
  - Attendance at relevant Police Scotland and SPA meetings
  - Interviews with stakeholders and key members of staff.
  
7. Since our primary objective was to understand the perceptions of frontline officers and staff, we used a combination of focus groups, interviews and observation. We set up an online polling platform to capture views and comments directly from those taking part in our focus groups and selected five divisions within Police Scotland, to give a breadth of geography, size, function and a mix of both officers and police staff. Those divisions we selected included:
  - West Command - Argyll and West Dunbartonshire (L Division)
  - East Command - Forth Valley (C Division)
  - North Command - North East (A Division)
  - Contact Command and Control (C3)
  - Custody - Criminal Justice Services Division (CJSD)



## Context of wellbeing within Police Scotland

8. In September 2017, Police Scotland launched its [Your Wellbeing Matters](#) campaign. This supported four areas of wellbeing (physical, psychological, social and financial) with work to promote those internal and partner services available to support officers and staff.
9. The programme aimed to promote and embed an inclusive approach to wellbeing within Police Scotland and the SPA, taking proactive measures and promoting good practice so that officers and staff felt informed, valued and supported.
10. Police Scotland's [People Strategy 2018-2021](#) outlined three strategic priorities:
  - inspiring leadership
  - positive environment
  - organisational health.
11. Wellbeing was described as a key theme throughout the strategy, with a particular focus on a positive environment:

*“To create a positive and healthy working environment, we will invest in and have a strong focus on the wellbeing and development of our people. We will support our people to deliver an effective service through a culture of empowerment and opportunity.”*
12. In May 2023, the SPA published its [Joint Strategy for Policing](#) for 2023-2026. Outcome 4 of the Strategy relates specifically to wellbeing:

*“Our people are supported through a positive working environment enabling them to serve the public.”*
13. The strategy goes on to state that officer and staff safety and wellbeing are at the heart of Police Scotland's commitments and that it will:

*“Prioritise wellbeing and keep our people safe, well equipped and protected.”*





14. In November 2023, the SPA approved [Police Scotland's People Strategy for 2024-2027](#). The strategy sets out wellbeing as a strategic objective, underpinned by three commitments:
  - We have a coordinated approach to health, safety and wellbeing which meets the full needs of our people,
  - Our Total Reward approach is fair, transparent and recognises achievement,
  - Our people have the uniform, equipment and skills they need to keep themselves and the communities they serve safe.
  
15. Police Scotland provides a quarterly health and wellbeing update to the [Scottish Police Authority People Committee](#), which gives an update on wellbeing activity. The purpose of the People Committee is to provide oversight, scrutiny and assurance to the SPA Board on all significant workforce matters relating to Police Scotland and the SPA.



## Our findings

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### Framework and governance

16. HMICS found no consistent model or framework for the delivery of wellbeing across the country. There was evidence of collaboration within local policing command areas, but this did not extend across wider portfolio areas or with the national health and wellbeing function. People plans, aligned to the People Strategy, existed in both local policing and national divisions. Activity aligned to these plans is reported to regional people boards, which should be chaired by the relevant assistant chief constables (ACC). However, we found that some ACCs had devolved the chairing of these to chief superintendents, or they were held infrequently. This left the impression that the delivery of the people plans was not a priority. We could not identify any direct strategic scrutiny of the regional people plans or their delivery.
  
17. We consider that this lack of strategic scrutiny has resulted in the disparity we found in the allocation of both human and financial resource dedicated to wellbeing across the country. We found that while some areas and divisions had dedicated wellbeing staff, most did not. Local Policing West had secured a budget of £250,000 for wellbeing, but there is no such budget allocated to Local Policing East or North. People we spoke to on the frontline felt that the provision of wellbeing services very much depended on where in the organisation an individual worked; our observations supported this view. We were made aware of a number of positive wellbeing initiatives that were exclusively offered to those working in specific areas. While we acknowledge the effort and innovation in providing these services, this disparity in provision is felt by those unable to participate.



18. Police Scotland provided evidence of “*The Little Things*” campaign, which formed part of the [‘Your Voice Matters’ Implementation Plan](#). Its stated intention is to allow officers and staff to suggest improvements that would remove or reduce hindrance stressors.<sup>3</sup> This has evolved into requests that relate to anything wellbeing-related, but there are stringent rules governing what the process can be used for. The administrative burden that this caused was highlighted as a hindrance stressor itself by those charged with administering the scheme. Many staff and officers we spoke to had been asked what they would like to spend money on, but then found that what they asked for was not allowed within the conditions of the scheme, or what they received was different to what was requested. There was also a sense that the majority of items purchased under this banner were things that the organisation should provide as core provision, such as additional lighting and kitchen equipment.
19. In February 2022, Police Scotland produced a [Health and Wellbeing Programme Review - Statement of Intent](#) outlining a four-stage process by the health and wellbeing team to shape the next generation health and wellbeing programme.
20. The output from this review, the [Health and Wellbeing Framework](#), is described as a *‘proactive, preventative and person-centred approach’* and identifies health and wellbeing action plan areas. We understand that a programme manager has recently been appointed to lead on the further development of this framework.
21. We found little evidence of a cohesive wellbeing strategy or plan. We did find a great deal of effort, well-intentioned activity and initiatives – but with no mechanism for evaluating their worth or sharing best practice.
22. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) [Employee Health and Wellbeing Viewpoint](#) states that wellbeing should be a core element of any HR strategy and central to the way any organisation operates. It advises that activity should not centre around one-off initiatives, but should be based on employee need.

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<sup>3</sup> Hindrance stressors refer to work-related demands; individuals view these demands as constraints that hinder their performance and achievements at work. This impacts strongly on wellbeing and reduces their engagement in discretionary behaviours.



23. We found no alignment between current regional/divisional people plans and the health and wellbeing framework. We recognise that the new People Strategy was only recently published, and the delivery plans aligned to it should consider these issues.

#### **Recommendation 1**

Police Scotland should develop a wellbeing plan that has appropriate governance, structure and activity, reflecting the People Strategy, and delivered equitably across the organisation.

24. [The National Police Wellbeing Service](#) has developed the [Blue Light Wellbeing Framework](#) (BLWF), which is a self-assessment tool developed by the College of Policing. The framework enables organisations to audit and benchmark themselves against an independent set of standards that have been tailored to meet the specialist needs of emergency services staff. The framework also provides an option for an inter-force peer review to avoid costs associated with outside accreditation. We understand that a proposal to sign up to the National Police Wellbeing service was submitted to the Police Scotland Wellbeing Governance Board on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023 and was approved in principle, subject to final approval from the Senior Leadership Board. However, we were unable to establish the final outcome of this proposal.
25. Police Scotland highlighted the benefits of the BLWF to the SPA People Committee with the stated intention of adopting this self-assessment tool. However, we have since learned that Police Scotland has allocated funding to commission an independent health and wellbeing review.

#### **Area for development 1**

Police Scotland should re-visit the proposal to join the National Police Wellbeing Service and the subsequent adoption of the Blue Light Wellbeing Framework.



## Organisational stressors

26. The [World Health Organization - Mental Health at Work](#) report provides evidence-based global public health guidance on organisational interventions for the promotion of positive mental health and prevention of mental health conditions. It sets out 10 categories of psychosocial risk factors: work content/task design; workload and work pace; work schedule; control; environment and equipment; organisational culture and function; interpersonal relationships at work; role in organisation; career development; and home-work interface. It offers 13 recommendations, including;

**Recommendation 2** - *Organisational interventions for health, humanitarian and emergency workers: organisational interventions that address psychosocial risk factors, for example reductions to workload and schedule changes or improvement in communication and teamwork, may be considered for health, humanitarian and emergency workers to reduce emotional distress and improve work-related outcomes.*

27. [Organisational and individual perspectives of police wellbeing in England and Wales](#)<sup>4</sup> considers that negative psychological wellbeing is more likely a result of organisational rather than operational stressors, stemming from inadequate training, overtime demands, police culture and issues with managers and peers.
28. A research paper from 2020<sup>5</sup> cautions that the true picture of police mental health and wellbeing is not understood, and while the nature of policing has been identified as a risk factor in poor wellbeing, a number of studies have also recognised that organisational – rather than operational – stressors are significant for police officers (Bishop et al 2007; Shane 2010).
29. We heard time and again that organisational stressors were having a significant negative impact on officers and staff, at all levels. We also found no evidence that interventions such as those described by WHO were being considered or implemented.

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<sup>4</sup> Independent research published in the Policing Journal.

<sup>5</sup> Syed S, Ashwick R, Schlosser M, Jones R, Rowe S, Billings J. Global prevalence and risk factors for mental health problems in police personnel: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Occup Environ Med.* 2020 Nov;77(11):737-747. doi: 10.1136/oemed-2020-106498. Epub 2020 May 21. PMID: 32439827.



30. We heard that increasing workloads were leaving officers and staff feeling unable to complete tasks to the standard they wished, diminishing job satisfaction and increasing levels of stress. Echoing key findings reported in our [Organisational Culture Inspection](#), we identified a range of cultural aspects that were felt to impact on wellbeing, such as the invisible hierarchy between police officers and police staff, unfair custom and practice, with privileges extended to some and not others. This was particularly apparent within C3 service centres, where the operating model, dynamic monitoring and reaction to performance left many staff feeling devalued.
31. We also identified themes associated with particular roles and environments. We heard from officers working in remote rural areas that access to training was problematic and that the impact of not receiving training was far greater than on urban colleagues. This was due in part to the lack of immediate access to other trained staff. Rural officers were also far less likely to have direct contact with line managers and felt a sense of isolation.
32. Police Scotland's Wellbeing Framework identifies a number of work and life events as drivers for poor wellbeing, but it does not recognise organisational stressors or psychosocial hazards which we repeatedly heard about during our inspection, such as resource levels, culture, leadership behaviours and working environments. It is therefore unclear how Police Scotland intends to respond to the wellbeing needs of its frontline officers and staff if such aspects are not considered within its framework.
33. [British Standards Institute ISO 45003 – Psychological Health and Safety at Work](#) states that organisations should;
  - *understand the underlying sources of harm before control measures are considered to improve the effectiveness of activities to manage psychosocial risk,*
  - *establish, implement and maintain processes for hazard identification that are ongoing and proactive.*
34. We were told that there is no current alignment between health and safety and wellbeing, and we did not see evidence of any organisational risk assessments pertaining to psychosocial hazards.



35. Police Scotland provided information on its analysis of long-term psychological absence, with the findings remaining neutral on causal factors beyond those that are societal. There was no acknowledgement of organisational stressors or psychosocial hazards being a factor; instead the report concluded that there was nothing to support or deny that organisational stressors may impact on absence levels.
36. The CIPD [Employee Health and Wellbeing Viewpoint](#) stresses the importance of having an in-depth understanding of psychological absence – suggesting that efforts to improve wellbeing will have only short-lived success if causal factors are not addressed. This understanding should then form the basis of any preventative activity.

### **Recommendation 2**

Police Scotland should implement effective actions to understand and address organisational stressors, including those caused by perceived unfairness in application of process/procedures.

### **Resource levels**

37. At every level of the organisation we heard that resource levels were felt to be disproportionately impacting on the wellbeing of frontline officers and staff. Those on the frontline – and those in specialist units – told us that the frontline is consistently more negatively impacted by resourcing levels and that this has resulted in officers trying to find roles away from the frontline to limit the impact on their wellbeing.
38. Many of those frontline officers and staff we spoke to indicated that they felt that current staffing levels in their areas left them feeling vulnerable and, at times, unsafe. We heard repeated references to officers and line managers being asked to ‘*risk manage*’ low resourcing levels. We were not given any clear explanation as to what ‘*risk managing*’ entails, but it appeared that the term simply acknowledges less than optimal resources, with senior leaders accepting that risk. The ambiguity around this term is only increasing officers’ and staff’s sense of vulnerability.



39. Frontline resourcing levels are impacted not only by sickness absence, but by other demands too. This results in absence from core duties such as attending court, policing events (e.g. football or festivals) and performing tasks that utilise specialisms (e.g. carrying out search duties). While we were told that colleagues in the Criminal Justice Division are working both locally and nationally to reduce the impact of court abstraction, officers consistently cited court attendance as one of the most frequent causes of cancelled rest days.
40. The cancellation of rest days disrupts the quality of recovery time away from work, with officers and staff also reporting difficulties in trying to re-roster rest days.
41. Operational base levels (OBLs)<sup>6</sup> are set by Police Scotland to indicate appropriate resource levels within areas of the organisation. Those on the frontline told us that it is commonplace to be expected to work below OBL, but then to be refused time off due to the area being below OBL. We heard that OBLs are not consistently applied across the organisation, which creates difficulties in flexing resources and identifying resources for events and operations. We consider this an example of unfairness in the application of process.

### **Recommendation 3**

Police Scotland should demonstrate flexibility in the deployment of resources across the entire organisation to reduce the impact of low resourcing levels on the wellbeing of frontline officers and staff.

### **Police estate**

42. During this and other inspections, we have noted a significant variance in the quality of workplace accommodation throughout the organisation – and that those offices and stations where frontline officers and staff work tend to have the worst conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> Operational base levels give an indication of the minimum safe levels of staffing for each shift of officers within a defined geographical area. These were set early in the life of Police Scotland and have not been systematically reviewed.





43. This was particularly noticeable during a visit to Rothesay, where we found the station had water running down the walls. Officers were using buckets to catch the rainwater and placing towels on the windowsills to stop water ingress; and a room set aside for officer wellbeing had wallpaper peeling off the wall as a result of water coming through the roof.
44. This was in stark contrast to our visit to Police Scotland's Dalmarnock building, one of the most modern in the Police Scotland estate, which accommodates amongst other departments specialist units, human resources and the wellbeing team. Although it is a modern, purpose-built facility, there was extensive remodelling taking place to improve it further (to the extent that taps in refreshment areas now provide hot, cold and sparkling water).

#### **Recommendation 4**

Police Scotland should ensure that its Estates Strategy promotes parity and ensures an appropriate standard of facilities are provided across its estate.

45. The inequality identified in the standard of operational buildings, the approach to resourcing, and references to the invisible hierarchy between staff and officers were all recognised in our [Organisational Culture Inspection](#), recommendation 2, which stated that:

*“Police Scotland should develop and deliver a set of actions to address the fundamental inequalities between officers and police staff and frontline policing and other national/specialist functions.”*

#### **Factors that positively impact wellbeing**

46. We heard overwhelmingly that there were three particular factors that positively impacted on the wellbeing of frontline officers and staff. These were time with family and friends; peer support; and line manager support. As described above, the ability to have meaningful rest, and to take time off when appropriate to those requesting it, is significantly impacted by the lack of available resource on the frontline.



47. Peer support and line manager support have been identified in research as a significant protective factor for wellbeing. We heard repeatedly during our fieldwork that *“the people around you make a hard job easier”* and there was recognition of peers being a supportive factor.

### Wellbeing as an organisational priority

48. Officers and staff reported mixed views on whether they felt that wellbeing was an organisational priority. Those who did consider it so mainly referred to line manager support as the reason. Many cited personal experiences of crisis, and reported being supported by their line management (and the wider organisation) at their time of need. Most of our interviewees felt that the organisation would offer support if people needed it in such circumstances.
49. There are a range of policies to support officers and staff who may require time away from work, or flexibility in their working hours, to respond to personal matters (such as bereavement or caring responsibilities).

#### Example of good practice 1

Officers and staff are supported by their line managers and the organisation in times of personal crisis. There are a range of policies and procedures in place to facilitate this.

50. While many considered Police Scotland's commitment to wellbeing has improved, there was still a strong sense that much of what is said is lip service. During our fieldwork, we heard of a change in policy that resulted in officers no longer being allowed to retain five rest days within a rest day bank. While we recognise that this change is in line with regulation 18 of [Police Service Of Scotland Regulations 2013](#),<sup>7</sup> we heard that the decision and rationale was not well communicated, and there was no demonstrable understanding of the unintended consequences this change would have on the wellbeing of staff and officers.

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<sup>7</sup> Regulation 18 relates to the time or day within which time off in compensation for time spent on duty will be granted.



51. Changes to the authorisation and use of overtime was another example where we identified a lack of understanding of the impact this would have on officer and staff wellbeing. We were told of officers feeling compelled to work overtime without payment as a result of overtime restrictions being imposed. One example of this included an officer presenting a prisoner at a custody centre 30 miles from their home station (at the end of their shift) not being allowed to claim overtime for being retained on duty beyond their shift end. Failing to consider the wellbeing impact of such changes to policy may prove to be counterproductive, since such additional burdens have the potential to increase work-related stress.
  
52. Police Scotland previously signed up to [The Mental Health at Work Commitment for the Emergency Services](#), which formed part of the 'Blue Light Together' package of mental health support for emergency services. Part of this commitment related to the introduction of wellbeing impact assessments for new and existing policies. While we heard there was an intention to develop a wellbeing impact assessment approach and found references to this in reports to SPA People Committee we were advised this has not yet been achieved. We believe that the introduction of wellbeing impact assessments will assist with the identification of unintended consequences such as those found during the inspection and provide an opportunity for mitigations to be developed and deployed.

### **Recommendation 5**

Police Scotland should conduct wellbeing impact assessments when developing new and existing strategies, policies and procedures.

### **Leadership**

53. We spoke to many supervisors in different areas of frontline policing and recognised their individual commitment to the wellbeing of their staff. These interviews identified, almost without exception, that their skills in people management were self-taught, or self-sourced from organisations external to Police Scotland. Some also reported – that while they knew what was the right thing to do – they were being prevented from doing so as a result of pressure of work or direct instruction from leadership. An example of this included C3 supervisors being asked to refrain from developmental or supportive conversations with staff, to allow them to remain answering calls.



54. We repeatedly heard that line managers had received no training in respect of wellbeing, particularly in the preventative space. Where individuals could recall training, it involved procedural aspects such as absence management. Most described experiential learning, which was dependent on those they were learning from – often experiencing ‘*what not to do*’, rather than being provided with examples of good practice.
55. Police Scotland has recently developed the People Management Development Programme (PMDP) as a way of investing in leaders to support the workforce. We understand that this programme is in its infancy, with a pilot recently concluded.
56. The PMDP is a two-day training programme for existing leaders within the organisation and devotes a full day to encouraging managers to support the wellbeing of their team. The training lists the benefits to the organisation, while also highlighting “*it is the right thing to do*”. It sets out what wellbeing support services are available, how to access them, and how to use preventative conversations.
57. As part of our inspection, we took part in training delivered by [Lifelines Scotland](#). This NHS-supported facility is available to all blue light services to promote and deliver training on peer support as a preventative measure, and to provide psychological first aid and support following trauma exposure. This training provided by Lifelines is much more aligned to preventative activity, and keeping people well, rather than reacting when things go wrong.
58. Police Scotland has been working with Lifelines to develop a facilitator programme, with the intention that officers and staff will facilitate Lifelines sessions within their own business areas. This will include probationer training instructors, who will then provide elements of the training as part of the probationer training programme at the Scottish Police College.

### **Recommendation 6**

Police Scotland should ensure that wellbeing training is provided to all line managers to ensure a supportive, proactive and preventative approach. Existing training should be reviewed and amended to reflect the new People Strategy.



59. We found an absence of one-to-one conversations between line managers and their staff, at all levels in the organisation. Concerningly, many senior leaders told us that this would be difficult or uncomfortable to do, evidencing a prevalence of stigma around offering wellbeing support. This lack of regular and focused contact with line managers inhibits the opportunity to build trusting, supportive relationships. We consider this a barrier to the early identification of matters affecting wellbeing, and the provision of support.
60. We were repeatedly told by supervisors that there is an open-door policy to access support. Conversely, frontline officers and staff reported that supervisors are too busy to listen to them. The door may be open, but the culture remains such that it is rare anyone will walk through it and start a conversation.
61. We did witness a first-hand example of someone who had experienced a one-to-one conversation with their line manager. They had been absent, and had taken the opportunity in their return-to-work interview to raise some wellbeing concerns. They were very clear that – had they not been sitting in the return-to-work interview – they would never have raised the issue, despite knowing they needed support. The conversation ended with a positive appraisal of their work, and the impact on the officer was tangible.
62. The new People Strategy mentions MyCareer as a regular one-to-one conversation, with the opportunity to focus on wellbeing of the individual. MyCareer was discussed during this inspection, and a significant focus was placed on it during our [Organisational Culture Inspection](#). Overwhelmingly, we heard that there is no acknowledgement or space for discussion about wellbeing, and that it is a career development tool only.
63. In 2017, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, commissioned an independent review into how employers could better support individual wellbeing. The resulting [Thriving at Work](#) review, conducted by Stevenson and Farmer, identifies core standards for employers, stating organisations should promote effective people management to ensure all employees have regular conversations about their health and wellbeing with their line manager.



64. [HMICS Thematic Inspection of Police Scotland Training and Development - Phase 1](#) contained a recommendation that *“Police Scotland should develop a systematic process to record wellbeing conversations and considerations in support of its Wellbeing Strategy”*.
65. We spoke to some line managers who clearly recognised the benefit of one-to-one conversations and dedicated much of their time to supporting their staff; however, they felt that this was not appreciated by senior leaders and, in some cases, was actively discouraged. This reflects what we heard in the [Organisational Culture Inspection](#), where we found organisational conformity to be prevalent, with many leaders at each rank valuing operational skills more highly than interpersonal and ‘softer’ skills and being unwilling to show personal vulnerability.
66. It is essential that wellbeing support is modelled by leaders at all levels in the organisation. The CIPD [Employee Health and Wellbeing Viewpoint](#) suggests that senior leaders play a key part in embedding actions to show the importance of wellbeing provision. Leaders at all levels told us that they did not engage in one-to-one conversations with either their supervisor or their direct reports – yet they still had an expectation that everyone was receiving a one-to-one conversation from their line manager.

### **Recommendation 7**

Police Scotland should promote a culture and embed a process of carrying out and evidencing frequent conversations with line managers, which includes a discussion on wellbeing.

### **Frontline awareness of wellbeing provision**

67. Our focus groups demonstrated a high level of awareness of services such as occupational health, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP – a confidential support service) and Trauma Risk Management (TRiM – a model supporting officers and staff directly involved in traumatic incidents). However, when attendees were asked if they knew how to access these services, numbers dropped significantly. The default position seemed to be an assumption that there would be information on the intranet.



68. Line managers told us that they lacked an in-depth understanding of what these services could provide and what staff could expect, and that a greater understanding would help them to more confidently refer, signpost and provide reassurance.
69. Your Wellbeing Matters was a familiar term – although our focus groups struggled to describe what it actually was.
70. Police Scotland provided information relating to Your Wellbeing Assessment (YWA) which is provided by the external occupational health provider. YWA is described as a mental health MOT and is open to all officers and staff on a voluntary and confidential basis. The assessment is designed to identify early signs of psychological ill health, enabling early intervention and support. While we heard positive feedback about YWA from several senior managers, we identified a low level of awareness about it from our focus groups. Information provided by Police Scotland indicated that, in the year 2022/2023, of the 1,101 wellbeing assessments requested by officers and staff, only 555 were completed.
71. During fieldwork, we observed that information is largely received by email or poster, but that officers and staff have limited capacity to read and absorb this. Many officers felt this was another example of lip service, since capacity and resourcing challenges meant they were unable to read or digest information being emailed.

### **Area for development 2**

Police Scotland should improve awareness of wellbeing services among frontline officers and staff.

72. Although we were told about wellbeing forums and other mechanisms provided by divisions and departments to encourage engagement, staff and officers viewed these with cynicism. They provided examples where they had submitted suggestions for improvement, or highlighted areas of concern, but no action was taken. There was also a sense that those areas that were most impactful – such as resource levels – were outwith the control of local management.



## Effectiveness of wellbeing services

73. We heard generally positive feedback about EAP and occupational health, which are services procured by Police Scotland and provided through an external supplier. In general, officers and staff were more positive about these services than line managers, who felt that occupational health simply accepted what they were told by staff and recommended accordingly. Given the lack of training received by line managers, it is possible that this frustration may arise from a lack of understanding. Time taken to access services was also highlighted as an issue. Line managers spoke about the frustrations of access/process; for example, we heard that the contact email from the occupational health provider would be sent to someone's work email address, even if that person was absent. The perception from many was that Police Scotland paid for a reduced package of services due to financial constraints. Lack of psychological and neurodiversity support was repeatedly highlighted as a shortcoming, as was the rigidity of the offering. Many interviewees felt that a more individually-tailored response was required, not simply a menu of fixed services.
74. We heard that the occupational health provider asked for direct service user feedback to improve their service, but we are not aware of any organisational engagement with officers, staff or local management about satisfaction levels. During the time of our inspection, the provision of both occupational health and the EAP were out to tender, and the lack of engagement with local management was noted by many of those we interviewed (although both the Scottish Police Federation and SPA acknowledged their engagement with the tendering process).
75. We did not inspect the tender process relating to EAP and occupational health, but note that some of the more significant aspects relating to absence of trauma counselling have been addressed in the recent tendering process. However, we consider that regular engagement and ongoing evaluation between Police Scotland and officers and staff is lacking. Improved engagement would enable Police Scotland to better understand and address current issues and challenges and take an informed position on the quality of service provision and where gaps exist.





### Area for development 3

Police Scotland should improve engagement with officers and staff to address real time challenges, enable ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of wellbeing services and identify gaps in service provision.

## Conclusion

76. The key output from our inspection is this final report and accompanying briefing sessions to key stakeholders.
77. Our terms of reference for this inspection aimed to provide the following outcomes:
  - assurance that the approach taken by Police Scotland in relation to wellbeing is recognised by officers and staff
  - assurance that the approach taken by Police Scotland is being delivered to frontline officers and staff
  - an assessment of Police Scotland's understanding of factors relating to workforce wellbeing
  - an assessment of the approach taken by Police Scotland.
78. We have found that Police Scotland's approach to wellbeing remains predominantly reactive, and lacks a demonstrable understanding of the drivers of poor wellbeing. The consistent references to organisational stressors, which we heard from those on the frontline, highlights the disconnect between the current approach versus the lived experience and needs of frontline officers and staff. While we recognise that cultural change is complex, there must be an organisational acceptance and response to the broader inequalities that exist and are felt across the frontline.
79. We welcome the inclusion of wellbeing as one of three key outcomes in the new People Strategy, but this must be underpinned by plans that address the recommendations outlined in this report, to deliver improved working conditions, consistent people-centred leadership and a recognition of the service provided by those on the frontline.



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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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