



Policing & Trauma Conference – Event Summary and Next Steps

Background

The Scottish Police Authority made a commitment in December 2022, during an event on mental health, vulnerability and policing, to convene a stakeholder event on policing and trauma specific to our workforce. This builds on discussions and evidence sessions throughout 2022 and 2023 on the issue of mental health both in relation to demand and also specific to our own workforce.

The safety and wellbeing of our people is at the heart of our commitments. A career in policing is rewarding, but can also be incredibly challenging. Our Joint Strategy for Policing states: *"The emotional wellbeing of our people is as equally important as ensuring their physical wellbeing. We want our people to feel supported and empowered to seek help from colleagues and support services no matter the situation. There is a range of support available to our officers and staff. We will ensure that these support channels are easily accessible and available to all in their time of need"*.

In order to demonstrate our commitment to understanding and addressing issues regarding the impact of trauma we must listen to lived experience and discuss our current practices, this, coupled with expert research and insight will ensure that any new approaches to support and advice for our officers and staff are evidence-led.

This trauma focused event, chaired by Fiona McQueen on behalf of the Authority, aimed to:

- Bring together research, insights and knowledge on approaches to prevent, manage and minimise the impact of work based trauma on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing;
- Recognise that, while the removal of traumatic experiences completely is not possible and that each individual is effected in a different way, there are steps that can be taken to prepare officers and staff for those inevitable events;

- Describe the work being taken forward by Police Scotland and SPA Forensic Services in this area, exploring case studies and the lessons learned, and invite discussion on the effectiveness of the current approaches from across different agencies and jurisdictions;
- Recognise this issue in the context of a growing challenge, not only to policing but to other emergency services, first line responders and the parallels to the roles performed by our armed forces;
- Share current and best practice and identify successful innovation in dealing with the challenges which could enhance the current approaches taken in the policing system; and
- Provide an opportunity to network and learn more about current providers used across the policing system.

Event Summary

Fiona McQueen welcomed delegates to the events and set the context for the day before handing over to Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor and Scottish Government Criminal Justice Committee Convenor Audrey Nicoll MSP for opening remarks which focused on a recognition of the challenges often faced by officers and staff in delivery of their duties and the ongoing focus of both Police Scotland and the Parliament on officer and staff wellbeing.

All opening remarks recognised the impact that delivery of core responsibilities within the policing system can and does have on the mental health and wellbeing of officers and staff, and the need to address these challenges in the widest possible sense – recognising the collaboration and collective action required.

Session one of the day gave an overview of the nature of trauma and its impacts. Delegates heard from Dr Karen Goodall of the University of Edinburgh and Gill Moreton from the Rivers Centre of NHS Lothian. Karen's presentation on trauma informed approaches in policing drew on relevant research projects conducted with officers, explaining how exposure to adverse childhood experiences can increase likelihood of mental health conditions and is associated with higher work stress within policing. Gill gave delegates an overview of the lifelines Scotland model which is an approach to supporting the wellbeing of Scotland's emergency services community, through a public health and preventative approach to helping officers and staff stay well.

In the final input of session one delegates heard from four colleagues from across the policing system. Scott, Jason, Laura and David shared their own personal and lived experience on how exposure to trauma in delivery of their role impacted on their mental health and wellbeing. They stressed that often it's not one 'big event' but a culmination of the day to day which impacts on individual wellbeing.

Session two looked at how organisations currently approach workforce trauma, with inputs from SPA Forensic Services, Scottish Ambulance Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland and Walking with the Wounded. Delegates heard about current supports such as Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), peer support networks, staff engagement, and post incident supports. Speakers also outlined current wellbeing strategies in place across organisations, and work to focus on the proactive building of resilience across the workforce.

After lunch delegates heard (through video input) about practice in other jurisdictions from Jess Miller, Police Care UK, and Vernon Herron of Baltimore Police Department. This focused on sharing insights from research and practice from different systems.

Delegates then had the opportunity to reflect on all they had heard over the course of the day, focusing on what we can learn from elsewhere, what currently works well and what we could look to improve on.

Emerging Themes

A number of key themes were gathered through the roundtable discussion at the event:

What can we learn from elsewhere?

- Use academic research and insights - the wider content for trauma
- Invest in training and service provision – make it everyone's role
- Need to focus on prevention and mainstream this
- Taking an opportunity to 'decompress' after traumatic incidents
- Look at adopting the question set/ checklist model used in SFRS
- Introduce psychological supervision; a culture of 'its ok not to be ok'

What currently works well?

- Peer support (such as muster room chats) and welfare provision
- Identifying posts likely to be higher risk to ensure appropriate supports are in place
- Pockets of good practice in local policing divisions – widen this out
- Little Things Campaign
- Support from Police Treatment Centre
- Capability manager within Forensic Services – could this roll out?

What could we improve on?

- Culture can still be a challenge, especially stigma
- Everyone is busy, so maybe not picking up on early signs
- Put in place psychological support training for all officers and staff
- Improve culture of asking colleagues 'are you ok'?
- Empower first line managers to respond in person centred ways
- More training for all staff and officers, focus for line managers

Next Steps

Fiona McQueen closed the event by thanking all contributors, especially those staff and officers who took to the stage to share personal experiences, and committing to the publication of an event summary which includes next steps. This will reflect some of the developing models described during the day, as well as picking up on suggestions and feedback from the roundtable discussions.

The event focused how the policing system supports frontline staff to prepare for the traumatic experiences their role presents them with and how the organisation supports them to maintain personal wellbeing and minimise the adverse impact of those experiences. The Authority and Police Scotland are working closely to development meaningful commitments focused on the wellbeing of our people.

This includes:

- Putting in place, across the policing system, a whole system approach to promoting wellbeing and preventing trauma
- Independent review of current systems, services and processes for supporting officer and staff wellbeing
- Work with key external stakeholders to scope the end to end process for supporting officer and staff wellbeing
- Building on recommendations from the forthcoming HMICS frontline focus assurance review
- Continue to deliver on Royal Foundation commitments and standards
- Development of the Mental Health Strategy
- Investment in leadership development activity
- Progressing tenders for Occupational Health and the Employee Assistance Programme
- Wellbeing champions relaunch

Presentations and video inputs from the event have been [published on the Authority website.](#)