



BRIEFING PAPER FOR INFORMATION OF SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY

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BRIEFING PAPER – Update for Action 20250409-CCC-002

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide members of the SPA Complaints & Conduct Committee with an update in relation to learning opportunities for Police Scotland identified by the PIRC.

Members are invited to note and discuss the contents of the paper.

BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW

Over the course of the 2024-25 period and the first quarter of this year, Police Scotland’s Professional Standards Department (PSD) have received, considered and progressed nine Recommendations emanating from investigations referred by Police Scotland, whether through their statutory obligation or otherwise, into the PIRC.

From the Recommendations received, the subsequent policy amendment and departmental engagement has positively influenced the efficiency and reputational status of the organisation and continues to ensure continued long-term improvement.

PSD also continue to identify emerging patterns and trends, sharing findings and working interdepartmentally to generate solutions as well as empowering divisions and departments through the recently developed learning forums to

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identify shortcomings and resolutions which can then be collated and shared to the benefit of the organisation.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Following a spate of XL Bully related Dangerous Dog incidents which were initially attended by conventional police officers and later supported by specialists from Operational Support Division (OSD), the PIRC recommended that Dog Handlers on mobile patrol, carry and have immediate access to specialist equipment within their vehicles to immediately deploy in such circumstances, to avoid any unnecessary delays in such high-risk incidents. PSD, working closely with OSD, considered the feasibility of the recommendation and determined several factors which would prevent this from being implemented. PSD ensured that other specialist officers, better placed and resourced to provide such assistance would be available to support in such incidents. A Force memorandum and a Dangerous Dog Protocol was circulated in May 2024 following the incident that led to the PIRC investigation and management of Dangerous Dog incidents have markedly improved.

PSD also considered establishing procedures for contacting a veterinary surgeon or other appropriate authority to attend such incidents and provide viable options for the safe management of dangerous animals. This was deemed impractical in such scenarios however, acted as a catalyst for considering options when required to dispatch injured wild animals.

During the same period, the PIRC recommended that in the absence of guidance within National Covert Policing manuals in relation to the identification of plain clothes officers when deployed during armed operations, Police Scotland should consider drafting specific guidance. The guidance should stipulate the requirement to carry out dynamic risk assessments in such circumstances and mirrors guidelines set out within both the Armed Policing Operations Standard Operating Procedures and National Police Firearms Training Curriculum (NPFTC). This proposed amendment to national policy continues to be progressed through the Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism Unit (OCCTU) Scottish Covert Users Group and will, when implemented, serve to provide an additional measure to reduce the risk to operational officers deployed in such circumstances.

In the third quarter of 2024, following an incident whereby public space CCTV was not subject to live time review because the incident occurred out with the normal operating hours of the CCTV staff, PIRC recommended that Police Scotland should remind all operational officers within the Greater Glasgow Division area of the established process for accessing and reviewing CCTV for ongoing incidents during the time where CCTV staff are not on duty. To mitigate potential public confidence and trust issues, together with the possible impact of impeding operation decision making by not having access to all available evidence, an out of hours CCTV process was published on the Greater Glasgow Division Intranet page. This re-iterated to all operational staff the out of hours process for assessing and reviewing CCTV. An email to all Greater Glasgow

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Division staff was also circulated to reiterate the process. The Greater Glasgow process was also disseminated to all C3 staff, in particular highlighting the out of hours process.

The learning was also included in the Divisional Commanders report, a quarterly document issued across Police Scotland, for organisational awareness to ensure established processes are in place across all divisions in Police Scotland. Since discharging this recommendation, there have been no further instances of missed CCTV opportunities recorded by PSD.

During the fourth quarter of 2024, an incident involving the humane dispatch of a wild animal, namely a deer, which had been struck by a motor vehicle on a main arterial route and was suffering unnecessarily. The resultant police actions led to the issuing of several recommendations from the PIRC. The recommendations focussed on the decision making around the use and deployment of Authorised Firearms Officers (AFOs), the consultation process with specialists and the escalation route which culminates in the discharge of police firearms in a public place.

PSD, together with Firearms Training, quickly and successfully resolved the issues highlighted by Tactical Firearms Commanders not consulting with specialist advisors ahead of authorising firearms tactics by reinforcing those expectations to all Commanders during annual refresher training.

The more challenging recommendation to address, which was highlighted in quarter one of 2024 when dealing with Dangerous Dogs, required Area Control Room (ACR) staff to review processes and consider an appropriate escalation process from Humane Dispatcher (volunteer) to Vet (paid contractor) to Armed Policing (Rifle Officer) and finally Armed Response Vehicle (ARV) crewed by AFOs.

In line with the original guidance, which was officially withdrawn in July 2018, ACR utilise a "fit and competent" register of Humane Dispatchers or contact a local vet to identify personnel qualified to dispatch animals prior to determining the need to authorise armed officers. However, there have previously been issues with utilising this register, insofar as although Police Scotland hold the data in systems, no persons with "fit and competent" status have ever consented to being contacted, either within or out with business hours, let alone on a gratis basis. There were also questions raised around how to ensure and govern the standard and quality of both the Humane Dispatchers and their equipment.

Work continues to progress this recommendation and produce an approved process, with this becoming a regular agenda topic at the firearms deployment oversight group, as it will require to be progressed collaboratively between armed policing and Contact Command and Control (C3) Division.

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In quarter one of 2025, two instances in operational environments resulted in the issuing of recommendations by PIRC.

Both incidents concerned suspects who were utilising motor vehicles when they encountered police. Both recommendations were discharged through the issuing of national advice, one highlighting to all Specially Trained Officers (STOs) to draw more fully on all available options when processing their decisions around the use/discharge of Taser against subjects in control of motor vehicles. Guidance was also issued to all General Police Drivers across the organisation reminding them of the vehicle tactics available to them in line with their current level of driver authorisation.

The issuing of this guidance has prevented any further occurrence of similar incidents.

FURTHER INFORMATION

ADDITIONAL AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT / WORK ONGOING

Police Scotland's Professional Standards Department have identified the department's need to be mindful of our responsibility to highlight and disclose all "relevant material" to Senior Investigating Officers in respect of any ongoing or future criminal proceedings for consideration of disclosure to COPFS. PSD are currently developing a process which will ensure all such material comes to the attention of those requiring sight.

PSD are the gatekeepers for all incidents within the Force area which result in the Death or Serious Injury (DSI) of a member of the public, following police contact. PSD are also responsible for gathering information on behalf of the ACC (Professionalism and Assurance) who will decide to activate Post Incident Procedures (PIP) if deemed necessary and proportionate. However, it was identified that opportunities may be missed to activate PIP and as such, organisationally, we risked failing to protect the integrity of investigations and support the welfare of those officers and staff impacted. To address this, PSD have proactively engaged across the organisation to raise awareness of PIP, the referral process and criteria and remove any reticence around early engagement with PSD. Resultantly, referrals have increased and missed opportunities have reduced.

By way of working proactively to identify and address learning opportunities ahead of the receipt of PIRC reports and recommendations, PSD have rolled out a Divisional Learning Form (primarily in respect of Death or Serious injury Incidents) and a Complaint Handling Learning Form. This structured, auditable process for the identification, recording and dissemination of individual and/or organisational learning from complaints and Death or Serious Injury (DSI) matters formalises previous learning practices. It will ensure that as an organisation we can identify trends and patterns from across the country at the early stages and mitigate potential systemic problems and failings.

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CONCLUSION

Police Scotland welcome and recognise the value of reflective learning based on recommendations from the PIRC and a myriad of other learning opportunities, including our internal review policies. We believe this approach will ensure we continue to provide a flexible, robust and compassionate service that is fit for purpose and instils public confidence in policing.