

LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL ONLY

John Finnie MSP
Convener
Justice Sub-Committee on Policing
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

27 March 2020

CO/025/2020

Dear John

Governance, Accountability and Support for Policing During COVID-19

I refer to your correspondence of 26 March 2020 sent to the Chief Constable and copied to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

I am writing to update you on the Authority's approach to governance, accountability and support for our police service in these unprecedented times.

Issues around resources, objectives, priorities, methods, and logistics within policing are having to be addressed at a pace that simply does not allow the levels of engagement, consultation and consideration that we enjoy in more routine times.

I want to record the SPA's appreciation of the response already provided by Police Scotland – its officers and staff – and our recognition that the response required will continue to make huge demands on their resilience and adaptability. Similar challenges are also being faced by our Forensic Services teams.

As scheduled, the Authority held its Board meeting earlier this week on 25 March 2020, though by tele-conference to adhere to public health guidelines. Business was prioritised to ensure the minimum abstraction for the Chief Constable and his leadership team from their operational response duties.

Authority members were able to discuss a range of issues with the Chief Constable and his senior team relating to the current emergency – including prioritisation of business and shifting of resources to meet demands, the

availability of personal protective equipment in key areas of the service such as custody, call handling and the maintenance of the 101 and 999 service, workforce wellbeing, the implications of the additional emergency enforcement powers referenced in your correspondence, and our shared concern at the continued requirement for Police Scotland to plan ahead for the COP 26 climate change event.

We are reassured that the Chief Constable and his leadership team are already taking all necessary measures to maintain the resilience of the service, and the Authority will do everything in its power to support that.

I have agreed with the Chief Constable that the Authority will not be introducing any additional oversight or scrutiny arrangements during this period, and that any reporting for scrutiny or requests for support which fall within the Authority's remit will be channelled through our existing procedures. The Authority will remain a key touch point for the service as it grapples with what will inevitably be tough decisions ahead. The Chief Constable and I will continue to be in regular contact and will ensure that all necessary information and decisions are brought to the Authority expeditiously.

We are in exceptional times, and to reflect that the Authority has also approved amendments to its Governance Framework to establish an Exceptional Circumstances Committee to deal with any urgent business of the Board which cannot be dealt with through the normal process for an ordinary or special meeting of the Board. It will clearly be used sparingly and I will chair that Committee with three fellow Authority members if and when it is required.

Despite the current constraints, we are also maintaining our commitment to transparency and, while we are not able to provide public access or the livestreaming, the 25 March Board proceedings were recorded and the audio uploaded to our website. You can listen to the recording at the following link: <https://livestream.com/spa/glasgowmarch>

I hope that you find this correspondence useful and I commit to keeping you advised of any further significant developments.

While the Authority itself is working remotely and visiting at our office in Pacific Quay in Glasgow is suspended, our other channels of communication and contact remain open as usual.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Crichton', written over a horizontal line.

DAVID CRICHTON
Vice Chair