



Complaints & Conduct Committee

5 June 2025

Minutes of the Complaints & Conduct Committee held on 27 February 2024 via Webex

Board Members present:	Katharina Kasper (Committee Chair) Catriona Stewart (Committee Member) Paul Edie (Committee Member) Chris Creegan
Board Member apologies:	Fiona McQueen (Committee Member)
In attendance:	<p><u>SPA</u> Chris Brown, Deputy Chief Executive (Resources) Darren Paterson, Head of Workforce Governance Graham Mackin, Complaints and Conduct Co-Ordinator Gary Price, Complaints and Conduct Co-Ordinator Deborah Christie, Governance Support Officer Colette Craig, Governance Support Officer</p> <p><u>Police Scotland</u> Assistant Chief Constable Stuart Houston Chief Superintendent Helen Harrison Superintendent Alan Sommerville</p> <p><u>PIRC</u> Ilya Zharov, Head of Reviews and Policy Raymond Brown, Head of Investigations</p>

	HMICS Maggie Pettigrew, Lead Inspector
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1. Introduction and Welcome:

1.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and advised that due to Interim Chair commitments Fiona McQueen was an apology for the meeting. Therefore, Fiona McQueen, as Interim Chair of the Authority, has confirmed in writing her authorisation for Chris Creegan to be appointed to this meeting as a substitute member (in line with Paragraph 55 of the Corporate Governance Framework) to assist with any potential quorum issues. The Chair further advised that Chris would join the committee formally from 1 April 2025.

The Chair paid tribute to Catriona Stewart, noting this would be her final attendance at the committee ahead of leaving the SPA Board in March 2025. The Chair thanked Catriona for her membership and contribution to the committee.

The Chair paid tribute and thanked ACC Stuart Houston for his leadership within the committee noting that he was now moving to organised crime, counter terrorism and intelligence within Police Scotland.

The Chair welcomed Gary Price and Graham Mackin who have joined the SPA as newly appointed Complaints and Conduct Co-ordinators.

1.2 Apologies

Fiona McQueen (Committee Member) and DCC Alan Speirs.

1.3 Declarations of Interest and Connections

None.

1.4 Any Other Business

None.

1.5 Decisions on taking business in private (Item 12 – 16)

Members **AGREED** to take Items 12 – 16 in private.

2 Minute and Actions from previous meeting:

2.4 Minute from meeting held on 14 November 2024 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Minute of the meeting held on 14 November 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

2.5 Public Minute of Private Meeting held on 14 November 2024 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Public Minute of the private meeting held on 14 November 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

2.6 Public Minute of Private Meeting held on 19 December 2024 for approval

Members **AGREED** the Public Minute of the private meeting held on 19 December 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

2.7 Rolling Action Log and Matters Arising

The Committee **APPROVED** the action log, noted the updates provided.

2.8 Decisions since last meeting

Members **AGREED** a determination on 2 senior officer matters on 19th December 2025.

3. Police Scotland Professional Standards Quarterly Performance Report (Q3 - 24/25)

Members were provided with a report noting statistical information on the overarching performance activity in relation to complaints and conduct matters about members of Police Scotland for period (1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024). During discussions the following matters were raised:

- Members sought clarity over excessive force and assault allegation data presented within the report. Chief Superintendent Helen Harrison (CSHHarrison) advised that they involve different circumstances, excessive force allegations typically relating to the use of handcuffs, rather than assault. CSHHarrison advised both allegation types are automatically referred to PIRC, noting this as an area which is closely monitored to identify any trends. Police Scotland were unable to explain the 10% increase in respect of excessive force allegations, however, assured members that learning that comes from enquiries is fed into the Operational

Safety Training to ensure that where there are issues, they are addressed quickly.

- Members referred to the impact on complaint handling timescales of an increased complexity of complaints and sought assurance that Police Scotland were building capacity to address this. ACC Stuart Houston (ACCSHouston) referred to Operation Glade, noting that whilst acknowledging current unallocated case volumes, all cases have been subject to initial assessment of threat, risk or harm to ensure that they are prioritised appropriately. Members were advised of several factors making complaints more complex and challenging. It was agreed this would be discussed further within Operation Glade (Item 7).
- The Chair welcomed the data and trends coming through within the report and asked that future reports include data on unallocated cases and progress in addressing the backlog. (This request will be captured within Operation Glade (Item 7)).

Members **NOTED** the report.

4. SPA Quarterly Report (Q3 - 24/25)

Darren Paterson (DPaterson) provided a report updating members on complaints and conduct matters including key statistics reflecting the position at the end of Q3, 2024/25. During discussions the following matters were raised;

- There are no key themes associated with complaints received over the 8-quarter reference period, although noting end of year reports will examine multi-year data for any themes/trends.
- Members were provided with an update on the work addressed by the National Complaint Handling Development Group (NCHDG) noting the groups support to improvements and good practise.

Members **NOTED** the report.

5. PIRC Annual Report on Police Scotland Handling of Complaints and Referral Investigations (Q3 - 24/25)

Members were provided with a report detailing key statistics reflecting Quarter 3 2024/25. Ilya Zharov (IZharov) provided a detailed summary of the report which noted statistical information in relation to PIRC Complaint Handling Reviews (CHR's). Raymond Brown (RBrown) provided an overview on the Referral Investigations. During discussions the following matters were raised:

- The Chair noted that although there would likely be an impact on PIRC due to Operation Glade, it was welcomed that PIRC were prepared for that as more complaint cases are closed.
- RBrown advised that, in respect of statutory referrals and investigations, there was nothing in the data that would give cause for concern.
- RBrown noted potential significant impact on volume of investigations undertaken by PIRC following change in law in respect of corroboration. On 1 January 2025, PIRC implemented a revised investigative approach for such matters which, albeit are referred by COPFS, will have a consequential increase in requests by PIRC to PSD for case related information and associated processes. Dialogue is ongoing between PIRC and Police Scotland around the efficient and effective management in relation to this unprecedented change. The Chair asked that the full SPA Board were made aware of the change in legislation in this regard and the wider implications in relation to policing practice.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action;

20252702 – PCCC- 002: Chief Superintendent Helen Harrison to ensure the full SPA Board are made aware of the Revision to Law for Corroboration and the wider implications in relation to policing practice.

6. SPA/PIRC Joint Audit (Triage) – Recommendations Progress Update

Members were provided with a report noting the closure of recommendations arising from the SPA/PIRC Joint Audit Report of Police Scotland on the Triage of Complaints. The report provided public visibility of the fact that PIRC & SPA officials have agreed to close off remaining recommendations from the earlier 2021 review.

CSHHarrison provided an update on the 6-stage audit which concluded in July 2024 which looked at the 6-stage complaint handling process. The audit had 10 recommendations within it and since then there has been engagement with PIRC in terms of 4 recommendation closures. 4 remain ongoing with hope to reach a conclusion in coming months, with a further 2 having a dependency on the Centurion upgrade. Members welcomed this update and agreed that action 20261411 - CCC-006 should remain ongoing until a further update comes to the committee.

Members **NOTED** the report

7. Operation Glade

Members were provided with a report updating them on work done in relation to Operation Glade. During discussions the following matters were raised:

- The Chair welcomed the narrative provided to support the report and welcomed the transparency on what is being done by Police Scotland in this area.
- Members referred to the backlog of unallocated complaints, clarifying that the reported figure represented a 28% increase against the figure reported previously. Noting the work of Operation Glade, Members sought to understand when a tangible impact was anticipated.
- ACC Stuart Houston (ACCSHouston) advised members that the training of new staff has taken longer than anticipated, but when they are fully trained it is hoped there will be a tangible difference. ACCSHouston advised that this was more than having additional resource, but about learning from complaints and engaging at an earlier stage. ACCSHouston hopes that members will see a reduction in the backlog for the next committee.
- Members noted the substantial investment put into this space and the need for regular updates in relation to the backlog to upcoming committees, enabling unambiguous trackable measurement against the earlier baseline. CSHHarrison committed to consider how this can be best presented and include the information within future performance reports, noting the numbers coming into PSD and how they are being allocated.
- The Chair welcomes transparency around this area, however, advised that if there are no improvements within the next few months there will be a need to look deeper into the root causes for the backlog.
- The Chair asked that a clearer explanation is provided to members around the treatment of new complaints against historic complaints in terms of decision making and prioritisation to ensure complaints are being handled to appropriate timeframes. CSHHarrison advised that she would look to articulate that within the performance report.
- Members agreed to close action 20261411 - CCC-005 following agreement of the new actions in this space.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following actions:

20252702 – CCC- 002: Chief Superintendent Helen Harrison to ensure future reports include data on unallocated cases and

progress in addressing the backlog. In addition, consider how the backlog of non-criminal complaints can be best presented and include within future performance reports, noting the numbers coming into PSD and how they are being allocated. As part of this information, provide a clearer explanation around the treatment of new complaints against historic complaints in terms of decision making and prioritisation to ensure complaints are being handled to appropriate timeframes

8. Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill Update

Members were provided with a report which provided an update and overview of activity ongoing to prepare for the implementation of the Police (Ethics, Conduct & Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill and its implications for Police Scotland. During discussions the following matters were raised:

- Robin Johnston (RJohnston) referred to the barred and advisory list and noted the importance of being clear that in terms of the Bill, the responsibility for the list lies with the Authority and they should be involved, noting the work already being progressed by Police Scotland to develop the list. The Chair noted the need for the Authority to keep an eye on this area to ensure it can fulfil its obligation when the time comes.

Members **NOTED** the report.

9. Police Scotland Professional Boundaries Report – Biannual Update

Members were provided with an overview and update in relation to ongoing activity in relation to Professional Boundaries. During discussions the following matters were raised:

- The Chair welcomed the fact that a second review had been undertaken in relation to the handling of cases involving complaints of a sexual nature.
- Members were assured that Police Scotland intended to undertake further reviews in future, acknowledging the importance from a public assurance perspective, and in terms of learning and continuous improvement. CSHHarrison committed to presenting the Committee with a proposed timeframe for a further review, as well as emphasising Police Scotland's commitment to discharge recommendations identified from reviews to date in a timely fashion.

- The Chair sought clarity on whether there were any cases found where matters not being handled how they should have been. CSHHarrison advised that neither review identified any material concerns in respect of how matters were handled at the time.
- Members were updated on the welfare strategies that have been captured and assured that this was a journey that Police Scotland are committed to.

Members **NOTED** the report.

10. Committee Effectiveness

Members were provided with a report noting the findings of a recent survey conducted with Board Members and stakeholders, seeking their feedback on the overall effectiveness of the committee. The report was for Members' consideration and seeks to inform overall evaluation of the committee's effectiveness during 2024/25, and subsequent assurance report to the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee in May 2025.

- Members felt the report adequately reflected the committee's position, with improvements in terms of increased transparency and quality of reports.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** that the Committee Chair should sign the Committee Assurance Certificate. This confirms that the committee have fulfilled its obligations.

11. Committee Work Plan

The Chair asked Police Scotland to consider the timeliness around the submission of papers and offered the committee's assistance if required in this area.

DPaterson agreed to work with Police Scotland colleagues to produce a proposal for Member consideration in respect of the frequency of reports, noting an opportunity to spread reporting over the year and make agendas more focused.

Members **NOTED** the report and **AGREED** the following action.

20252702 – PCCC- 003: Darren Paterson to work with Police Scotland colleagues to produce a proposal for Member consideration in respect of the frequency of reports, noting an opportunity to spread reporting over the year and make agendas more focused.