

Meeting 9 April 2021 13:00

Members attending:

John Scott QC, Solicitor Advocate (Chair)
Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
Ephraim Borowski, Chair of the National Independent Strategic Advisory Group
Gill Imery, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS)
Dr Elizabeth Kelly, Associate Carnegie UK Trust
John Logue, Deputy Crown Agent Operational Support, COPFS
Professor Susan McVie, University of Edinburgh
Diego Quiroz, Scottish Human Rights Commission
Assistant Chief Constable Gary Ritchie, Police Scotland
Barry Sillers, Deputy Chief Executive, Strategy and Performance, SPA
CS Sean Scott, Police Scotland

In attendance

Jen Waterton, Consultant (IAG Impact Assessment process)
Simon Anderson, Consultant (IAG Impact Assessment process)

Apologies:

Aamer Anwar, Solicitor and Human Rights campaigner
Tressa Burke, CEO Glasgow Disability Alliance
Maria Galli, CYPCS
Deputy Chief Constable Will Kerr, Police Scotland
CS Linda Jones, Police Scotland
Naomi McAuliffe, Programme Director Scotland, Amnesty International
Brian Scott, Glasgow Disability Alliance

Secretariat:

Jennifer Blackwood, SPA
Eleanor Gaw, SPA
Karen Vallance, SPA

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1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed members of the group and attendees to the meeting. Apologies were noted.

The Chair noted the group had not met in a fortnight and, during that time, disturbances at the Meadows, Edinburgh, had been widely reported. He highlighted that lengthy discussions had taken place at the OpTICAL Group, and CS Sean Scott would be joining the meeting to provide an overview.

These events had made significant demand on resources and had contributed to an increase in online reporting. However, reassuringly, there had been no increase in fixed penalty notices during that period.

The group heard some personal experiences of those who had visited the Meadows both recently and throughout lockdown. Reflections were very positive overall, and members recognised how important access to green space has been for many people. It was noted that there is difference between large groups congregating together in breach of the regulations, and many smaller groups gathering at the same time, but with the individuals involved observing the regulations, and this difference is not always apparent to observers or in media portrayals.

Bruce Adamson told the group that, in his experience, some older children are suffering from stress and anxiety, but, despite being blamed by some for breaches, the majority are sticking to the rules and accept them.

The group discussed the challenges of the transition period and the move towards public order policing. There are concerns on the impact on both rural and urban hotspots, when travel restrictions are lifted. The group agreed that strong communication of relevant restrictions, and any changes, is critically important, and needs to be reinforced to ensure people are properly informed.

CS Sean Scott provided an overview of the incidents in the Meadows, confirming that many of the offenders who had been intent on causing a disturbance had been identified. There will be a higher police presence in the coming weekend, and the group will be kept up to date on any developments. He indicated that, for the service, the period of transition and easing of lockdown regulations is in many ways the most challenging.

The group agreed that it may be helpful to hear from elected representatives in due course, to assist in supporting communications and to build awareness of the joint work in place. The period after the election may be most appropriate.

Action: Chair/ Secretariat

Members discussed the impact of the absence of the daily briefing during the pre-election period. Dr Kelly agreed to approach the Chief Medical Officer and senior NHS colleagues to ask if a briefing could be offered more frequently, led by senior health officials, in the run up to the election.

Action: Dr Elizabeth Kelly

The Chair thanked CS Scott for attending and for his input. CS Scott left the meeting.

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2. Note of the previous meeting and matters arising.

The Chair reviewed the note of the previous meeting.

3. Data Update - OpTICAL Update/ Citizen Space

Susan McVie updated the group on the recent meeting of OpTICAL and provided the following specific updates from the previous week;

- Two reports had been shared - an initial weekly report followed by an update, which included information on the Meadows incidents.
- Interventions had increased by 25% in the first report but had increased very significantly in the second, following interventions from the Meadows.
- There was a reduction in fixed penalty notices and arrests compared with the previous week.
- There was an increase in public space intervention but reduction in private space intervention, such as house parties.
- Travel regulations had increased and online reports doubled, with increased travel into rural hotspots.
- There were around 2000 interventions in the Meadows on 2 March, and around 2600 on 3 March - almost all were dispersals.
- House parties have decreased but are still an issue, as well as garden parties. Student parties continue to be an issue in various areas of Scotland.
- Susan is working with the Crown Office to analyse additional data, to be reported to the group in due course.

It was noted that some officers are experiencing increasing hostility in enforcing the regulations, and that the easing of lock-down is particularly challenging for policing and resource intensive. The service anticipates this pressure will ease somewhat in the coming months.

The change in regulations around places of worship was highlighted. It was noted that gatherings around mosques during Ramadan, which are in accordance with current regulations, may generate additional calls for service if the new regulations are not widely understood.

The call handling service has been reinforced to deal with any related increase in demand as lock-down eases.

No additional Citizen Space responses have been received this week.

4. Police Officer interview update

Gill Imery informed the group that feedback on the questions and format had been provided, and the question set was now taken as agreed. Any late comments from members are still welcome and can be sent to Gill. Interviews are scheduled to take place between 26 April and 3 May.

5. AOCB

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The group discussed the level of children and young people in custody, noting that, before the pandemic, Police Scotland had acknowledged that these numbers were higher than they would wish, due to long standing issues on access to places of safety. Bruce Adamson and ACC Ritchie will liaise directly to consider the impact of Covid-19 on the number of young people in custody.

Simon Anderson confirmed work on the IAG review was progressing well, with a couple of interviews still to take place.

Bruce Adamson informed the group that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Act may be referred to the Supreme Court, based around a couple of specific sections. This should not, however, impact the Scottish Parliament's ability to progress with this. A further update will be provided to the next meeting when more detail is available.

Date of next meeting

Friday 16 April 2021 – 13:00 – 15:00

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