



SCOTTISH POLICE  
**AUTHORITY**  
ÙGH DARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

# Islands (Scotland) Act 2018

**Annual report**

**1 April 2023 -  
31 March 2024**



# 1

## Introduction

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 put in place a framework of measures reflecting the unique challenges faced by Scotland's island communities. It is intended to give effect to a range of policy changes to improve outcomes for island communities in Scotland.

The National Islands Plan, developed by Scottish Ministers, provides a framework for action to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities.

Section 12 of the Act requires Authority's to publish information about steps taken to comply with the duty to have regard to island communities in carrying out its function.

This report details how the Scottish Police Authority has had due regard to island communities, where impact assessments have been carried out and other steps taken to comply with the duty.

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## **Please describe how your organisation has had regard to island communities in carrying out its functions.**

The Authority's main statutory functions as set out in Section 2 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 are to:

- Maintain the Police Service of Scotland.
- Promote the statutory policing principles.
- Promote and support continuous improvement in the policing of Scotland.
- Keep the policing of Scotland under review.
- Hold the Chief Constable to account for the policing of Scotland.

We continue to improve our approach to consideration of island communities in both our strategic decision-making and policy development and review. We are also working to improve our oversight of Police Scotland's responsibilities in this area.

### **The Joint Strategy for Policing and Local Police Plans**

The [Joint Strategy for Policing 2023](#) was approved by the Authority in May 2023. An [accessible Gaelic language version](#) of the plan is also available. The alignment of strategic direction, priorities for policing, planning and performance assessment is articulated in this Plan. Outcomes 2 and 3 of this plan commit to addressing the needs of local communities through effective service delivery and that the public, communities and partners are engaged, involved and have confidence in policing.

The objectives that underpin these outcomes recognise that policing must continue to be responsive to all forms of community, including islands. By doing so, services will continue to evolve and be designed to meet the needs of individuals and communities, building a safe and confident society for them to thrive, creating real participation and genuine partnerships between the police and the community.

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Flowing from the Joint Strategy for Policing, [Local Policing Plans](#) provide a clear statement about the commitment to developing services and addressing priorities that are of particular importance in specific areas. The priorities are decided by data and also feedback from local authorities, partners, and residents in the Your Police survey. There are Local Policing Plans for various island communities recognising their unique policing needs and priorities.

### Local scrutiny and accountability

In April 2023, the Authority published a new [strategic partnership agreement](#) between COSLA, Police Scotland and the Authority. This sets out four key priority areas to strengthen collaboration between Local Government and policing in the years ahead. The first of these is local scrutiny and accountability. This recognises that policing is delivered by a national service, delivered locally and it is key that services continue to evidence our focus on local priorities. Open and transparent local public community engagement and effective scrutiny of policing by elected members play an important role in setting priorities and measuring impact of local policing. Linked to this, the Authority published a public briefing on [Police Scrutiny in Scotland](#) in August 2023. This provides an overview of current arrangements and context for policing scrutiny at a local, regional and national level in Scotland. Local oversight promotes community engagement and fosters positive relationships. Different areas, including islands, have unique policing needs and priorities. Local oversight encourages the development of policing strategies that are tailored to address local issues and needs.

### Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

The Authority monitors the welfare of people detained in police custody using a team of Independent Custody Visitors. These are volunteers, drawn from local communities.

Although throughput is smaller, the Authority makes annual visits, sometimes more regularly, to the islands to visit custody suites to ensure the welfare conditions of those held in custody on the islands.

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## **Specialist resources**

The Authority expects national equity to specialist policing resources. For example, the Authority sought assurance around the roll out of Police Scotland's Taser Hubs and additional Specially Trained Officers to the islands and rural areas. An update to the Authority's Policing Performance Committee in December 2023 provided a divisional breakdown of specially trained officers and a [map](#) showing the location of taser hubs.

Authority staff have also been working with the Air Support Team to ensure their future strategy considers drone hubs on islands to ensure national equity.

## **Impact Assessment**

During 22-23 the Authority implemented an integrated impact assessment approach to improve our delivery of the range of public body duties. This includes our approach to due regard for island communities in carrying out our functions and work to embed the framework continued throughout 2023-24. The Authority shared this framework with Police Scotland and other blue light partners to support work towards compliance.

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## **Forward look**

### **Revised Model for Policing Oversight Group**

Police Scotland is developing a revised model for policing to ensure the Service can adapt to evolving societal needs and challenges, meet budgetary requirements, and make best use of available human and financial resources. The Authority has set up a dedicated 'Revised Model for the Policing of Scotland Oversight Group' to monitor and track progress in developing the new model. The Oversight Group will report regularly to the Authority's Board. The Group will seek assurance on key areas, such as the impact of the new model on the organisation's people, public services, stakeholders and partners, is appropriately evidenced and understood. The Authority will advocate for Police Scotland to undertake Island and Community impact assessments for all major change initiatives where appropriate.

### **Self-assessment of Public Body Duty compliance**

During 2023-24, SPA Corporate completed a self-assessment of our public body duty requirements and made improvement recommendations to strengthen compliance. This included a recommendation to work with Police Scotland further around processes and compliance with the duty to give due regard to island communities and to carry out Island Community Impact Assessments where necessary. A strategic lead with responsibility for Islands Impact Assessments has been appointed and this work is a feature of our delivery plan for 2024-25.

### **Estates Strategy**

The Authority is expecting a revised estates strategy and implementation plan during 2024/25 from Police Scotland where we will consider the Islands Act.

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## **SPA Forensic Services**

The provision of Forensic Services to Police Scotland and the Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) is delivered by SPA Forensic Services following a triage and assessment criteria that is not influenced by the geographical location of the source of the demand.

Forensic Services provides its functions on a national basis and utilises a decision-making framework as part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with its service users which is outlined below. This seeks to provide equality of service provision to all communities regardless of location.

Laboratory examinations of forensic casework is delivered from 4 laboratory hubs and casework is routinely delivered to and transferred within Forensic Services to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and best-value. This casework is requested by Police Scotland or instructed by COPFS.

There are also 13 sites from where Search and Recovery Scenes deploy staff trained in methods to identify and recover forensic evidence outside of a laboratory setting. This places Forensic Services resources in each Police Scotland local policing division.

The logistics of supporting crime investigations with a physical presence on the islands when required can be challenging and Forensic Services teams are well exercised in the mechanisms to deploy resources outside of mainland Scotland using both sea and air transport.

A decision-making framework is utilised to prioritise requests which will consider:

- Threat/risk/harm
- National and local policing priorities
- Criminal justice processes
- Community impact
- Forensic value

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This assessment will include, but not be limited to the following:

- The circumstances of the scene and evidence already available/collected.
- The forensic opportunities that may be present at the scene (e.g. obvious blood staining, footwear marks or discarded items).
- The potential value of forensic evidence to support the sufficiency and/or corroboration of evidence in the case and subsequent report to COPFS.

A Memorandum of Understanding exists with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) which details the arrangements for the provision of forensic services in Scotland.

The MOU seeks to achieve the following:

- Appropriate and timely investigation of incidents or events which may reveal criminality
- Management of instruction, necessity for and prioritisation of requests for service from Forensic Services
- Efficient use of forensic science resources and capacity to properly manage prioritisation of workload.
- A transparent management of the forensic science process across the justice system.

To demonstrate the level of engagement from Forensic Services to support provision of service to island communities the following case studies have been provided.



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## **Case Study 1**

### **Forensic medical services provided to victims of sexual crime in the islands/rural communities versus the mainland.**

In 2016 HMICS conducted a review into forensic medical services provided to victims of sexual crime. The findings were published in 2017 and recommendations for National standards were created. One issue raised was the disparity in healthcare provision due to geography, particularly when comparing services provided to the islands/rural communities versus the mainland.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) taskforce was established in 2017 and a five-year, high-level plan was devised to set out a vision for improvements. This work was underpinned by new legislation, in the form of the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of sexual offences) (Scotland) Act 2021 which places a statutory duty on all NHS health boards to provide forensic medical services and access to 'self-referral' medical examinations. SPA Forensic Services was represented on the CMO taskforce and worked collaboratively with partners to drive these improvements. In all discussions, there was cognisance of the requirement to ensure that any proposed improvements would create an equitable service for all, regardless of geography.

Some of the notable improvements in terms of remote communities are as follows.

- Self-referral medical examinations are now available to those living in island/rural communities and not just the mainland.
- Appropriate, NHS run forensic medical examination facilities are now available to those living in rural/island communities. Ensuring such facilities are suitable for forensic sampling requires effective DNA decontamination supported by an environmental monitoring (EM) regime. SPA devised a DNA decontamination protocol for all NHS health boards and provided training on DNA decontamination and environmental monitoring. Training was delivered online and bespoke videos were created to ensure those in remote communities had full access to training. Additional support was provided by online meetings during 'go-live' and continues to be provided by a SPOC within SPA Forensic Services.

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## **Case Study 1 continued...**

- All samples taken for EM sampling are analysed within the SPA laboratory at the Scottish Crime Campus. To ensure the veracity of these samples a process was implemented by SPA whereby 'double ended' swabs, which can be sealed and air dried were utilised. Due to this EM samples are posted to SPA with no requirement for freezing. This removes the onus from remote health boards to freeze or air-dry samples within their facilities.
- SPA Forensic Services assisted in the training of sex offence examiners (SOE) in the photography of medical injuries for instances of self-referral medical examinations. This allows for greater flexibility in recording injuries in remote areas. SPA is also involved in the pilot to train specialist forensic nurses, supporting the QMU PgCert Advanced Forensic Practice. Nurses from remote health boards have gained or are working towards this qualification. If the pilot is successful this will result in an increase in the number of SOE, providing an improved service to those living in island/rural communities.

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## Case Study 2

### **N Division Island Forensics – Supporting Highland and Islands Division with Police Officer Forensic Capture Training**

SPA Forensic Services respond to demands for both acquisitive crimes and serious incidents across the Highlands and Islands.

The logistics of covering such a large geographic area mean that even urgent forensic attendance can take more than 24 hours to arrange and travel. This delay affects the return to normalcy for those affected by crimes and may require officers to guard crime scenes for extended periods, while awaiting the arrival of forensic staff.

To ensure resilience of service to the island communities, SPA Forensic Services undertook a programme to provide training to Detective Officers in N Division (this Division covers Highland, Shetland, Orkney and Western Isles Local Authorities). This tuition provided capability to Detective Officers for general daylight photography where there are no lighting challenges and some simple methods of fingerprint powder and lifting as well as DNA swabbing. SPA Forensic Services have since undertaken an additional programme of training for local Police Officers to improve the resilience of this service to the island communities.

The benefits of training additional officers is as follows:

- Additional resilience across Island area Commands in relation to lower level, volume crime when CID are unavailable, or attendance prevented by inclement weather.
- Improved public service who will/may be deprived of access/property for reduced timescales.
- Development opportunity for Island officers.

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**Please provide a list of policies, strategies or services for which your organisation has completed a Section 10 assessment ICIA.**

A project to digitise/modernise the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme (ICVS) Visitor Form process with an online platform. This project represents a fundamental change in process and practice which will affect multiple stakeholders, therefore the correct appraisal and analysis of potential impacts should be carried out.

During the period, Police Scotland provided two progress updates to the Authority's Policing Performance Committee on their Criminal Justice Service Division 5 Year Vision and Direction.<sup>1 and 2</sup> An Islands and Rural Communities impact assessment is in place and the Authority is encouraging their use for future plans and strategies.

[1. Criminal Justice Services Division \(CJSD\) Vision and Direction Update – June 2023](#)

[2. CJSD 5 Year Vision and Direction Progress Update – Dec 2023](#)

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**What other steps has your organisation taken for those policies for which an ICIA was not required (under the Section 10(b)(ii) assessment).**

We continue to improve our approach to consideration of island communities in both our strategic decision-making and policy development and review. We are also working to improve our oversight of Police Scotland's responsibilities in this area.

The screening checklist implemented as part of our Impact Assessment Framework gives a high-level assessment on whether an Islands and Community Impact assessment is required.