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**SCOTTISH POLICE
AUTHORITY**

1 Pacific Quay
Glasgow
G51 1DZ
Tel: 01786 896977
SPACHairOffice@spa.pnn.police.uk

LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL ONLY

Margaret Mitchell MSP
Convener
Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

27 May 2020

CO/047/2020

Dear Mrs Mitchell

COVID-19 Oversight

I refer to your correspondence of 14 May 2020 seeking further information about the SPA's scrutiny of policing the COVID-19 pandemic.

As stated in recent updates to the Committee, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) continues to exercise its duties in providing maintenance, oversight and scrutiny of Police Scotland during this time. Our overall approach is explained fully on our website at the following link: [Strategic approach to the oversight of policing COVID-19 in Scotland](#)

The Authority's oversight is being undertaken through formal scheduled governance meetings, including our most recent [Authority meeting of 20 May 2020](#), all of which continue as scheduled and are being enhanced by ongoing engagement and 'real time' oversight of policing.

At last week's Authority meeting, members covered a variety of issues including the services' ongoing efforts to engage, explain, encourage and enforce the restrictions applicable in Scotland. The impact on the workforce, matters of health and safety, and the implications on the police budget were also covered. Crucially, the Authority also considered:

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- The [first report of the Independent Advisory Group](#) chaired by John Scott QC considering Police Scotland's application of the new police powers
- The results of [Police Scotland's own regular survey of public confidence](#) based on feedback from members of the public who have had contact with the service informed further considerations.
- An update on the findings of recent [independent polling commissioned by the SPA of public attitudes](#) to the additional powers granted to the police service and how they are being exercised.

I am delighted to say that public confidence continues to be strong and steady and the triangulation of results of the three pieces of work is greatly reassuring in confirming a remarkable degree of consent and support for the police service at this time. This is something the Authority will continue to monitor in the weeks ahead.

COVID-19 Weekly Bulletin

Your correspondence requests further detail in relation to absence levels and the provision of testing of officers and staff in [Police Scotland's COVID-19 Bulletin: 19 March - 29 April 2020](#). Weekly bulletins are an important part of the Authority's oversight of policing COVID-19 and are informing regular update briefings by members. They are also being published on the SPA's website alongside a summary note of members' considerations of the content. Since the first briefing the following bulletins have been published:

- [COVID-19 Bulletin: 30 April - 6 May 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Bulletin: 7 - 13 May 2020](#)

The next scheduled COVID-19 Bulletin covering the period 14 - 20 May 2020 will be published by the SPA on Thursday 28 May 2020 at the following link: [SPA Oversight of policing COVID-19](#).

Absence levels

Following the most recent updates, you will note a reported steady reduction in absence levels since Police Scotland's initial bulletin.

Absence levels across the workforce are regularly monitored by the Authority's Resources Committee. Indeed, the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce, and specifically the implications on the availability of the workforce, was the subject to detailed consideration by the Resources Committee on 23 April 2020 ahead of this first bulletin being published. Members considered the efforts being taken by Police Scotland to monitor absence levels daily and ensure service to the public is maintained throughout the COVID-19 outbreak and restrictions. Whilst sickness absence was reported as higher than normal at the time, it continues to be offset by reduced commitments in relation to operations, court, annual leave, training and time off. Additionally, incidents, crime and custodies are all reported as significantly lower than average. Where any shortage in personnel is identified, the service is redeploying officers or staff across the force from 'non-critical' roles to frontline activity. This is an issue we will continue to review on a weekly basis.

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COVID-19 Screening

The committee also seeks further information on the Authority's oversight of COVID-19 screening of the workforce. To be clear, any officers or member of staff who are symptomatic or living with someone who is **and** those who have been subject to a COVID-19 related incident, assault or near miss will automatically be referred by Police Scotland for COVID-19 testing. The numbers of tests arranged and subsequent positive results are reported through Police Scotland's Weekly COVID-19 Bulletin to the Authority.

Enforcement

Your correspondence also seeks comment on Police Scotland's approach to enforcement of the 14-day quarantine for incoming air passengers. The Chief Constable stated during the First Ministers lunchtime COVID-19 briefing on Friday 22 May that he is working with the Scottish Government to determine exactly what, if any, role the police will play. This is a matter the Authority will continue to monitor, initially at our weekly update briefings and publicly at the next Authority meeting in June.

Finally, your correspondence seeks the SPA's views on a suggestion that individuals using coronavirus as a weapon should be remanded in custody automatically. As explained by the Chief Constable, Police Scotland's approach to enforcing the new restrictions has been to engage, explain, encourage and enforce. Where enforcement has been used, it is, appropriately, for the courts to decide on the appropriate sanctions for that.

I trust this addresses the issues raised.

Yours sincerely,

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

DAVID CRICHTON
Vice Chair