SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee

13 August 2026

Minutes of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee held on Tuesday 12 May 2026 at 09.30am via Webex.

Committee Members present:	Katharina Kasper (Committee Chair) Paul Edie Brian Howarth Pauline Howie Angela Leitch
Committee Member apologies:	n/a
In attendance:	**Scottish Police Authority** Chris Brown, Chief Executive John McNellis, Head of Finance, Audit and Risk Karen Vallance, Governance Support Officer **Police Scotland** DCC Alan Speirs Tom McMahon, Director of Strategy and Analysis Sarah Roughead, Chief Financial Officer Mark McCabe, Best Value Manager Angelo Gustinelli, Head of Accounting and Control Donna Adam, Audit Manager Transformation Heather Cunningham, Head of Resourcing Kate Hilley, HR Lead – Talent Acquisition Sara MacKenzie, Enterprise Risk Manager Michelle Hutchison, Deputy Risk and Insurance Manager

	Forensic Services Craig Donnachie, Head of Quality and Assurance **BDO** Claire Robertson, Risk and Advisory Services Director **Grant Thornton** Joanne Brown, Audit Partner **HMICS** Craig Naylor, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland John Paterson, Lead Inspector

1. STANDING ITEMS

1.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Committee Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees.

No apologies were noted.

1.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members noted no declarations of interest.

1.3 MINUTE OF MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2026 FOR APPROVAL

Members approved the Minute of the 12 February 2026 meeting.

1.4 ACTION LOG AND MATTERS ARISING

Members noted the action log updates and agreed the closures.

1.5 DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE (ITEMS 7-10)

Members agreed that, in accordance with paragraph 20 of the SPA Standing Orders, the Committee would consider items 7-10 in private for the reasons set out on the agenda.

2. AUDIT AND IMPROVEMENT

2.1 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Members considered the report which provided an update on internal audit progress and Q4 follow up results. Claire Robertson (CRobertson) highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members sought confirmation that the Communication and Engagement audit would be considered at a later date. CRobertson advised it is expected to take place in 2027/28 but if the risk profile were to change then timing would be reviewed.
- Regarding audit timings, Members sought rationale for the timing of the sickness absence management audit given the challenges already known. Donna Adam (DAdam) explained that the timing was to allow current ongoing activity to be embedded.

Members noted the report.

2.2 POLICE SCOTLAND AUDIT AND IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATION TRACKER Q4

Members considered the report which provided an update of current open recommendations from all audit and improvement activity. DAdam provided a summary of the key performance points detailed within the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- The Chair noted that there were some improvements in the management of recommendations but there was still concern around the overall number. Tom McMahon (TMcMahon) summarised the internal work being done to improve accountability. He explained that the area is now a standing item at Senior Leadership Boards and a new framework will be presented which emphasises the essential role of audit and scrutiny and the importance of agreeing accurate dates for recommendations. The Chair replied that Members would be looking to see how quickly the work will have the desired impacts.
- Regarding the time taken to close recommendations, Members questioned why there was such a difference between the time taken to close Internal Audit recommendations and recommendations from other bodies. DAdam highlighted that a high number of Internal Audit recommendations are being closed which has increased from last year. However, the organisation needs to ensure quality and supporting evidence is good enough to get closures agreed at first presentation.

- Members questioned why there has been a significant drop of Internal Audit recommendations closed in the last quarter. DAdam explained that review activity indicated further work was required on a few so they would not meet timescales, therefore a decision was taken to defer.
- Members sought further detail on the recommendation relating to the SPA Annual Audit of 2021/22. Sarah Roughead (SRoughead) explained that it relates to benefits realisation and is also linked to recommendation 6 of the Best Value Audit. She assured Members it is being progressed and should be completed following mapping work.
- The Committee suggested it may be useful for the owners of older recommendations to attend Committee meetings to provide further information. TMcMahon assured Members accountability is discussed internally and he would be supportive of executive owners attending to provide input.
- Members sought comment on key issues relating to progress of biometrics and environment and sustainability management recommendations. DAdam explained that there are a huge number of recommendations in the biometrics space and many were made before the new team (to address them) was established. In relation to environment and sustainability, the recommendations were raised in October 2025 and had long timescales attached so movement was not expected at this time.
- Members sought BDOs view on whether the organisation is operating in a riskier environment. CRobertson advised that the Internal Audit opinion is due to the number of limited assurance reports and the implementation rate of recommendations. She confirmed if both had been higher a more positive opinion may have been given. Members committed to providing support for improvement.
- Comment was sought on how risk is viewed, cost versus benefits, owner responsibility, and continuous improvement. TMcMahon assured Members there are improved discussions on management and detail of strategic risks. He explained that the updated Terms of Reference for the internal Audit and Risk Board will be explicit that each recommendation should have an owner which will improve accountability. He also advised that cost benefit analysis should be undertaken when recommendations are accepted and that Best Value work has highlighted the need for a coherent approach to continuous improvement and shared responsibility.
- Members sought detail on the work undertaken for the abnormal load recommendation. DAdam advised that when presenting closing statements to HMICS, a commitment was made to engage with Scottish Government and Transport Scotland but no significant

change in the short term was expected. HMICS had accepted closure on this basis.
- The Committee discussed how SPA officials are linked to the work and Members heard SPA will now attend Police Scotland's Audit and Risk Boards. DCC Alan Speirs stated that challenge and independent scrutiny was welcomed.
- John Paterson (JPaterson) advised HMICS have a focus on older recommendations and have been working with Police Scotland to determine if they are still current and can they be closed down.

Members noted the report.

2.3 SPA AUDIT AND IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS UPDATE

Members considered the report which provided an update on progress against the SPA Corporate Strategy for 2024/25, and open recommendations from all SPA corporate audit and inspection activity. John McNellis (JMcNellis) highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

No questions were raised.

Members noted the report.

3. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTING

3.1 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

Members considered the audit report on insurance obligations. CRobertson highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Noting that some documents were not provided, Members sought assurance that all necessary documents are shared. CRobertson responded that documents not provided were slightly out of scope therefore it was not pursued. She explained that the reason they were not provided was that there was not a single source. TMcMahon advised that the asset register can be provided.
- Assurance was sought and received from BDO that timescales were appropriate, hearing that highest risk areas will be dealt with first.
- The Committee heard that the Legal Committee oversee claims management and are seeking lessons learned information on liabilities.
- Members requested further information on self-insurance be provided to the Committee. TMcMahon confirmed he would work with SRoughead on best value work.
- Members were informed that the risk team requested the audit, and focus was on commercial policies and not self-insurance. Sara MacKenzie advised that improvements have been made and a

framework introduced with consultation underway. With regard to timescales, she told Members that the team will be looking at what is already on the risk register and will flag relevant risks to see if further work is required. She advised that claims information is out with the risk team controls and a short life working group has been set up to look at access to ensure good insurance decisions.

Members considered the audit report on recruitment and retention. CRobertson highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members sought assurance that there was appropriate training in place for those who are on recruitment panels. Heather Cunningham responded there has always been training in place and this was updated when the framework changed. She advised that a manual check is undertaken to ensure at least one panel member is trained and this process is what is required to be tightened. Members were assured that all staff had undertaken discrimination training.
- Members sought clarity from BDO on training requirements and heard it was not explicit as to whether the training undertaken was a Police Scotland course or not. DCC Speirs advised that interview training is not bespoke and is to a UK standard.
- Further comment was sought on the partially accepted recommendations. Kate Hilley explained that the recruitment team partially accepted the recommendation as the design and delivery of training sits with the training team whereas the recruitment team ensures it is fit for purpose.

Members noted the report and agreed the following action:

20260512-AUD-001: Further information on self-insurance to be provided to Members.

3.2 ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Members considered the Internal Audit Annual Report. CRobertson highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members noted their disappointment at receiving the opinion and sought further comment from BDO on improvement, and if it was unusual for a public sector organisation to receive that type of opinion. CRobertson explained that the audits found several high risk areas that are not fully embedded which has led to limited assurance ratings. She explained that there are some public sector organisations who have improvement required conclusions. Also the root causes of issues are normally investment in systems and

trying to embed new controls within a large environment. Members were told last year's opinion was presented differently due to methodology changes but essentially BDO were more than generally satisfied. CRobertson reiterated that improvement work was concerning and required effort to improve. Members requested a recommendation improvement plan be circulated and discussed at the next committee meeting.

- Members sought assurance that there were appropriate levels of accountability. DAdam explained that every recommendation added to the system has two people assigned – the person responsible for undertaking the work and the senior responsible officer. She explained that those people get prompts to undertake work and there are escalation routes if required. TMcMahon told Members that the improvement plan would help ensure there is correct focus and accountability.
- In closing, the Chair stated that it was an uncomfortable report to receive. She noted she would expect some findings to be picked up by management rather than waiting on an Internal Audit report and encouraged improvement work to focus on that challenge.

Members noted the report and agreed the following action:

20260512-AUD-002: Improvement Plan to be an Agenda item at next Committee but circulated to Members in advance for early sight.

3.3 ANNUAL EXTERNAL PROGRESS REPORT

Members considered the report which provided an update on progress in delivering external auditor responsibilities and an update in respect of emerging sector issues. Joanne Brown highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

Members sought comment on the impact of changes to valuation periods for land and buildings. Angelo Gustinelli (AGustinelli) responded that the changes were now mandated so Police Scotland would be applying indexation to all assets that do not undergo a valuation in year.

Members noted the report.

4. ASSURANCE REPORTING

4.1 HMICS SCRUTINY PLAN

Craig Naylor (CNaylor) provided an update on the HMICS Scrutiny Plan.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members sought CNaylors view on continuous learning and development. CNaylor stated that SPA and Forensic Services have improved considerably in terms of making improvements. Some

areas in Police Scotland have seen progress such as best value and missing persons but there was still further work to be done areas like drug harm reduction. He explained that differences in improvement can be due to differences in leadership.

- CNaylor advised Members that when significant progress have been made with a recommendations, HMICS are happy to close before it fully completed.
- Further comment on the child sexual abuse audit was sought, specifically in relation to data sharing. CNaylor explained the audit was in the early stage of data return and work was starting on the self-evaluation but there was concern on the effectiveness of data sharing/use. Notwithstanding, he highlighted the Vulnerable Persons Database was a benefit.
- Members asked when HMICS would look at work on local policing and heard it would be within year three of the scrutiny plan and will be focussed on community based policing. Learning experiences of the Forth Valley roll out and any thematic issues would be considered, recognising collaboration and partnership working was important.

Members noted the report.

4.2 BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Members considered the improvement plan to address the recommendations in the Best Value audit report. Mark McCabe (MMcCabe) highlighted a number of key points detailed in the report.

In discussion the following matters were raised:

- Members sought and received assurance from JPaterson that if the plan is delivered, the recommendations would be discharged. JPaterson thanked TMcMahon, MMcCabe, JMcNellis, SRoughead, Donna Vallance and Sam Curran for the work undertaken. He explained that timescales are challenging but achievable and HMICS would keep in contact with teams to ensure delivery and quarterly updates.
- CNaylor informed the Committee that he had provided feedback to HMICFRS and Lord Hogan-Howe as part of the Home Office reform work.
- Referencing recommendation 5c (strategic workforce plan alignment), Members requested the plan be updated to explicitly state there will be at least an annual review. JMcNellis advised that Forensic Services were further ahead with their SWP so there is a model to pilot linkage.
- Members requested detail on any challenges with timelines. MMcCabe explained the main challenge would be progressing some

strategic issues and effectively coordinating them with the medium term financial plan and transformation plan.

- Referencing recommendation 7 on continuous improvement, Members queried the proposed date of 2027 and questioned if the Committee will have sight of progress before then. MMcCabe explained work is being done collectively to establish a co-ordinated approach which would take until 2027. JMcNellis informed Members there would be a report to the next meeting that would detail how Best Value work is continuing which would provide assurance on continuous improvement. JPaterson assured the Committee that HMICS work with BDO to ensure no duplication or gaps in work.
- Members sought detail on the engagement process for the Strategic Policing Plan (SPP). Chris Brown (CBrown) advised that the SPP has been laid in parliament so the next step is around how supporting strategies can better align. In terms of timing, he explained that the Police Scotland Business Plan, Forensic Services Strategy and the SPA Corporate Plan refresh will all go to 2030 providing alignment. CBrown highlighted that Scottish Government strategic policing priorities may change with the new parliamentary session so there could be a requirement to amend the SPP.

Members noted the report and agreed the following action:

20260512-AUD-003: Recommendation 5c to be updated to explicitly state at least an annual review.

4.3 INTEGRATED ASSURANCE STATEMENT 2025/26

Members considered the report which provided an annual strategic summary of the systems of internal control across the four lines of defence and a summary of the findings from key audit and inspection bodies. JMcNellis highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

No questions were raised.

Members noted the report.

4.4 SPA CORPORATE YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT

Members considered the report which provided oversight of the progress undertaken to deliver SPA corporate strategy milestones. CBrown highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report and confirmed that some milestones are stretching and the refresh of the Corporate Strategy would provide a clearer link with other strategies.

No questions were raised.

Members noted the report.

4.5 EVALUATION OF COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS

Members considered the report which detailed the overview of findings from 2025/26 committee effectiveness process. Karen Vallance highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

Members discussed the need to take cognisance of the upcoming BDO audit on effectiveness and Best Value recommendation work.

Members noted the report.

4.6 AUDIT, RISK AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the report which detailed the annual work of the Committee, in line with the Committee terms of reference and the Scottish Government Audit Committee handbook. JMcNellis highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

No questions were raised.

Members noted the report.

5. ACCOUNTING POLICIES, JUDGEMENT AND ESTIMATES

Members considered the report which provided the proposed accounting policies, judgements and estimates, prior to the preparation and approval of the SPA Annual Report and Accounts. AGustinelli highlighted a number of key points detailed within the report.

The Committee suggested future reports reconsider what represents a significant judgement compared with a significant estimate.

Members noted the report.

6. COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

Members were presented with the work plan which proposed Committee items for the next 12 months.

Members noted the plan.

The remaining items were taken in private.