

OFFICIAL

SCOTTISH POLICE  
AUTHORITY

1 Pacific Quay  
Glasgow  
G51 1DZ  
[SPChairOffice@spa.police.uk](mailto:SPChairOffice@spa.police.uk)

**LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL ONLY**

Audrey Nicoll MSP  
Convener, Criminal Justice Committee  
Room T2:60  
The Scottish Parliament  
EDINBURGH  
EH99 1SP

[JusticeCommittee@parliament.scot](mailto:JusticeCommittee@parliament.scot)

11 August 2022

CO/072/2022

Dear Ms Nicoll

**MENTAL HEALTH IN POLICING**

I write in response to your correspondence of 20 June 2022 and the Criminal Justice Committee's Roundtable held on 18 May 2022, to which I contributed on behalf of the Authority.

I set out in our written submission and reinforced at the roundtable discussion in May that there is a general and growing acceptance across civil and civic society that the needs of people with mental health issues are not being met appropriately. Demand for effective and timely support services is exceeding current capacity. The implications of this on policing in terms of service provision and on our workforce are significant.

The issue of mental health and demand on policing was raised by Dame Elish Angiolini in her 2020 review of complaint handling in policing. It is also covered in detail in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police in England and Wales report of 2018 titled [Policing and Mental Health: Picking Up the Pieces](#). Similarly, in Sir Michael Barber's 2022 [Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales](#), which also concluded that the way the police perform their emergency response function will need to adapt to changing demands.

I am aware that the Committee has written to Police Scotland regarding these issues. With this in mind, I have provided a response under the headings below which focuses on the Authority's scrutiny and oversight role to avoid duplication.

OFFICIAL

## **POLICE OFFICER WELLBEING**

You have asked for details of the Authority's oversight of the hours worked by police officers, in particular, frontline officers, such as those engaged in response policing. Information has also been requested on whether any analysis of the effectiveness of the Trauma Risk Assessment (TRiM) and Employee Assist Programme has been conducted.

The Authority's People Committee leads our scrutiny and oversight of all significant workforce matters. The health and wellbeing of our workforce are a priority and the committee receives regular reports from Police Scotland tracking overall workforce annual leave utilisation and re-rostered rest day balances. At the end of the last financial year (2021/22), it was reported to the People Committee that 2.12% of annual leave across the whole workforce had not been utilised during the year. This represented an improvement against the previous year, despite the impact of COVID and COP26. The People Committee will continue to monitor annual leave utilisation going forward.

In relation to re-rostered rest days (RRRDs), the Authority knows the importance of sufficient rest and the impact on our officers where it is not achieved. There has been an unacceptable increase in banked RRRDs during 2020/21 and 2021/2022. This has been discussed by the Authority's People Committee and our Board. Police Scotland has reported that it is working with divisions to understand the reasons behind this increase, and the extent to which they are within the organisation's control. Court citations are a significant driver behind cancelled rest days, with COVID, COP26 and resourcing levels also having contributed to recent increases in banked RRRDs.

The Committee is informed that there are officer-preferred practices where, rather than being used, banked RRRDs are utilised to bring forward retirement dates. In response to the increase, Police Scotland has established a dedicated group to drive robust and effective management of RRRDs as a matter of priority. At our People Committee on 1 June, members required an update on this work, including a clear timeline for a return to acceptable levels.

The People Committee receives reports from Police Scotland in respect of wellbeing support for officers and staff on a quarterly basis. The Committee's view is that workforce wellbeing is being prioritised and a significant amount of time and effort are being invested in initiatives under the 'Your Wellbeing Matters' programme. We know from engagement with the staff associations that these efforts and their impact can be undermined when officers do not get the annual leave they want or their scheduled RRRDs. Police Scotland has reported to the People Committee that it is reviewing existing arrangements, and is undertaking research to better understand the organisational factors impacting on wellbeing. A Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group has been established to support continuous evaluation and feedback. Our People Committee will receive an update on this work in due course.

At a meeting of the People Committee in June, Police Scotland also confirmed it is carrying out detailed analysis on stress and psychological illness in the

## OFFICIAL

workforce. Members welcomed this activity and will consider the findings at a future meeting.

Another area of the committee's interest in relation to wellbeing has been [Police Scotland's Organisational Implementation Plan](#), which seeks to address the range of issues identified through [Police Scotland's 2021 workforce survey](#). The survey of more than 7,400 officers and staff found very high levels of public service motivation across our workforce. However, the energy officers and staff have to meet daily demands and challenges was reported at a moderate average level, indicating physical fatigue and a sense of feeling 'drained' at work. The implementation plan seeks to improve the wellbeing of the policing workforce. The Authority welcomes these efforts and activities in response to the survey findings. We will continue to monitor closely their progress and impact.

You also asked whether the Authority has conducted any analysis on the effectiveness of the TRiM and Employee Assistance Programmes. The Authority has set clear expectations of Police Scotland in this regard and we seek assurance, through our scrutiny of these and the wider wellbeing programme, that services are meeting demand and need, and addressing issues identified by the workforce through the staff survey for example.

Police Scotland has provided evidence to our People Committee that there is proactive support in place for officers exposed to traumatic situations (both one-off and cumulative events). These cover those in particular roles as well as preventative mental health assessments used to identify those who may be struggling or could benefit from early intervention.

Police Scotland reported a significant increase in requests for TRiM during 2021/22 to the People Committee. This has been attributed in part to improved awareness and trust in the service.

Similarly, an increase in contact to the Employee Assistance Programmes was reported in 2021/22, although contact is still below pre-COVID levels. The People Committee has received advice from Police Scotland that demand is being met for these services and we will continue to seek evidence that they are meeting the needs and expectations of our workforce.

### **MENTAL HEALTH IN CUSTODY**

You have asked for details of the Authority's role in relation to procedures within custody suites, and in particular mental health assessments, recording of medical requirements and information sharing with relevant agencies.

The Authority has two roles in regard to oversight of custody arrangements. The first is the oversight of and support for continuous improvement in policing, which includes custody provision. The second is providing an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme to monitor the welfare of people detained in police custody facilities throughout Scotland, checking the conditions in which they are being held and that their rights and entitlements are being observed.

On the former, Police Scotland's approach to the care and welfare of people in police custody is set out in a Standard Operating Procedure titled National Care

## OFFICIAL

and Welfare of Persons in Custody. The operating procedure provides guidance to custody officers and staff on dealing with people in custody. This operating procedure was recently reviewed by Police Scotland. The procedure sets out clearly that the custody supervisor is responsible for contacting the Custody Healthcare Professional if anyone is in need of a mental health assessment. It is the role of a qualified Custody Healthcare Professional to determine whether an assessment is required. Similarly, the procedure states that the administration of medication to anyone in custody is the responsibility of the National Health Service and not of Police Scotland.

There are varying experiences and inconsistent approaches across the country for services to people in custody requiring mental health assessments. Responsibility for meeting these needs is shared across public services, particularly the NHS. This is a real challenge that Police Scotland and the Authority have raised consistently.

Police Scotland reports to the Authority examples of good practice in relation to health provision in custody centres. The custody suite in St. Leonard's, Edinburgh has an arrangement where professional healthcare staff are embedded within the custody environment. The Authority would like to see this replicated elsewhere where appropriate.

Police Scotland seeks to establish suitable mental health pathways in each health board area to improve the experience of and support to people in custody. This work relies on the active and willing input of health boards and local authorities.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland and Health Improvement Scotland are scheduled to undertake a joint inspection later this year on custody healthcare. This is a welcome and valuable piece of work that we anticipate will drive improvement of the health care provided to people in police custody. In conjunction with this, the Authority is also aware that the Custody Health Care and Interventions Team works closely with the National Police Care Network who are also about to commence a review of mental health pathways across all health board areas.

The Authority's responsibilities to manage an Independent Custody Visiting Scheme provides independent assurance to inform our oversight of Police Scotland's custody arrangements. In the 2021/22 financial year, 96,170 people were detained in police custody by Police Scotland. Over 40% of these individuals self-declared as having some vulnerability with regards to mental health at some point in their life. The events that lead to an individual being arrested, being processed and finding themselves in a place of detention, can be distressing and can sometimes exacerbate underlying mental health issues.

During 2021/2022, the Authority's Independent Custody Visiting Scheme undertook 1,314 accepted visits with detainees. Visitors have spoken to detainees in highly distressed states, refusing food and/or seeking medication. On those occasions, visitors have reported to the Authority that Police Scotland has dealt with the circumstances appropriately and in a timely fashion.

**OFFICIAL**

Of the 1,314 accepted visits in 2021/22, a total of 232 issues were raised by detainees in relation to requiring medical help or assistance. This represents 18% of overall visits. 91.4% of these concerns were, or already had been, addressed immediately by Police Scotland.

Police Scotland presented its [5-Year Vision and Direction for Criminal Justice Services](#) to the Policing Performance Committee in June 2022. This document sets out the strategic direction for police custody centres and an ambition to embrace a public health approach to policing. Members of the committee welcomed and supported the direction and ambition set out in the report. The committee will receive updates and monitor delivery against it in the period ahead.

I trust this information is helpful. I have asked the Authority's Chief Executive to ensure your Committee is kept informed of any updates or considerations by the Authority on these matters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martyn Evans". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**MARTYN EVANS**  
**Chair**