

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Authority Meeting</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>30 April 2020</b>
<b>Location</b>	<b>Tele-conference</b>
<b>Title of Paper</b>	<b>SPA Vice Chair's Report</b>
<b>Presented By</b>	<b>David Crichton, Vice Chair</b>
<b>Recommendation to Members</b>	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Appendix Attached:</b>	<b>No</b>

**PURPOSE**

To update Members on the conduct of Authority business during the public health emergency and to offer comment on significant areas of development since the previous Board meeting on 24 March 2020.

## **Policing of Covid-19**

We now have over five weeks of experiencing life and work under the extraordinary circumstances required to limit the spread and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenge of policing during this period, in applying new regulatory powers while still meeting the normal demands of day to day police work, has been huge and complex. That challenge has been met with professionalism and sensitivity, and with the core principle of policing by consent at the core of the force's approach. So I want to begin my report by thanking all police officers and staff for responding so well, and for doing so while experiencing the same concerns and anxieties for their loved ones that every citizen has had to cope with. I also want to thank the staff and Board members of the Authority for adjusting so willingly and professionally at a time when the expectations placed upon the Authority have not diminished and in many ways have increased.

This additional meeting of the Authority is focusing solely on Covid-19 and will examine both Police Scotland's and the Authority's response. There are two contextual points I want to reinforce in my report.

The first is the fundamental link between policing and public health. The connection between the two services has been increasingly recognised in recent years, with much innovative work in public health approaches to, for example, violence reduction, drug abuse, child protection, mental health and community development. The connection is explicit in the current Joint Strategy for Policing, with outcomes defined in terms of resolving threats to public safety, addressing the needs of local communities and involving the public, communities and partners. The response to Covid-19 has reinforced even more strongly these deep connections between policing and public health. Our NHS has performed heroically in treating and saving those whom the virus has affected the most seriously. In tandem, Police Scotland has been at the forefront of preventing further spread of the virus, informing and advising the public and reducing pressure on front-line health services. I hope these essential links will be more fully recognised and widely embedded long beyond the current circumstances.

My second point concerns the next few weeks and months. The First Minister has published a framework for taking decisions about the gradual easing of the current restrictions. The job of policing such a gradual easing will become more complex and challenging. The possible differentiation between different demographic groups, communities and business sectors will create scope for misinterpretation and misinformation around the changing regulations, whilst the population as a whole will become increasingly anxious to see restrictions lifted. Police Scotland are already in

close discussion with the Scottish Government about the nature and timing of exit planning, and the Authority will continue to support that planning in whatever way possible.

### **The Authority's response**

The responsibility of the Authority to provide oversight and scrutiny has not diminished during this period. In fact, the introduction of new legislation giving the police additional and untested powers over the whole population makes that responsibility even greater.

I undertook at the early stages of the emergency that the Authority would continue to exercise its duties but to do so without imposing additional reporting burdens on a police service which was clearly going to face growing and unpredictable operating pressures. We have published the details of our approach to governance and scrutiny on our website and have increased the frequency of communication to those we work with most closely, including Parliamentary Committees, Scottish Government, HMICS, COSLA, local authorities, custody visitors and of course Police Scotland.

The Authority's established system of governance has continued to function on its planned cycle, with each of our scrutiny committees adding specific consideration of the Covid-19 response to their agendas. Individual reports from each of the Committees are included in the papers for this meeting. The full Board continues to meet as normal with this particular meeting being convened as an additional public session focused entirely on the current emergency.

In addition to the normal cycle of Authority work, Board members are receiving weekly tele-briefings throughout this period. Police Scotland will be providing fortnightly reports on Operation Talla, including key data and emerging issues. The financial implications of the policing response are being tracked continuously. Police Scotland is also providing reports on specific matters which require Authority awareness and scrutiny, for example to support the shielding of those at most risk from the virus.

I want to highlight particularly the establishment of an Independent Advisory Group chaired by John Scott QC to monitor the human rights and equalities implications of exercising the new legislative powers. I commend the Chief Constable's initiative in inviting this additional layer of scrutiny, and I am grateful to John Scott and all the Group members for taking on this independent oversight role. The Group will report into the Authority and Authority staff are providing secretariat support to it.

## **OFFICIAL**

The Authority also has responsibility for the delivery of Forensic Services and for the operation of the Independent Custody Visiting Service (ICVS). Both services have had to adjust rapidly and substantially to Covid-19, and the Authority continues to monitor their resources, planning and operation. Details of the required amendments to the operation of ICVS have been published on our website.

The Authority has been commended by Audit Scotland and others for its commitment to undertake its work transparently. Clearly it is not currently possible for Authority meetings to be held with members and the public physically present. However the full proceedings of our meetings are being recorded and can be accessed on our website. We are also exploring other technological means of enhancing transparency, including the possibility of video streaming.

I am confident therefore that the Authority continues to meet its maintenance, oversight and scrutiny responsibilities, enhancing them in response to these unique circumstances and doing so without imposing disproportionate burdens on Police Scotland during such an operationally challenging period.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are requested to discuss and note the information contained within the report.