



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Criminal Justice Committee

Mr David Page  
Deputy Chief Officer  
Corporate Services, People & Strategy  
Police Scotland

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19 December, 2022

Dear Mr Page,

At the Committee meeting of 7 December 2022, the Criminal Justice Committee considered your response to my recent letter to the Chief Constable on policing and mental health.

Thank you for providing information on the measures in place to support police officers and staff who may experience mental health issues. That information is helpful in enabling the Committee to understand the work being done by Police Scotland on this important issue.

However, the Committee noted that your response did not include an acknowledgement of the experiences described by the police officers who spoke to us informally and which outlined what they considered as shortcomings in the support and advice they received when they experienced mental health issues. While your response was comprehensive, members did not feel it addressed all of the Committee's specific requests.

It would be appreciated if you could respond in detail to the Committee's specific requests in my letter of 24 October. Some of the key issues are outlined below:

1. Officers told the Committee how they felt the TRiM policy had failed them. In particular, the onus being placed on officers to identify they are experiencing mental health issues and to proactively seek support did not work for them. Could you please address the various issues raised by officers in their informal evidence with the TRiM policy, detail how those may be resolved, and confirm whether Police Scotland will undertake a review of the TRiM policy.
2. Could you please confirm whether Police Scotland is to review its organisational welfare response to ensure the measures in place are the correct ones for officers and staff.

3. Could you please confirm whether Police Scotland will explore opportunities to strengthen collaboration with NHS Boards and/or relevant third sector providers, and clarify the oversight and reporting mechanisms in place to ensure a consistent approach is taken by line managers.
4. It is welcome that one of the outcomes of the recent review of the Health and Wellbeing programme is to “Reduce the stigma which still exists around health and wellbeing, particularly mental health and the seeking of support”. This outcome appears to focus on officers and staff seeking support. The issue that the officers who spoke to us wish to be addressed is the attitudes of, and in some cases the inappropriate responses from line managers which acted as a barrier to the officers seeking and being provided with the help they required. The Committee would be grateful if you could confirm how Police Scotland intends better understanding of current attitudes and responses towards mental ill health within the organisation in order that measures to address them can be put in place.
5. You confirmed that line managers undertake “return to work interviews for all absence including absences due to mental health issues”, and that these interviews “should provide the officers and staff with awareness of potential options”. However, the Committee heard evidence from officers that they were not made aware of these options, and that they may have benefited from them and been able to remain in their jobs. Could you please confirm the reporting and oversight mechanisms in place to ensure this policy is consistently applied?
6. Could you please confirm what the current agreed procedures are between Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and if these include the provision of appropriate notification periods for officers and a procedure for excusal on the grounds of an officer being unavailable. The court scheduling system redesign is a welcome development. Could you please provide details of when in 2023 it will be in place, and if the protection of the rest days of officers will be a specific consideration.
7. Could you also please confirm if officers are currently offered the option to appear in court virtually and provide details of any current procedures in place to accommodate that option.
8. Thank you for providing information on the mental health training provided to staff and officers. Could you please confirm whether any of the training is mandatory, the percentage of line managers who have participated in Lifelines Scotland training courses, and whether an alternative external provider is being sourced to replace Eleos to deliver a mental wellbeing programme.
9. Thank you for confirming that Police Scotland would like to discuss the outcomes of the ill health retirement pilot programme to tackle complex PTSD with both Police Care UK and the Police Treatment Centre once concluded. The lack of support for officers who experience complex PTSD is a key concern. It would be appreciated if you would keep the Committee updated with developments in this regard.

At its meeting of 7 December, the Committee also considered the notes of the informal evidence sessions with six police officers which describe their experiences of working for Police Scotland. These are on the Committee's website. The Committee would be grateful if you would consider the issues raised in the detailed notes from our meetings with police officers and respond to the points they made to us. The Committee agreed to write to Police Scotland to request that action may be taken on some specific issues raised by the police officers. These are outlined below.

### ***Police Scotland's policies***

The Committee heard from the police officers about the implementation of Police Scotland's policy of entitlement to six counselling sessions and how this impacted on their mental wellbeing. The officers described the impact of receiving letters informing them of the dates that they were to move to half pay (after six months) and zero pay (after 12 months), as well as the lack of acknowledgement or thanks from Police Scotland for their service, when they retired due to ill health.

It would be appreciated if you would provide details of the following Police Scotland policies:

1. The policy for approving counselling sessions for officers who have mental health needs and what flexibility exists to tailor support to the individual needs of an officer, including extending the time offered beyond that set out in Police Scotland's welfare policy. Also, details of how officers who are off due to mental health issues, should be informed.
2. The policy on sickness pay rates and durations for officers who are signed off with mental health issues and any exceptions.
3. The exit strategy/policy that exists to ensure officers retiring following a period of absence receive both practical and emotional support in their transition out of the organisation, and that there are clear lines of communication to facilitate this process.

### ***Police Scotland's HR department***

Police Scotland's HR department is the main point of contact for officers who are not able to work due to their mental health. The police officers who gave informal evidence to the Committee gave examples of their experiences and highlighted several areas where improvements could be made. These are outlined below.

1. There is a 'one size fits all' approach taken by HR which does not appear to be trauma informed. Contact with officers felt impersonal and can have a detrimental effect on their mental health. One example is HR sending correspondence informing officers when they will be reduced to half pay and zero pay.
2. There is a lack of communication with officers, with the onus placed on officers to keep in touch with their employer and to proactively seek progress updates.
3. Officers are not given a single point of contact. The officers found that each new contact person did not seem to be aware of their circumstances, which

meant they had to repeat multiple times the reasons they were off ill. Some of the officers described this process as retraumatizing.

4. Officers are asked to provide the same information multiple times over months and, in two cases, years.
5. The HR officers inaccurately recorded key information, such as the views of medical professionals. I appreciate this may be an exceptional occurrence but it was articulated none the less.

It would be appreciated if you would consider what changes can be made to the processes used by Police Scotland's HR department for dealing with officers who are suffering from mental health issues. This is to ensure that the procedures are trauma-informed, efficient and that there is an oversight mechanism.

### ***Support for officers***

An issue raised by some of the officers was the length of time they had to wait for an appointment with the Selected Medical Practitioner (SMP). Officers gave examples of long waiting times, with one officer having to wait 14 months for an appointment. In its letter to the Committee of 25 November, the Scottish Police Authority confirmed the appointment of a number of additional SMPs, and that the waiting time to see a SMP has reduced from 21 to 12 months. The SPA also confirmed that 39 of the 'live' cases have been in the IHR process for more than 12 months. Could you please provide details of the role of the SMP, confirm how many additional SMPs are now in post, and whether the 39 cases which have been in the IHR process for more than 12 months have been prioritised.

The Committee has been informed that whilst an SMP post is vacant the Force Medical Adviser (FMA) can be appointed to perform the role of the SMP on a temporary basis. Could you please confirm whether this is possible and, if so, whether Police Scotland implemented this procedure when the SMP post was vacant.

Some of the officers raised issues with the adequacy of the Employee Assistance line, as it is not just for police officers and the operators cannot always provide the required assistance. One of the officer's told the Committee that he called the employee assistance line when in crisis and was told to "phone back later". When he called back an hour later, he was told "we can't help you", as he did not meet their specific criteria. He recommended that a specific helpline for police officers be provided.

Could you please consider the issues raised by the police officers in their informal written evidence about the employee assistance line and how these can be addressed. For example, the option of providing a dedicated line for police officers and staff and/or amending the criteria to ensure that officers in crisis are given adequate help when they call.

The informal evidence from the police officers demonstrated the crucial role that line managers play in identifying signs that an officer needs help and the necessity of them having the skills and support to take timely and appropriate actions. Line managers also need to have the skills to ensure that officers can speak to them in the first instance and feel confident of an appropriate response. The Committee remains concerned that line managers may not have the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and training to identify that an officer may be suffering

from mental health issues. Could you please confirm what mandatory and optional training is provided to first line operational supervisors to ensure they recognise changes in an officer that indicate deteriorating mental wellbeing and are able to respond effectively using clearly defined pathways to referral and support.

### ***Financial burdens***

A cause of financial stress for officers is the impact on their finances of having to pay 14% each month towards their police pension. For some, this can be over £400 per month, which is similar to a mortgage payment. To alleviate this financial impact, the Committee heard that some officers regularly take on extra shifts to make up their salary or give up their rest days, whilst others have opted out of the pension scheme. It would be appreciated if you would consider this issue and how it might be addressed.

This letter has been copied to Mr Martyn Evans, Chair of the Scottish Police Authority.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey N : cjl". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Audrey Nicoll MSP  
Convener, Criminal Justice Committee