



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Criminal Justice Committee

Martyn Evans
Chair
Scottish Police Authority

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24 October, 2022

Dear Mr Evans,

I am writing to you regarding recent informal evidence sessions that the Criminal Justice Committee Members held with six police officers to hear about their experiences of working for Police Scotland.

The purpose of the informal sessions was for Members to hear about the challenges and organisational factors that the officers face and how these impact on their health and wellbeing, their personal lives and their families. Also, to hear about the types of work-related stresses the officers experience, and whether these are specific to their role or are due to dealing with members of the public with mental health conditions.

The Committee also heard about the advice and support provided to the police officers when they asked for help with mental health issues, including some suggestions from them on the ways in which that advice and support could be improved.

Some of the officers that spoke to us are retired due to mental ill health. They described the retirement process as 'one size fits all' and not tailored to their specific needs. They explained that they are expected to fit into a process which is inappropriate for their set of circumstances and which has been, and continues to be, detrimental to their wellbeing.

Some specific examples of the process, based on their experiences include:

- not having a single point of contact, which means that they are expected to explain the same issues repeatedly to strangers who do not seem to have access to the information already provided;

- a lack of communication from Police Scotland's human resources department over many months and, in one case, years;
- not being kept updated on progress and when HR are in touch they provide incorrect information and/or inconsistent advice; and
- the officers having to proactively chase HR and when they do being asked to provide material which has already been provided, for example, a GP report.

A key issue that was raised was the lack of progress in processing injury on duty awards, despite there being no dispute that the officers are entitled to it.

Police Scotland officers are automatically covered for an injury on duty award from the day their employment begins. This means that officers could receive financial compensation if they are permanently disabled because of an injury received on duty and have to leave Police Scotland employment as a result.

The rules on Police Injury Awards are set out in the Police (Injury Benefit) (Scotland) Regulations 2007 and the Scottish Police Authority makes the final decision on all applications, based on the recommendation of the medical practitioner assigned to each case. Awards are administered, calculated and paid by the Scottish Public Pensions Agency (SPPA).

The officers who spoke to us described the process as impersonal, inappropriate, inadequate, inefficient and retraumatising. It is unnecessarily lengthy and stressful. They desperately want the retirement process to conclude, so that they can move on with their lives.

We would appreciate it if the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) is able to undertake an urgent review of the number of cases where officers and staff have retired due to mental ill health and where the administration of their retirement remains incomplete.

This could include consideration of: the reasons for the delays; whether the injury on duty awards process is a particular area which needs to be addressed; how issues could be resolved; and recommendations for ways to improve the process of retirement due to ill mental health to ensure it is efficient, fit for purpose and trauma informed.

We agree with the Chief Constable that the people within Police Scotland are its most important asset and drive the success of policing in Scotland. We wish any police officer or staff member who has to retire due to ill mental health to be provided with a service which acknowledges their dedication and service to the police force, thanks them for their service, and recognises the need for an efficient retirement process which does not further impact on their ill health.

We would very much appreciate it if you could undertake this work as soon as practically possible and provide us with a progress report by mid-December.

The Scottish Police Federation assisted us in arranging the informal evidence sessions and have kindly agreed to liaise with you to provide details of any relevant cases. We are aware that there could be staff members and senior officers who may

be in a similar position, and you may wish to liaise with their relevant unions for details of their cases.

I have copied this letter to the Chief Constable for information.

I will be writing to the Chief Constable shortly regarding other issues which were discussed during the informal evidence sessions. I will copy the letter to you, as the Committee is aware that the SPA's People Committee is currently undertaking some work on Police Scotland's health and wellbeing strategy and may be interested in the Committee's views.

Best wishes,

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

Audrey Nicoll MSP
Convener, Criminal Justice Committee

CC: Iain Livingstone, Chief Constable, Police Scotland