

OFFICIAL

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Audrey Nicoll MSP  
Convener, Criminal Justice Committee  
Justice Committee Clerks  
Room T2.60  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP



**POLICE  
SCOTLAND**  
Keeping people safe

**POILEAS ALBA**  
Fiona Taylor QPM  
Deputy Chief Constable  
Professionalism, Strategy and Engagement  
Police Scotland Headquarters  
Tulliallan Castle  
Kincardine  
Fife  
FK10 4BE

By e-mail:  
[justicecommittee@parliament.scot](mailto:justicecommittee@parliament.scot)

Tel: 01259 733115

[DCCprofessionalism@scotland.police.uk](mailto:DCCprofessionalism@scotland.police.uk)

Dear Convener

## **POLICING AND MENTAL HEALTH**

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2023 and for your ongoing focus on the wellbeing of police officers and staff. The Chief Constable considers the welfare and wellbeing of our colleagues as a priority. Policing can be relentless and can place particular demands on our people and indeed their families. We recognise this and seek to place wellbeing at the heart of our approach.

I hope the undernoted provides sufficient detail to the specific points queried in your correspondence;

### **1. You asked for an explanation as to why the officers who spoke to the committee did not receive the expected standards of advice and support**

I'm aware some officers who spoke with the Committee about mental health and wellbeing explained that they did not receive the expected standard of advice and support. Understanding when experiences are below expected standards is of vital importance.

We greatly value the challenge and support of our staff associations, including the Scottish Police Federation, and we are in active discussions with colleagues around how we can continually improve our processes.

Further discussions are planned and, within those discussions, we will seek to explore the specific circumstances of those cases shared with the Committee to better understand why those experiences were below expectations. This will enable us to ascertain what processes were in place at that time, whether and why they were not implemented, and what we can learn from any failings.

**2. You asked about the measures in place to support managers in recognising and tackling mental health trauma.**

I agree we must support our people to recognise when colleagues need support, and empower managers to step in at the right time. In my previous correspondence, I outlined how over 1,000 officers and staff had undertaken Lifelines Scotland training and that the Scottish Government has committed additional funding to extend the training provision and support until 30th September 2023.

Notwithstanding that, our Chief Constable has been clear that policing in Scotland has not invested enough in developing leaders over a period years. As indicated, developing our leaders is a key imperative and the Your Leadership Matters programme includes a wellbeing and mental health module which will enable line managers to have constructive conversations with their staff, to spot early signs of mental health and take action.

**3. You asked whether the TRIM process and other mechanisms still place the onus on officers to seek support.**

As indicated, we are working to equip leaders with the tools required to identify when a colleague needs support and to make proactive interventions. It is also important to recognise that some colleagues wish to self-refer and this remains an option available to every officer.

**4. You asked whether Police Scotland is considering setting up a dedicated telephone line for officers and staff who call the Employee Assistance Programme.**

We are tendering for our new Occupational Health and Employee Assistance Programme, with a new contract due to commence next April. We are at an early stage of specifying our requirements. We will keep this option under consideration and I would be happy to update you further as progress is made on procurement.

**5. You asked for confirmation on the planned date for the court scheduling system redesign**

As I outlined in my previous correspondence, I agree that being cited for court while on annual leave or rest days causes disruption and frustration for officers. We are liaising with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service to inform improvements to these processes. I cannot provide a specific date because this multi-agency work remains ongoing. However as work progresses, I would be happy to provide further information.

**6. You asked whether Police Scotland intends to undertake any work (*through formal and/or informal methods*) to determine whether there was a work-based element in relation to any officers or staff who have sadly taken their own lives.**

The loss of an officer or member of police staff in any circumstances is a tragedy for the individual, their family and their colleagues. Each is acutely felt throughout the policing family. Of course, each death is a unique tragedy and our response, both as a police service and as an employer, will reflect those individual and specific circumstances, and appropriate action taken where relevant.

When such a loss arises, or apparently arises, in circumstances indicating the person has taken their own life, the pain is no less keenly felt by the bereaved but may be impacted by a range of other emotions. You have the Lord Advocate's letter of 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023, and I fully endorse all that is set out therein as to the steps that are taken at the Crown's instruction after any such death.

In your correspondence, you ask around the engagement which Police Scotland undertakes after such a loss, which may include '*informal*' steps. I am sure, in that event, your Committee will recognise that a combination of the unique nature of every such death and the correspondingly bespoke response the Service may make to it does not comfortably accommodate summary repetition in a passage of letters which are intended for publication.

I look forward to speaking to you, and progressing further constructive discussions on the impact of traumatic events on officers and staff with the Scottish Police Authority and other stakeholders, at the roundtable event on Mental Health and Trauma in Policing on 21 April.

Officers and staff work to improve the lives of the people and communities of Scotland every minute of every day. The Chief Constable is committed to ensuring that we recognise the demands that such dedication brings and that our people know that they are supported and valued.

I trust this provides you with assurance on this vital matter. A copy of this letter has been provided to the Chair of the Scottish Police Authority.

Yours sincerely,



Fiona Taylor QPM  
Deputy Chief Constable