



**HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland**  
Improving Policing across Scotland

Thursday, 11th April, 2024

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Demands of Frontline Policing taking a toll on Police Scotland workforce**

POLICE Scotland need to develop a cohesive wellbeing strategy that addresses what really impacts on the physical and mental health of their officers and staff.

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) carried out a review of wellbeing provision in Police Scotland focused on those officers and staff delivering a frontline service.

It found while the organisation was good at supporting officers at points of crisis, it failed to recognise in any of its wellbeing initiatives the key areas staff said took the biggest toll.

Resource levels and police stations being in a poor state were among issues repeatedly highlighted by officers and staff as affecting their wellbeing.

Rest days being disrupted and difficulty in securing time off were also cited as major areas of strain.

The HMICS inspection found examples of dilapidated police buildings with holes in the roof, water running down walls and barely functioning furniture.

Inspectors heard repeated evidence such organisational causes of stress had the most severe impact on frontline officers and staff, with many left feeling unsafe and unable to provide the service they want to give.

Despite this, HMICS found no recognition or reference to these areas of significant stress in any of the work currently being undertaken by Police Scotland in relation to wellbeing.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Craig Naylor, said the HMICS 'Frontline Focus – Wellbeing' report aimed to draw attention to the concerns raised, and highlight that those most in need of wellbeing support were often those with the least time or opportunity to seek it out.

Mr Naylor said: *“Police officers and staff support communities during their times of need, witnessing trauma, distress and acts of violence on a daily basis.*

*“They are exposed to incidents and experiences that most people will not see in their lifetime, and they do this willingly - often running towards danger as others run away.*

*“It is essential that officers and staff are looked after before - and if -they become unwell, so they can continue to deliver this service to the people of Scotland.”*

During the review period the inspection team spoke to police officers and staff from areas across Scotland.

They heard mixed views on whether wellbeing was seen as an organisational priority.

Many frontline officers and staff had only a vague awareness of wellbeing services provided by Police Scotland, and the inspectors found support provided by line-managers to be inconsistent due to a lack of training.

At every level of the organisation inspectors heard that resource levels on the frontline were impacting on absence, work-related stress, and job satisfaction, leading to officers and staff trying to find roles away from frontline policing where there are improved physical working conditions, and where they are not routinely required to attend court or work at events on what was supposed to be their rest days.

Mr Naylor said: *“Many of those frontline officers and staff we spoke to indicated they felt that current staffing levels in their areas left them feeling vulnerable and, at times, unsafe.*

*“We heard consistently that more needs to be done to ensure the pressure associated with the dynamic and demanding nature of policing does not disproportionately impact the frontline and that the load should be more evenly shared.*

*“Resource levels also impact on time away from work, with the cancellation of rest days disrupting the quality of recovery time, and officers and staff reporting difficulties in trying to re-roster days off.*

*“Compounding this problem was the requirement to attend court, often on rest days, with officers and staff only being required to give evidence on a very small number of occasions, adding to feelings of frustration.”*

The report found dramatic contrasts across the country when it came to the physical environments where police staff and officers work.

Mr Naylor said: *“It tended to be those offices and stations where frontline officers and staff work, that inspectors have noted the worst conditions.”*

The report called on Police Scotland to ensure their Estates Strategy promotes parity and that an appropriate standard of facilities is provided across the country.

The HMICS Inspection contained seven recommendations designed to enable Police Scotland to improve wellbeing provision, including calling on the organisation to introduce wellbeing impact assessments when developing new and existing policies and procedures.

Mr Naylor welcomed the recent announcement by Police Scotland Chief Constable Jo Farrell to focus less on overall officer numbers, and more on prioritising what should be done, including working collaboratively with other services to reduce inappropriate demand on officers and staff.

He said: *“Such a focus should help ease the pressure of expecting the frontline to do more with less.*

*“The challenge remains, of course, for policing to live within its budget, while delivering a high quality of service and protecting the wellbeing of the staff and officers.”*

**Ends**

## **Notes**

- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) was established under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and has wide ranging powers to look into the 'state, effectiveness and efficiency' of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).
- In response to the [HMICS Scrutiny Plan 2022-2025](#) HMICS committed to conduct a series of strategic reviews with a particular focus on the frontline. Due to its significance in both the priorities of Police Scotland and the impact on officers and staff, 'Wellbeing' was selected as the first of review of this nature.
- Wellbeing is understood to be defined as how people feel and function on a number of levels. Whilst much of the focus of research in recent years relates to the psychological wellbeing, resilience and mental health of police officers, the broader strands of wellbeing are considered to relate to physical, psychological, social and financial.

## **Ends notes**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The HMICS Frontline Focus – Wellbeing report will be available to download at the HMICS website [www.hmics.scot](http://www.hmics.scot) from 00.01hrs, Thursday, 11 April 2024.

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**Ends**