



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Criminal Justice Committee

**Wednesday 20 December 2023**

**Session 6**



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**CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**35<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2023, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab)

\*Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con)

\*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

\*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

\*John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors QPM (Police Scotland)

Chief Constable Jo Farrell (Police Scotland)

James Gray (Police Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Stephen Imrie

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



# Scottish Parliament

## Criminal Justice Committee

*Wednesday 20 December 2023*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:01]*

### Chief Constable Jo Farrell: Vision and Priorities for Police Scotland

**The Convener (Audrey Nicoll):** Good morning, and welcome to the 35th and final meeting in 2023 of the Criminal Justice Committee. We have received apologies from Pauline McNeill.

Our main item of business is to take evidence from the chief constable of Police Scotland, Jo Farrell, on her vision and priorities for Police Scotland. I welcome the chief constable, who is joined by Jane Connors, deputy chief constable for crime and operational support, and James Gray, chief financial officer of Police Scotland.

I refer members to papers 1 and 2. I intend to allow up to 90 minutes for this session.

I invite the chief constable to make a short opening statement.

**Chief Constable Jo Farrell (Police Scotland):** Thank you, convener, and good morning. When I was chief constable of Durham Constabulary, my perspective was that, under the direction of Sir Iain Livingstone, Police Scotland became a highly credible public sector organisation that is known for its compassion. Police Scotland attracts huge public support, is highly operationally competent and is very well regarded across the United Kingdom and internationally. There have been many clear successes. The policing of the Covid pandemic, the policing of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties, operation unicorn and the world-leading homicide response are just a few of the things that have contributed to that view.

That view has been strengthened during my preparation to become Police Scotland's chief constable and since I have taken command. I have met officers and staff across Scotland and I have been deeply impressed by the passion and commitment that I have found. I have also met key partners, including those from the criminal justice sector and local councils, and the regard in which policing is held in Scotland is clear. Police Scotland is a national asset and it is a privilege to be entrusted with the leadership of so many talented, professional and courageous police officers, staff and volunteers.

Yesterday's welcome budget announcement provided an overall £104 million uplift over and above flat-cash funding for policing. I will return to what that funding will enable us to do in a moment. I recognise that, when not all asks could be met and some budgets have been cut, policing has been allocated the majority of its £128 million ask. The allocation is an important recognition of Police Scotland's value and the contribution that policing makes to Scotland being a safe place to live and work, with historically low levels of crime.

I believe passionately in the value that policing brings to our communities in keeping people safe from harm, protecting the vulnerable, bringing criminals to justice, solving problems and reducing offending. We stand up for and with our communities, which strengthens them, improves their wellbeing and allows them to prosper.

I have placed trust, confidence and performance at the top of our agenda. I want us to be highly trusted by the people we serve. When the public call us, they must have the confidence that our service delivery will be of the highest possible standard. The key to delivering trust and confidence across our communities is our visible, engaging and proactive local policing teams. Our front-line officers, both in response and in the less-visible specialist worlds, work tirelessly to keep people safe, responding to calls for help, keeping drug dealers and organised crime gangs off the streets and securing justice for victims and their families.

I want us to be willing to challenge ourselves so that we continually improve, and to be high-performing. It is vital that we continue to build on the cultural progress that has been made in recent years through investment in leadership and a focus on our values and standards, driven through our policing together programme. As chief constable, my operational focus is in three areas: first, addressing threat, harm and risk; secondly, in relation to prevention, problem solving and proactivity; and thirdly, looking after the wellbeing of officers and staff, so that they can deliver for the public.

As I mentioned, I welcome yesterday's budget announcement. The improvement on flat cash is a recognition of our track record on reforming to maintain capacity and improve service while returning savings to the public purse. A revenue uplift of £74.5 million allows us to restart officer recruitment for the year, fund the cost of this year's 7 per cent pay award for officers and staff, and make a credible pay offer in the coming financial year. A pension rebate in the region of £17 million next year will support us to progress a programme of voluntary retirement and redundancy. Our capital allocation was enhanced by £13 million, which is a welcome improvement,

although our capital allocation has been a challenge over a number of years and remains low compared with other police services in the UK.

More broadly, it is clear from my early observations since becoming the chief constable that year-to-year budgeting makes it more difficult to effectively plan and deliver change—for example, projecting recruitment needs or co-ordinating and prioritising the introduction of new technologies. The cumulative effect of that slows our ability to transform and to give our officers and staff the tools that a modern police service needs to keep people safe as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Body-worn video is an example of a complex project that requires information technology infrastructure to support the storage of footage and data security. To get the maximum benefits, we needed a national crime system and partners had to be ready to take evidence right through the criminal justice process. One of my first commitments to my fellow officers and staff when I joined Police Scotland was that we had to push on with the roll-out of body-worn video. We are moving at pace and I expect the roll-out of body-worn video to front-line officers and staff to start in the summer.

That demonstrates policing's commitment to playing our part in necessary progress against the entire criminal justice system. I have been meeting key partners and I believe that there is a shared recognition that innovation and improvement must be prioritised and accelerated to support better and quicker court outcomes for victims, and to provide efficiency and value for the public. The overtime cost of officers being cited for court, with very few of them being called to give evidence, is £3 million. That is not a sustainable position, financially or operationally. We must reduce the cancellation of rest days and leave and increase the time that officers can spend in communities.

The summary case management pilot, of which we are a partner, aims to improve the summary court process by resolving cases at the earliest opportunity. We are already seeing the benefits, and interim evaluation is very positive. That targets domestic abuse cases, reduces trauma for victims and witnesses and allows for a significant reduction in citations, including of police officers and other witnesses.

Another clear challenge is that policing must reset the parameters of our role in responding to people who are living with poor mental health. Each year, officers deploy to well over 100,000 mental health-related incidents, equivalent to the work of between 500 and 600 full-time officers, and in more than 87 per cent of those incidents no crime has taken place. Resetting those parameters will help to ensure that the most

appropriate help is provided, and will allow officers to return to preventing crime and responding to threats, harm and risk as soon as possible after the moment of crisis has passed and public safety is assured.

Although I welcome the important uplift in our budget, a changing and ageing population and a cost of living crisis driving vulnerability and pressure on other services, and civil unrest, new laws and increasingly complex investigations all contribute to a growing community need and an increase in contacts to policing from the public.

The acute pressure on public finances will continue to bring urgency to the important principle that Police Scotland must be efficient and provide as much value to the public as possible. Police Scotland must focus intensely on our core duties and what matters to the people whom we serve.

If what we do does not protect the vulnerable from harm, prevent crime or support our officers and staff, we will challenge that and redirect resources to prioritise the front line. That work will allow us to develop a new operating model in order to live within our projected funding while maintaining service to the public by prioritising the front line, removing back-office duplication and creating capacity to deal with new and increasing threats, in particular in the online space.

I have directed that we approach change differently, bringing together key experts from different functions across the service to deliver change with agility and at speed. Ensuring that Scotland continues to be a safe place in which to live and work is my commitment and priority as the chief constable. Thank you.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, chief constable. We welcome your comments on the police budget that was announced yesterday and related matters.

I want to pick up on some points, staying with the budget theme. We are all currently in the budget space. The Scottish Police Authority, in its budget proposal for 2024-25, said:

“As the significant financial benefits from reform and transformation have already been realised through the creation of the single service, it is not possible for policing to deliver substantial savings for a second time through efficiency alone.”

It stated that,

“Further significant savings can only be achieved through a redesign of the policing model”

—which you mentioned—

“underpinned by a reshaping of the workforce, alongside targeted action to reduce the overall non-pay cost base.”

It went on to say:

"It is recognised and accepted that more can be done to re-shape and re-size policing to ensure the most effective and efficient use of its resources aligned to the policing priorities."

From the committee's scrutiny of the policing budget requirement for next year, we very much recognise those remarks and that position. Can you set out in a bit more detail what you consider that a redesigned policing model for Scotland would look like?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Thank you for the question. The first 10 years of bringing the eight forces into one Police Scotland has generated £2 billion-worth of savings to the public purse. During that time, my predecessors and my colleagues have spent time developing national capabilities that meet threat and harm across the country, ensuring that, regardless of where someone is in the country, they are able to access specialist policing capabilities. Should someone be the victim of serious crime or should they need support on the roads, there is a national capability that provides that service to them.

The next phase of reform, taking very seriously our responsibilities in relation to an efficient and effective police force, looks across what we call the local policing footprint of Police Scotland and seeks to identify what a new operating model would look like so that we can live within our means, recognising what the national finances look like.

10:15

Yesterday's budget announcement will allow us to reshape and redesign local policing over the next 12 months. We can do that because technology has advanced in the past 10 years. Last week, we reached the point at which we have a national crime system and, for the first time, can look across the whole of the country and have full visibility of one crime system. That has brought efficiencies and new ways of working. One example of that is that local arrangements can now be reshaped and redesigned in light of the investment in technology.

When I talk about local policing, I do not just mean neighbourhood and community policing. It includes response policing, our investigators and the significant contribution made by a number of police staff who provide vital services to ensure that the business of policing can continue.

We are looking to drive efficiencies in our corporate world, some of which will be driven by improvements in technology. We are looking at whether services that are delivered at local level can be delivered regionally or nationally.

**The Convener:** That brings me to my next question, which is about remodelling and the

reform agenda within the context of the overall justice system. What, if any, are the challenges in delivering on your review of the policing model while bearing in mind that you are one part of a broader justice system?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I have spent the first few weeks and months with many of our key criminal justice partners. I have observed and understand that there are many areas of good practice and that there is a real willingness to take a system-wide approach to the efficiency and effectiveness of that system.

However, I have also observed that it is taking far too long for victims to get justice in this system and that there are occasions when not only the victims of crime, but the witnesses, including the police witnesses that I have referred to, are repeatedly cited to court but not asked to give evidence.

There was lots of really good practice in that space during Covid, when victims, witnesses and police witnesses were able to give evidence to the court remotely. Some of that practice has been retained, but some has slipped away. The challenge for the whole system is to speed up justice for victims and alleged perpetrators and we must drive efficiency so that victims, witnesses and police witnesses come to court only if there is a high likelihood that they will give evidence.

That will require some adjustment to the system. I have referred to the case management pilot, which seeks to load the evidence at the front of the case so that, when there is strong evidence, there is an early guilty plea. That will be supported by the digital evidence transfer system, which committee members are probably familiar with and which moves evidence between the various parties in the system. That is starting to roll out and I know that there is ambition.

That started in quite a small area in Dundee and, with partners, we are looking to move it across to one of the bigger areas where we will be able to see the benefit of being able to move digital evidence around. The roll-out of body-worn video leads to that, and my experience is that, when we can present that evidence to the court at first hearing, we get early guilty pleas, victims get justice and the whole system becomes more efficient and effective.

**The Convener:** My final question is about timescales. Some reform can move relatively quickly, but other reform takes longer. What are your broad timescales for the priority areas of reform that you are seeking to deliver?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** The uplift in the budget that we are asking for so that we can maintain staff and officer numbers will allow us to do that redesign and reshaping in the next 12

months, so that we know that we will have an operating model that is fit for meeting the new threats that are coming down the track at us. More crime is being committed online and more crime has a digital element. In particular, we are seeing increases in fraud. Digital means are being used to exploit people, but they also provide evidence to us that we need to be able to capture and exploit from an evidential point of view.

Our ask was that the budget would give us the time over the next 12 months to do the reshaping and redesign work on accelerating technological changes and creating a workforce that is fit for the future and can meet threat, harm and risk, maintain visibility in communities, and play its part with partners in prevention and problem solving. That is where we want to be. We want to prevent crime by intervening at an early stage so that we can provide the best service for the public and prevent people from being the victims of crime.

**The Convener:** On that note, I will open the discussion to other members and bring in Russell Findlay.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** Thank you convener, and good morning everyone. Chief constable, the first headline that you generated was about the misuse of a police car being driven by a police officer who was on duty. Any other officer who did that might have expected to get their P45, but the Scottish Government and the Scottish Police Authority have forgiven you. Does that incident risk compromising you and your relationship with the Government when it comes to asking for more money and other issues of that nature?

**The Convener:** I remind members that the chief constable made a full and unreserved apology to the Scottish Police Authority board on 30 November. Chief constable, if you wish to add anything, that is fine, but I want to make sure that members are aware of that.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I reiterate that I made a full and unreserved public apology. It was an error of judgment that I regret and I apologise for it once again.

To speak specifically to the question, we made a credible and detailed ask of the Government for what is required to ensure that Police Scotland can continue to reform and deliver for the public. The result of that ask speaks to the confidence that the Government has in me as a leader of the organisation and, more important, in the work that my colleagues have done in the previous 10 years in bringing a fantastic national police service to Scotland.

**Russell Findlay:** Thank you. Assistant Chief Officer Gary Ridley of Durham Constabulary is giving Police Scotland unpaid advice. We know

that only because he also got a lift home in the police car. Was that advice anything to do with Police Scotland's budgets or its financial situation? Does his unpaid involvement with Police Scotland say anything about your confidence in Mr Gray or any senior officers in Police Scotland?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** As I said in my introduction, I want Police Scotland and the previous police forces that I have been involved with and have led to continually improve and to look for best practice and other opportunities, ensuring that we are better in the operational space and that we are able to drive efficiency for the public purse. Having been in policing for more than 30 years, I have a network of people whom I know bring value to policing, and Mr Ridley is one of them.

**Russell Findlay:** What was the nature of his advice?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** His advice related to the business or corporate side of Police Scotland at a time when there were some challenges in bringing this year's budget in at the allocation.

**Russell Findlay:** A lot has been said about the differential in income tax between Scotland and England, which is only going to increase due to yesterday's budget announcement. Are your earnings taxed in Scotland or England?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I am sorry—can you say that again?

**Russell Findlay:** Are your earnings taxed in Scotland or England?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** In Scotland.

**Russell Findlay:** Thank you.

Can I ask about body-worn cameras, convener?

**The Convener:** Yes, of course.

**Russell Findlay:** You have already talked about body-worn cameras. As we know, Police Scotland officers are the only ones in the UK not to have those as standard, and there is a bit of a long chronology to this subject that I will recap very quickly.

In 2020, the former Lord Advocate called for the cameras to be introduced; in 2021, the former Scottish National Party justice secretary told the committee that additional money had been given for them; in 2022, David Page of Police Scotland told the committee that it was a real weakness that they did not have that basic capability; in April, we were told the target date for full roll-out was 2027; and, at that meeting, Rona Mackay told us that the committee had been talking about body-worn cameras up to six years ago, long before my time here. We have also had commitments from Humza Yousaf that they are a priority. After that,



however, Mr Page told the committee that he could not guarantee that roll-out would begin next year.

Chief constable, I heard you in your opening statement say that the intent now was to begin roll-out next year but, for the sake of police officers who have had to suffer at least six years of hearing about this happening, can you give them any idea of when they are all going to have these cameras? Is 2027 still the likely completion date?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** From what you have described, the issue has come to this committee on a number of occasions, so you will recognise the benefits of such a move, but such is the scale of the roll-out and such is our ambition for every front-line officer to have body-worn video that the actual purchase and deployment of the cameras is probably the easy part.

The important aspects here are the infrastructure—that is, the digital platform that the information can be downloaded on to—and security. As you would expect, my colleagues in Police Scotland have taken the data security issue very seriously. One of the emerging and increasing threats to any organisation relates to cybersecurity, so it was important to ensure not only that the infrastructure was right for Police Scotland and that it went nationwide, but that it could feed into the broader criminal justice system and that everybody could be assured that the security of the data and what is often very sensitive and personal information was such that we could confidently move forward with things.

The roll-out will begin next summer, but I will need to come back to the committee on its duration.

**Russell Findlay:** You cannot confirm that it will be 2027 at this point, but you will come back to us on that.

As for sensitivities around the preservation and use of this data, all the other UK forces have managed such matters perfectly well for many years now. What is uniquely different about Police Scotland?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Scale is one issue. The committee will be aware of a body-worn video pilot in Aberdeen; I understand that it is quite straightforward when it happens on a small scale. I spoke earlier about bringing eight standard operational crime systems together into one. We needed to build that infrastructure, but that work will not necessarily be seen.

10:30

**Russell Findlay:** I am sorry to interrupt, but it is quite surprising to hear that Police Scotland has been in existence for 10 years and the eight

legacy forces still have their own systems. Is that correct?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** That is correct.

**Russell Findlay:** That is not your problem, because you are new to the job, but have you established why that was not dealt with sooner?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** That happened because of a combination of capital investment and prioritisation. The top priority 10 years ago was to bring the eight forces together into one and to ensure that, if someone is the victim of homicide or is involved in a serious or fatal road traffic collision—I could go on giving examples—they can receive a national response. My colleagues have worked really hard to ensure that everyone gets a high-quality, high-end service, regardless of where they are in the country.

**Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con):** You mentioned Sir Iain Livingstone in your opening statement. When he left, he warned that policing is unsustainable under the cash settlement from the Scottish Government. He said that that Government had

“clearly set out its spending priorities”

and that

“policing is not among those”.

Now that you have settled into your new role, do you think that policing is a priority for the Scottish Government?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** We welcomed yesterday’s budget settlement, but none of us are getting carried away. Our ask was reasonable: it provided us with some headroom to maintain services as we move into 2024-25 and it will allow us to use the coming year for the redesign work on the footprint and blueprint for Police Scotland that I described.

I am confident that we can make efficiencies, but some areas of criminality are increasing, and we are always looking at what is coming down the track. I also want to focus on front-line and community policing in particular. I see policing as an ecosystem. You can see the visible response in the community policing footprint. We need to maintain that while also being able to investigate and to protect vulnerable people. That is the less visible part of policing, but it is part of that broader ecosystem.

Yesterday’s settlement provides us with the time and space to redesign and reshape, so that we are fit to meet the challenges of the future, while recognising the country’s broader financial position.

**Sharon Dowe:** In your opening statement, you said that yesterday’s budget did not give you the

full £120 million that you had asked for. Will police numbers fall over the next few months and years as a result? You also said that you were going to restart recruitment, but that you are still going ahead with voluntary redundancy and early retirement. How will that affect police numbers?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Yesterday's settlement enables us to restart recruitment, which we will do before the end of the financial year. In the next 12 months, the settlement will enable us to retain police numbers of around 16,500 or 16,600.

At the same time, the money enables us to offer police staff a voluntary severance and redundancy retirement scheme; we are going through that process now, in consultation with the unions. That will run for the next couple of months and it is part of our reshaping.

In some areas of criminality, particularly in the cyber and fraud space, we recognise that the workforce needs to change. Different skills are required, and those skills are developing and complex. We always try to be at least with, if not ahead of, the different ways in which people commit crime, so that we can keep people safe.

The workforce is changing. We need more people to be able to examine digital devices. We need more expertise in cybercrime and, increasingly, fraud, where we need to work with partners such as banks, HM Revenue and Customs, and other agencies that form the greater picture of our ability to tackle that type of crime.

**Sharon Dowey:** I am trying to understand why you would still go through with a redundancy or early retirement process. If you are going to restart recruitment, can you not focus it on the skills that you need to tackle cybercrime?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I am sorry; I might have misled you. Voluntary severance and redundancy is open only to police staff, not to police officers.

**The Convener:** Rona Mackay, you wanted to come in on that.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** My question is on a different subject. Is that okay?

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Rona Mackay:** I want to ask about your approach to tackling violence against women and girls. We have heard from witnesses and victims about poor communication between women and girls and police officers. What is your strategy for dealing with that? Do you think that your trauma-informed training is adequate? What do you plan to do with that?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I talked at the beginning about threat, harm and risk. Day to day, my colleagues will hear me talking about high harm and what I mean by that in relation to violence against women and girls, for example. Some of the delays in the criminal justice system are at the heart of the situation for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. Those women and girls are not getting the justice that they deserve. DCC Connors can provide some additional detail in a moment, but it is absolutely an area of focus for us. We are working not only with partners across the criminal justice system but with groups that support victims through funding, some of which has come from the Scottish Government.

Our approach has different elements to it. Part of it involves upskilling our staff, so that we have specialist officers who can investigate those types of crimes. Those officers can identify repeat perpetrators and use our data well so that we can target them.

At the same time, we provide good support to victims, not only in the manner in which we gather trauma-informed and victim-centred evidence, but in the way in which we support victims, which, as I say, involves specialist officers. There is also our response when somebody first rings us. We ensure that staff in our control rooms are well informed in that space; there is a programme of training and upskilling for that. Many of those elements already exist, but the picture is constantly evolving. There is a real focus on understanding what it means to be trauma-informed, so that we do not revictimise somebody, and can support them, gather the evidence appropriately and wrap care and compassion around them during the investigation.

Some you might also have seen our media campaigns. For example, "Don't be that guy" called out violence and sexual violence against women. We also work with partners and local authorities on safe spaces, particularly in the night-time economy, and spaces where individuals might not feel safe. That is a real driver for us.

I will pass over to DCC Connors.

**Rona Mackay:** Before you do so, may I ask you another question? I am aware of those campaigns, which are very powerful. Could you clarify whether the upskilling and training of specialist officers are happening now?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Yes.

**Rona Mackay:** That work is on-going; it is definitely happening now?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Yes.

**Rona Mackay:** Thank you.

**Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors QPM (Police Scotland):** Just to add a little bit to that, we are rolling out trauma-informed training to our contact officers in C3 who take the first calls. They have training on the THRIVE model—threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement—but they receive trauma-informed training on top of that, because we want to ensure that they are also looked after from the very beginning, from the first point of contact with a victim. We then have response officers, or other officers who actually respond to incidents. Then there are specialist officers who will take investigations all the way through to their final stages. Therefore, we provide trauma-informed training at a number of touch points. The more specialist an officer is, the greater is the depth of their understanding of such elements.

We have a victim information advice workstream with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, which comes back to Rona Mackay's question about how we keep victims updated and how they want to be contacted, and it ensures that we focus on the victim. Our victim and survivor feedback portal offers a constant loop back to us so that our work can constantly evolve. We are not waiting for long evaluations so we can do things much more quickly. We also have the VAWG stakeholder engagement forum, in which we work closely with the third sector and other partners. Again, it is about getting people's feedback.

Those are the different levels, particularly in relation to trauma-informed training, but also on ensuring that we put victims at the front and centre of our approach, particularly on the issue of contact.

**Rona Mackay:** I have one more question. In the previous parliamentary session, legislation was passed to introduce domestic abuse protection orders to remove alleged perpetrators from the home. Will you give us an update on the progress of that? That legislation must significantly impact what you do, and at the time it was seen as being ground breaking.

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** As their name indicates, protection orders allow us to take exactly the approach that we want to take, which is to focus on victims and carry out prevention work. The legislation contains technicalities on how cases can be brought to court, on the understanding that there needs to be legal representation. There are therefore complexities around it, which, together with the associated costs, we are currently working through with the Scottish Government and other partners. However, we absolutely support it. It is a really good piece of legislation, but those are some of the complexities around its implementation.

**Rona Mackay:** Do you have an estimated timescale for when it might come into force?

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** I know that the work is intense and on-going. I do not have a timescale, but I could obtain more information and update the committee if it would like me to do so.

**Rona Mackay:** Thank you.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** Continuing on that theme, chief constable, you have mentioned court delays being a major factor in retraumatising survivors and victims. However, you will know very well—because I am sure that the situation is similar in other parts of the UK—that, historically, victims' experiences of police services in the context of violence against women and girls have been poor. I appreciate that a whole raft of work is being done, but how will you evaluate whether women are finding the service more supportive and effective? What thought have you given to whether the changes are working?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** We routinely survey victims of crime across a broad range of areas, and that data and information are used to inform our work as we move forward. That includes everything from the speed and quality of someone's first interaction with us when they rang 999 or 101, to our initial response, and then to the quality of the investigation. As DCC Connors said, our focus is very much on continually learning and improving so that victims get the service that they require.

**Katy Clark:** Thank you. That is helpful. Members of this committee are often frustrated that we sometimes have difficulty in getting data shared with us. I very much hope that, as somebody new in the post of chief constable, you would want to work closely with this committee. Many of us were pleased that a woman was appointed for the first time, and we want to have a strong relationship with you all. Could you share that evaluation with us on an on-going basis so that we can see whether there is an improvement in victims' experience?

10:45

In your opening statement, there was a lot of mention of change. For a lot of people, that will ring alarm bells, because change often means cuts. You have said that £2 billion has already been saved as a result of the creation of Police Scotland, but you have also outlined a number of difficulties with new systems that are partly related to the creation of Police Scotland, including body-worn cameras. It is not a one-way street. There are problems, obviously, and a lot of resources have gone into the reorganisation.

Do you accept that there is a big gulf between what the public expect from the police and what senior management thinks are the correct models? Many people are hugely frustrated that there seems to be less police visibility in their communities. When people phone the police, perhaps for what the police see as a routine matter, they do not get the response that they want. That is not necessarily just down to police numbers, although there is a big political fight over police numbers.

We understand from the most recent announcement that 29 police stations are under threat, is that part of a continuing programme, and will there be further announcements that police stations will close? Will you give a bit more detail on that? I understand that some of the estate is old and might not be fit for purpose. It might be that new facilities will be built or repurposed, whether that is through co-location or in another way. Will you give us a bit more detail about the programme?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Yes. You have heard me talk about a commitment to front-line policing. That absolutely needs to be where we prioritise our resources. You would not expect me to do anything but that.

I recognise that talking about and bringing about change creates uncertainty and anxiety. However, this financial year, it has been challenging to bring the budget in line. We cannot afford to continue with our current policing model, which is why we need to bring about change. One of the best examples of that is in where we can bring the local to the regional and the national.

I will talk specifically on the issue of our estate. I see estate changes and rationalisation as being part of broader reform. We still have an estate that pre-dates not only Police Scotland but some of the eight legacy forces. We had in the region of 500 buildings, and we have rationalised those down to around 350. However, you would expect that, in order to ensure that we have modern facilities that are fit for purpose, we are looking all the time to ensure that the estate meets the requirements of policing. In that time, we have moved to a more mobile workforce. All officers have mobile devices, so we are not wedded to the buildings in all cases. Of course, many areas of the business need estate, and those officers and staff use the estate out of hours—

**Katy Clark:** What is your understanding of how many of those 29 stations will be replaced? In broad terms, how many will no longer be a facility such as that in the community?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** We are consulting across the board on that. Currently, of the 29, three are completely vacant and 13 have no public

access. We will look to rationalise that, but we recognise that, in some cases, people feel very strongly about the estate, hence the consultation. It is not something that we will do lightly, and all the divisional commanders are well linked with local councillors, elected officials and other key stakeholders to have those discussions so that we make good decisions. At the same time, you would expect us to have an effective and efficient estate.

**Katy Clark:** There is a consultation, so you will keep us closely advised.

You mentioned the voluntary severance scheme for civilian staff. We know that there have previously been a lot of redundancies for civilian staff. Often the jobs of support staff go rather than those of officers. Obviously, that has a massive knock-on effect in the system. Can you give us more information about that scheme and tell us exactly who will be impacted and the number of people who will be affected?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I will ask Mr Gray to speak about the estate. He will add a bit more detail on that.

Currently, we are asking colleagues to indicate whether they are interested in the scheme. The funding will allow us to reduce the headcount by 187. Colleagues are being asked whether they are interested and, obviously, they are being provided with information about pensions and what the scheme means.

There are some areas that are not eligible because they are key areas in the front-line response. Our control room and custody staff are not eligible, because those are areas of high risk and we need those resources. However, the scheme is open to everybody other than people who work in those two areas. As the turn of the year comes, we will be able to make an assessment of who will be able to access the scheme, what it means for them individually, and what we need to do for the reshaping.

**Katy Clark:** What kind of jobs do you envisage will go, if they are not in control rooms?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** The scheme is open across the board.

**Katy Clark:** If you know who you need, you must have a view on who you do not need.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** We have some functions in which we may no longer need all of the current resource because the technology has improved in that space or because we are able to rationalise and move from local services to regional and national services. Some of the arrangements are the same as they have been throughout the whole 10 years of Police Scotland.

**James Gray (Police Scotland):** I will give members a bit of flavour of the estate and the 29 buildings.

This is not about taking police officers out of communities. There are bigger sites on the list, such as in Greenock. There is no intention to not have a police building in Greenock. It is about finding an alternative because the building is not fit for purpose, and there needs to be something better to meet the needs of policing in the 21st century and into the future.

There are a number of police stations on the Glasgow list, including those in Saracen and Castlemilk and on Stewart Street. There would not be fewer police officers in Glasgow if they closed; we would be able to re-accommodate all police officers in the existing estate. That reflects the fact that we have excess accommodation in Glasgow.

The building in Dalmarnock, which is the best-quality building that we have in Glasgow, is around 20 per cent occupied. A lot of that is to do with changes in working patterns, with people working more flexibly post-Covid. There is the opportunity for us to fill up that building and get value out of it, and that is our intention. That would mean that we could start to remove some of the smaller and older sites that there is no economic value in replacing. It would also allow us to ensure that the estate that is retained meets the wellbeing requirements of our officers and staff, who will still be in their localities.

With more modern working practices around mobility—DCC Malcolm Graham said this when there was the announcement—that involve mobile devices, access to apps and a better fleet, the intention is that police officers will be out in their communities whenever they can be and not in police stations waiting to be deployed.

We are also looking at working across the public sector to get better value. Fettes police station in Edinburgh is on the list. That building has issues with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, it is in really poor condition, and there are issues with its wiring and so on. We are looking to see whether there is an opportunity for people to move into Victoria Quay, which, as you will all know, is really good, high-quality accommodation that meets wellbeing needs. All the police officers would still be in the city of Edinburgh.

We see positives around that in that there would be wellbeing gains, we would not be withdrawing from communities, and we would have a fit-for-purpose estate that is starting to move towards being designed for Police Scotland as opposed to, for example, being inherited from the City of Edinburgh Police, which pre-dated the Lothian and Borders force. The locations of stations around Edinburgh do not reflect Police Scotland's model

of policing in the 21st century—they represent how policing was delivered 50, 60 or 70 years ago. We are just looking to modernise.

**Katy Clark:** Sure. In terms of—

**The Convener:** That is an important issue that people are interested in, but I am keen to bring in other members. We can come back to it at the end if we have time. I will bring in John Swinney.

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** Chief Constable Farrell, you have been very candid with the committee about the fact that your budget ask was essentially met by the Government. That rather surprised me, given the intensity of pressure on the public finances. I think that we should acknowledge and recognise—as you have done—the significance of the financial settlement that was delivered.

I am interested in your comments in response to Sharon Dowe about the budget giving you the time and the space to redesign. I would like to explore that, because the assurance that I seek is that, when it comes to further budget rounds, Police Scotland will be in a position in which it will not have to make the significant asks on the public purse that have been met by the Government on this occasion. As you rightly say, the pressures on the public finances are not going to abate in the forthcoming years in any shape or form. How confident can we be that the budget represents an opportunity to give you the time and the space to redesign?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** This year, it has been very apparent that, in order to come in within the budget, we would have to make decisions in relation to reducing officer overtime, which has an operational impact. We have also looked at what we call non-pay budgets. The approach has not been around a redesign but has been around where we can take costs out because the trajectory was for an overspend.

There are areas of Police Scotland's business that look very much as they did when the eight forces became one, so it is right and proper that, having built that national capability in the high end of policing that I have described, we look very closely at where we can drive efficiency at the local level. In particular, we have to look not at direct front-line policing but at the areas of business that support policing. Those areas are valuable and have in them people who work very hard for us but, when we look at the way in which they are arranged, we should ask whether that might be done more efficiently and whether it could be done on a regional or a national basis. This coming financial year, we need the time and the space to look across all of the business and ask what the most efficient and effective way is in which to carry that out, to offer value to the public

purse and—to answer your point, Mr Swinney—to ensure that we are not having to come back repeatedly looking for increases in the budget.

However, I have to say that the increase is a maintenance position for us, given inflation and the pay award. We came to the Government with a viable proposition, and that was met yesterday. From the turn of the year, we will be bringing about the changes that we need, such as further developing the technology that will bring some of those efficiencies, and spending time making sure that we are driving the maximum value for every pound that is spent by the Scottish Government on behalf of taxpayers.

11:00

**John Swinney:** In essence, you have covered the internal changes that Police Scotland can make to the operating model. I would like to explore that a bit further. In some circumstances, those changes will relate to working practices and approaches to the management of the estate. Am I right in concluding that there is, within the design of that model, a recognition that we are living in a society that has, relatively speaking historically, a very low level of crime? I accept that that has to be continually suppressed and prevented, but the nature, level and character of crime, with the best predictions that we can make about the contents of the approach, should inform the construction of the police force that we require for the future.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Absolutely. I will not go back over the need to be visible and to work in partnership on preventing crime. Obviously, that is the most effective way of doing business. However, particularly in the area that DCC Connors leads, there are cyberfraud opportunities to use digital means to exploit people and target people who are vulnerable. We are seeing rises in all those crimes, particularly against women and girls. Some of those crimes have increased as criminals have exploited technology, and some of the increase is from people coming forward to report crimes many years after having been victimised, because they have confidence in us and they want justice.

Those rises are driven by a number of different elements. We should take positives from people who have been victimised in the past coming forward and feeling confident that we can support them. However, to give members a further flavour, we can have a domestic violence incident involving violence and assault and, in addition to that, we can see elements of harassment, stalking or exploitation. There can be a digital investigation needing to be done alongside the capturing of physical evidence when police attend a scene and respond to a violent crime.

**John Swinney:** That helpfully gives the committee a sense of how you will proceed on issues in connection with Police Scotland. I am interested in your earlier evidence about your interactions with other bodies that have an effect on the operational efficiency of Police Scotland, and I am interested in understanding how you intend to pursue those questions, because they strike me as falling into different categories. In relation to the welfare of vulnerable citizens, for example, there is interaction with the health service and the third sector on how the mental wellbeing of individuals can be supported more effectively in order to try to reduce the crisis intervention of calling the police. I have seen that at first hand in my constituency experience, and that has been appreciated. There will also be examples of, frankly, your officers having their time wasted by the inefficiency of the court system.

I am keen to understand how blunt your conversations with others are about how they must get their house in order to help you to improve efficiency in the police service. What is the dialogue like with other parties—the Crown, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and health boards—to ensure that a combined public sector resource is used to its maximum level of efficiency, which can help to reduce the budget asks of Police Scotland in the years to come?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I will talk first to the issues around mental health and crisis.

Very recently, we convened a forum with partners on mental health and laid out the impact on front-line policing. There are pockets of really good practice. The committee will know that the provision for somebody who is feeling vulnerable and is in crisis does not meet a threshold for the use of police powers in the mental health space or those of social workers or medics. At the same time, that person needs support.

Our collective ambition should be to consider the pockets of good practice—they are often where money has been pooled, whether through health boards or local authorities—and, instead of having the current patchwork quilt of provision, move to something more sustainable so that the first place that people go to when they are in crisis out of hours is not the police.

**John Swinney:** If you do not mind, I will write to you after the committee meeting with a suggestion of a venture that you might wish to visit in my constituency in the city of Perth, which absolutely ticks the box that you just set out. However, I am interested in how you are pursuing a systematic conversation, because that will involve local authorities, third sector providers and health boards to ensure that that actually happens on the ground and in a more systematic way, rather than

having the occasional island of excellence, if I can put it that way.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** There is a call to arms and a repositioning of Police Scotland in our response. I am not going to say to this committee or anybody that we do not recognise our role in that space, but we are in there and beyond our role. We have become, in many cases, the default service.

On your point on the conversation, it is about a call to arms and a broader awareness of where good practice is and how money is being pooled. In many instances, good practice happens where pots of money are pooled and a system-wide approach is taken. In those cases, there is the ability to demonstrate not only the financial benefit but the benefit to the individuals, who do not end up with policing as the response because, in many cases, that is not adequate or appropriate. We recognise that, in an absolute crisis, where life is at risk, we continue to have a role, and we will always maintain that.

Therefore, it is about a call to arms, the identification of good practice and a resetting of our, or my, position about the expectation of partners. That is where that conversation has got to.

In relation to criminal justice, everybody who I have spoken to recognises that we need to work more effectively to drive the speed and agility with which we are able to process and get justice for victims, recognising the extreme pressure on the Prison Service.

**John Swinney:** Do you have the right climate and are you getting the right response to the effort that you are pursuing? Are partners responding in a helpful way?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Yes, absolutely. The conversations are productive, and it was clear from yesterday's budget settlement that the expectation from Government and more broadly is that we drive efficiencies, particularly across the justice system. The settlement that we and others across the justice system have received is on the basis that the efficiencies will be evident as we move forward.

**John Swinney:** I will move on to the position on the estate. The statistic that horrified me the most this morning was the 20 per cent occupancy level of the premises in Dalmarnock. What information can you share with the committee about the level of occupancy and utilisation of police premises around the country? Can you give us a figure? Can you say, for example, "We think the police estate is X per cent occupied"?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I will turn immediately to Mr Gray.

**James Gray:** We are working on that at the moment. Historically, our data has been poor across the estate. There has been no investment in technology, so we do not have an estate system; we are operating off spreadsheets. However, we are in the process of pulling that information together across the country so that we are able to provide data on cost per square metre, occupancy and space per employee, which is the type of data that you would expect to see anywhere. That has been quite a big task, and we have been working on it for a number of months. Some of that early work has resulted in our consultation on closures, which is the start of a broader piece of work in which we will map out an optimal model through the development of a master plan for what we think the policing footprint across the country should look like. Once we have a first iteration of it—I have committed to the SPA that we will have that by the end of this financial year—I would be happy to share it with committee members.

**John Swinney:** That would be helpful. In the communities that I represent, there is a particular proposal on the co-location of police and local authority services, which I am keen to encourage. I will use my opportunity at the committee to try to nudge that along a little bit, convener. There are significant opportunities for the release of sites that could be of enormous strategic importance in, for example, the fulfilment of social housing objectives that many of us would want to be taken forward. Therefore, that analysis would be very helpful.

That takes me to my final point, which is about the urgency and necessity of advancing the agenda. I have read too many submissions in my time—some have come to the committee in the short period during which I have been a member of it—that basically say, "We cannot possibly make any more savings, because we are absolutely up against it. We need to have more money, because we have exhausted all the savings". However, today, I have heard that Dalmarnock is 20 per cent occupied. The exercise that you are going to do, which I welcome, will probably throw up quite a lot of data of a similar nature.

I simply come back to where I started, which is about the necessity of viewing this year as one that has given the police service the time and space to redesign. To be frank and candid, the idea that the only answer to the challenges is more money is just not going to fly in the years to come, because public finances are under such pressure. I hope that the exercise will help to inform public debate about some of the realities that must be confronted.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Absolutely. I hope that, in the committee and more broadly, there is a recognition that our submission is well thought through in the sense that we recognise the broader picture and that there will be opportunities for us this year. We asked for the money in order to maintain current arrangements and to allow us to bring about the change that will be required so that we can live within our means.

**James Gray:** I will add to that. That is the basis on which we made our submission, with a spend-to-save approach to buy time so that we can see how to make ourselves sustainable in our own right. The estate is a component of that.

I have a point to make that goes back to capital and is on the example that John Swinney might have been referring to. This is not yet in our papers, but we are looking at issues in the estate across the entire country. In Forfar, there are leaks after storm Babet, and we have issues in Dundee around custody—West Bell Street is a former headquarters building, which is not really suitable for what we need in Dundee, and we need a custody solution. That would potentially unlock a solution in Perth around co-location with a local authority. We need to try to bring all those parts together to get to a coherent solution, which might be that we need a criminal justice facility somewhere around Dundee. However, in the context of our capital investment, that is a non-starter, so we are looking to see what other options there are. Again, if we were able to get some capital for invest to save, it would help to unlock some of those things.

11:15

**John Swinney:** Forgive me, but there is also an important point about partnership in this exercise. Our view might be that all of those solutions have to be found from within the police capital budget, but the dynamics of budget changes will never provide for that.

At the same time as Police Scotland is getting whatever its capital budget is—£64.6 million—I would think that local authorities will be getting ten times that in capital budgets. It is fundamental to this exercise that we try to find some ways through this by collaboration with local authorities. It has to be thought through in a broader context than by looking only at the police capital budget and asking how we can enhance it.

**James Gray:** I completely agree. We speak to local authority partners regularly. Where we can, our preferred option is to co-locate. For example, we have been having discussions with Dundee City Council about Dundee house and other sites. However, for certain facilities—custody is the big one—we might need to have further conversations

about the specifics. If we find specific policing solutions for custody, productions and mortuaries—there is one of those in West Bell Street, too—it would unlock the opportunity to co-locate with Perth and Kinross Council, Dundee City Council and, potentially, Angus Council. You are right, though—it needs to be cross-sector. That is our commitment, and we are having ongoing dialogue with local authority and national health service partners.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** You will be aware that we have joint occupancy of 60 or so buildings. With police officers go a lot of additional requirements in the sense of joint estate. That needs to feature in our considerations.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I welcome the chief constable to her role. Before I move on to my main line of questioning, I would like to follow up on the estate issue. Unless I missed it and will get hit with bad news today, I was glad that no Lanarkshire closures were planned. I think that that is right, given the distance between Lanarkshire police stations and the unique nature of all the individual towns.

I will pose what is perhaps the opposite question to the one that you have been asked today. A lot of those buildings in Lanarkshire—the one in Coatbridge, for example, and the one in nearby Airdrie—are very old, so there is no scope for the amalgamation that has happened in Glasgow, and for the officers and staff to move into good new buildings. The option is just not there—it is not like Coatbridge is good and Airdrie can move down, or vice versa. When you are redeveloping, have you given any thought to the buildings in Lanarkshire? I am not too sure about the Cumbernauld one, but the vast majority are old buildings.

**James Gray:** As I say, we are developing a master plan for the entire country. We have been doing work on Lanarkshire and have been speaking to partners in North and South Lanarkshire councils, as well as to Scottish Fire and Rescue Service about some of its estate in Lanarkshire.

You are right. The point that I made earlier was that consideration is given to geographical need. There are certain sites that we will always have. I speak regularly to Q division in Lanarkshire about sites there, because there are operational requirements in relation to where locations need to be, and for how many officers and what type of officers.

As I said in my previous response, we are looking at where, in certain circumstances, we might be able to partner with local authorities on accommodation. Again, that will be built into the master plan, which we will share with the



committee in due course. It will be a consultative document—we are developing proposals.

You are right about the nature of Lanarkshire, though. Looking at the early work that has come through, there will always be a requirement to have a policing building in certain of those localities.

**Fulton MacGregor:** It was good to give you the opportunity to put that on the record.

My main question goes back to the report that was produced in 2020 by Dame Elish Angiolini, when she carried out a review of policing. You will be well aware of that review. She said that she was “extraordinarily depressed” to hear accounts of discrimination within Police Scotland. I know that the previous chief constable acknowledged that, prior to leaving the service, and that you have also acknowledged that.

What do you feel should be done about the culture of the organisation? Do you have any plans to drive that work forward?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Craig Naylor was also at the committee in relation to the culture report by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, and I will pick up on some of its themes. Some people do not feel that they have been treated as individuals. Policies have been poorly applied, leading to feelings of inequity and discrimination. In the key work that is on-going in that space to address many of the cultural issues, it will be important for people to feel that they have a voice and are being treated as an individual. They must feel that they are well led, which means that quality leadership is important throughout the organisation and all the way from sergeants up to me.

We have embarked on, and are some way along, an extensive leadership programme called your leadership matters. The programme takes a values-based approach and talks about collaboration and the development of leadership skills. Leaders need more than the technical skills to deliver policing; they need people skills to support colleagues. That programme is on-going, values-based and has a human rights focus.

In addition to that, there is work and training on unconscious bias. Police Scotland is made up of the communities of the country, and we all bring our experiences. It is important that we are able to have conversations about where biases exist and whether we recognise them. That programme is also on-going. Another strand of our work on discrimination and inequality relates to issues of poor behaviour and misconduct. Poor behaviour is increasingly being called out by colleagues, and it is positive that people have the courage to do that. In addition, there is more transparency about the

consequences when we take formal action against officers and staff because of their poor behaviour.

All that work is on-going. We are not there yet, but there is strength and willingness. My reflection on Sir Iain Livingstone’s declaration is that those conversations are live in the organisation. We had one of our regular meetings with colleagues from the Scottish Police Federation and the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents last week and spoke about those issues and the way that people in the organisation feel. I spent a couple of hours with colleagues from one of the support associations in what we called a truth to power meeting. There were some uncomfortable descriptions in that meeting of the treatment that people had been subjected to in the organisation. It is really important that we hear about that.

On how we will know that we are improving, a lot of that will be through the survey work that we conduct and listening to how people feel. The data indicate that women and people with disabilities in the organisation feel that they are not treated fairly in all cases. That is an area in which we need progress, and I want to see progress in it.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Thank you for that frank and robust response. My follow-up question was going to be about how you will review that to find out when you are at the right place. However, you have answered that.

The Parliament’s Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee is interested in looking at that area, too. I am a member of that committee, and I know that its convener and clerks will look at that response to see whether it helps them to direct any future work. I thank you for your frankness. You have not tried to hide anything.

Everybody around the table knows that the issue is not necessarily about the majority of individual officers, who are doing a fantastic job throughout the country, but as the report identified, and as the previous chief constable and you have said, it is more of an institutional culture. I think that Dame Elish Angiolini referred to a cafe culture in her report.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Police Scotland is an organisation of 21,500 people. The vast majority of those people conduct themselves professionally, they are very competent and compassionate, and they have a real sense of public service. That has been evident to me when I have sat with teams of front-line officers, detectives and people who work in more specialist areas of the business. Throughout the work that I have described, the conversations are real and vibrant. People feel an absolute sense of being part of the organisation and that they have a voice in it. It is important for me to say that.

**Fulton MacGregor:** That certainly reflects my experience as an MSP of police officers I meet through my job and people I know personally.

The other issue that I want to ask about is the police's trauma-informed practice, if that is all right, convener—I hope that I am not standing on any toes in doing that. We hear a lot more about that as we take bills through the Parliament. The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill has a specific section on trauma-informed practice for the various justice organisations. We have already heard evidence that there is good trauma-informed practice in the police. The joint investigative interviews, for example, are key. However, there are other things that could perhaps be done better in dealing with victims and witnesses as they interact with the justice system. What are your early thoughts on that? What needs to improve, or what is already good and can be built on?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** There are some key parts of the bill that we are very supportive of, particularly in relation to supporting victims through the justice system so that they are well informed. There is the recognition of the impact of being a victim of crime and how that presents in terms of people's vulnerability and needs.

When we talked about violence against women and girls, we described lots of really positive work in partnership with criminal justice partners and other agencies that provide support in that space. What does excellence look like? The answer to that is consistency. That is the challenge. We need to ensure that, from the point at which a person contacts us and all the way through the process, the service that they receive is of a consistent and high quality. We have made really good progress in many areas in that regard, but it is a continual development. We have to keep up the awareness and the pressure around this, because we are bringing new people into the organisation all the time, we are learning more all the time and we are responding to new pieces of legislation. All of that means that there has to be continuous improvement so that there is a consistent and high-quality service.

DCC Connors might want to come in on that.

11:30

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** I would only add, linking back to the culture work that the Chief Constable just referenced, that internal culture very much affects what is reflected onto the external aspects—how we treat communities and victims. Trauma-informed practice has already been covered, but much broader cultural work is going on in Police Scotland around changing attitudes, understanding and knowledge levels. All

of that will also support victims in terms of trauma-informed practice and the understanding of different people's experiences, so I think that the two pieces will come together.

**The Convener:** I am aware of the time, chief constable, but I have one more question to ask, and a couple of members would like to come in with very brief follow-up questions, so if you have scope to stay with us for a few more minutes, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** Of course.

**The Convener:** I will pick up on a point that John Swinney raised earlier, and I will also reflect on your opening statement, in which you spoke about the significant resource implications arising from responding to people in distress and said that officers and staff had responded to about 100,000 mental health incidents in the past year and that that was equivalent to the work of around 500 full-time officers—I hope that I am quoting you correctly. Clearly, there is a budget implication in that, and it is good to hear about the work that is under way to address that.

One other factor that we are aware of in this space is the reluctance of officers to walk away, if you like, from a person. Doing that does not fit with the reason why they joined Police Scotland, which was to make life a bit better for people, and there is also a fear of the repercussions should something go wrong. I am interested in how you intend to reduce the demand that we have already spoken about, but at the same time enable and empower officers and staff to perhaps take a different approach than they have taken to date, without being worried about getting it wrong.

One of the things that we have not really spoken about this morning is training, which I see as being crucial to giving officers not only the confidence but also the skills to do that. I am interested in how you intend doing that, which perhaps also touches on what Fulton MacGregor spoke to around a culture shift.

**Chief Constable Farrell:** You have pointed to the issue of training, based on your previous knowledge, and it is very important. Policing is subject to a lot of scrutiny by many different agencies. That is right and proper; we are spending public money, and we have an important role, particularly in relation to threat and harm and crisis.

I will lay out our position in relation to supporting people in crisis. It is right and proper that we are involved and that people feel that they can turn to us when they are in crisis, but what we see, and what some of the data that I have presented to the committee today highlights, is that not only are we responding to individuals in crisis but we are the service that cares for and supports them for many,

many hours. That is well documented. You might have seen the recent BBC coverage where reporters were out with front-line officers last week in Edinburgh. That showed people who were suffering and had come to us, and we had responded, but that response took up hours and hours of time.

In relation to your point about officers' fear of the impact of what they do, there are examples of cases in which members of the public, following involvement with the police, have taken their own lives. However, policing has a very broad responsibility, and I need to give front-line sergeants and inspectors, in particular, the confidence to be able to say to their officers, "We need to come away from that incident now." Once an individual has been taken to accident and emergency and is waiting to be seen or has been taken to another location to see a mental health professional, we need to come away, because we have no right to detain that person. They are not involved in criminality; they are vulnerable.

You asked about training. We need to give front-line sergeants and inspectors the courage and the skills—and my support—to say that policing has a broad role and that we cannot devote hours and hours to one person, because we need to look across the whole. On any one evening, at any one hour—this will be happening today, now—we get calls from people who are victims of crime, who need our support on the road network or who say to us, "I was victimised many years ago, but this is a very complex issue for me and I am calling you now." We need to be able to respond to all those calls.

From a scrutiny perspective, if something fatal should happen to a loved one of ours and the police had involvement, we would want to know about the circumstances. That is right and proper. At the same time, we have a culture that is based in a good place, whereby we want to do the best for an individual, which means that our resource is skewed into that space. As I said, we need to give our sergeants and our inspectors the courage to tell their officers that it is okay to walk away and leave someone in an A and E department, because of all the other demands on us and the number of people who need our time and our professionalism.

That is an on-going dialogue. Unfortunately, there are catastrophic circumstances in which individuals determine that they cannot continue to live and they take their own lives, and we must be able to support colleagues by telling them that, while people will, of course, want to know about the circumstances, they have not done anything wrong. In our experience, 99.999 per cent of the time officers are trying to do the best thing. That was evident from last week's BBC item. However,

there is not the same ability to provide immediate support to people in crisis as there is with people who are experiencing physical issues.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that comprehensive overview. We do not have time to follow up on that this morning but, for me, one of the issues is the ability of officers to transfer the care of a person elsewhere. Nine times out of 10, that will be to health and social care services. I am very interested in what level of engagement health and social care has participated in with Police Scotland, because I see that as being absolutely key, but I am sure that we will come back to that further down the line.

I will bring in a couple of members for some brief supplementary questions, after which I will have to bring the session to a close.

**Katy Clark:** I want to ask about the subject of drug consumption rooms. What will be your approach to the policing of the proposed drug consumption room pilots?

**Chief Constable Farrell:** I will ask DCC Connors to respond to that to ensure that we provide absolute accuracy with regard to our dialogue with the Lord Advocate in that space.

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** We have been talking about it. We understand the Lord Advocate's guidelines. However, we also have a duty in the law. If serious offences were being committed, we would need to deal with them.

Although we completely understand the Lord Advocate's guidelines and the concept of drug consumption rooms, if there are serious offences and we are called to a premises, we will need to establish the facts, understand what needs to be done and take the appropriate action. We are talking about the more serious offences to which a situation that came from the use of a drug consumption room would give rise. We understand the thresholds and the guidance, but, as police officers, we will always have to respond to calls for assistance and then base our actions on the facts that are in front of us.

**John Swinney:** Deputy Chief Constable, could I pursue that a little further? Am I right to understand from your comments in response to Katy Clark's question that your officers will go with the grain of the Lord Advocate's guidance but keep a watchful eye out for anything that is not consistent with it? I will spit it out: I take it that, given the Lord Advocate's position, Police Scotland will give the proposal a fair wind?

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** Yes, absolutely. We completely understand the parameters and what the Lord Advocate has set out, but we reassure people that, as ever in policing, if a situation arises that does not fit with

those guidelines or is so serious that we would need to deal with it, we would respond. However, we would do so within the parameters that have been set out. We understand that.

**John Swinney:** Part of what underpins the question that Katy Clark puts, which is my view as well, is that we understand, accept and do not in any way question the proper role of the police in upholding the rule of law, but that must, on this issue, be done in a manner that gives the policy intent of the proposal the maximum opportunity to thrive, if that is possible.

**Deputy Chief Constable Connors:** Yes, I absolutely understand that, and that is what we will do. We also have to respond to the communities in the area surrounding the consumption room. It is a complex matter, but we want the opportunity for the drug consumption room to undertake the role that it has been given to support the public.

**The Convener:** We will have a very final quick question from Russell Findlay.

**Russell Findlay:** I was going to ask about the comments that the witnesses made about the culture, but I do not think that we have time, so I will instead focus on the estate. I share John Swinney's incredulity about Dalmarnock. That police station is less than 10 years old and cost £24 million, but it is 80 per cent empty.

To go back to the budget, in its submission to the committee, Police Scotland said that it needed £463 million of capital funding for the next five years. Yesterday, you were given £64.5 million, which is significantly less. Are you able to rule out any further closures once the proposed plans have been implemented?

**James Gray:** As I said earlier, the master plan that we are developing is to develop a blueprint that meets Police Scotland's needs into the future. On that basis, we cannot rule out any closures, but closures do not necessarily mean no replacements or co-locations, because the estate does not change the profile of how police officers are deployed within communities. That is a separate issue for the chief constable, which relates to how resources are allocated around the country for operational reasons. The estate issue will not have an impact on that.

In short, the answer is no, we cannot say that there will be no further closures beyond the 29 proposed. For example, West Bell Street in Dundee, which we spoke about, might be closed at some point down the line, but that does not mean that we would not seek a co-location with Dundee City Council or some other alternative arrangement so that we still have a physical presence.

**Russell Findlay:** Does the master plan or blueprint mean that people will start working out of Dalmarnock?

**James Gray:** Absolutely. It is the best asset that we have in Glasgow, and we want to ensure that we maximise it. If we cannot do so ourselves because we do not have the numbers to do it, we would look to see whether we could bring in local authority or other public sector partners and, potentially, the third sector and others beyond that. For example, the Scottish Police Authority is currently in Pacific Quay in Glasgow on a lease. We are looking to bring all the staff there into the ground floor in Dalmarnock. We are building plans to fill that building up, because we need to maximise the use of that asset.

**The Convener:** We draw our session to a close. I thank the witnesses for their forbearance, for staying on with us and for the evidence that they provided to the committee.

## **Decision on Taking Business in Private**

11:45

**The Convener:** I am sure that members noted my obvious omission earlier on. Are members happy for us to take item 3 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That completes our final business in public for the year. I wish this morning's witnesses, members, Parliament staff, police officers and staff, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and everyone who works in the justice sector a happy and peaceful festive season.

11:45

*Meeting continued in private until 12:20.*



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