



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 11 September 2024

Session 6



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CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

28th Meeting 2024, 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 Dowe (South Scotland) (Con)

*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

*Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Lynn Brown (Scottish Police Authority)

Chief Constable Jo Farrell (Police Scotland)

Alasdair Hay (Scottish Police Authority)

David Malcolm (Unison Police Staff Scotland Branch)

Fiona McQueen (Scottish Police Authority)

Katy Miller (Police Scotland)

Superintendent Suzanne Smith (Association of Scottish Police Superintendents)

Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs (Police Scotland)

David Threadgold (Scottish Police Federation)

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 11 September 2024

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Policing and Mental Health

The Convener (Audrey Nicoll): Good morning, and welcome to the 28th meeting in 2024 of the Criminal Justice Committee. We have no apologies this morning.

The focus of our meeting is on policing and mental health. It is an issue that the committee has been looking at as one of its priorities in this parliamentary session. We have been concerned about the impact that the work that is carried out by police officers and staff can have on their mental health and wellbeing, and about the growing demands on policing from people in distress in communities. We want to be reassured that there is adequate support for officers and staff in the important roles that they carry out for us. Recent events have more than demonstrated what the public ask of police officers and staff, and the committee is keen to ensure that they are provided with the support they need.

I refer members to papers 1 and 2. We have three panels of witnesses, and I intend to allow around 60 minutes for each panel. I would be grateful if questions and answers were as succinct as possible.

Our first panel consists of representatives of the police staff associations and trade unions. I am pleased to welcome Superintendent Suzanne Smith, who is the vice-president of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, and Mr David Threadgold, who is the chair of the Scottish Police Federation. We hope that David Malcolm, who is a branch secretary from Unison, will join us shortly; he has been slightly delayed. Thank you all for providing written evidence.

I will start with a general question to set the scene. I will come to David Threadgold first, then move on to Superintendent Smith.

Do you think that the wellbeing support that is provided to officers and staff has improved since the committee last considered the issue back in November 2023, and what more needs to be done?

David Threadgold (Scottish Police Federation): You are right to say that it is an issue that challenges us every day in the work that we do, and we see the consequences and impacts of

being police officers in the work that we do every single day.

It is right and appropriate that I frame my remarks—this is also mentioned in my written submission—around my genuine belief in the chief constable's commitment to address the issues and take as preventative an approach as possible to our workforce and the experiences that we have as police officers, with the aim of preventing us from going through some things that result from our everyday work.

Your question is specifically about whether the situation has got better. There are still some challenges. I have noted Police Scotland's response to the issues in its submission, and I have some difficulties with some of the mitigations that are identified in that document, which I am quite happy to go into, with your permission, convener, because I think that that is relevant. I do not want to have a situation in which the committee thinks that everything that is written in that submission is the finished article to prevent my colleagues from becoming ill.

To summarise in one sentence: we have to get much more into the preventative space instead of the absolutely reactive space, which a good number of the things in the submission are in. I am happy to go into more detail, if you wish.

The Convener: I will bring in Superintendent Suzanne Smith now, but we can come back to you before we open up questions to members.

Superintendent Suzanne Smith (Association of Scottish Police Superintendents): From my perspective, I absolutely believe the chief constable's commitment to do all that she can to support officers and staff who are involved in the activity of servicing people across Scotland. I would be keen to accelerate some of those initiatives so that we begin to feel their benefits. We are very good at the point of crisis, in reactive spaces, when things have gone horribly wrong, but we need to get better in the space of intervention and prevention. That is the case across criminal justice but is particularly important in providing support for our staff.

For senior management, it is about training around human resources issues and understanding our role. We get a lot of support from the people and development team, but it is often tactical advice, and we are left to make quite bold decisions, which would undoubtedly be part of scrutiny should things not go right. We are perhaps not always trained to the right standard.

I have been a senior leader since 2018, and I have not had any senior management human resources training. Sometimes, you feel as though you are finding your way. Yes, you get a lot of tactical advice from the people and development

team, but we would all benefit from having that expertise. A programme is being built around that, but I would like to see some of that work accelerated so that we can reap the benefits.

The Convener: Leadership and training is a really important issue that we will come back to later.

David Malcolm has now been able to join us, which is great. It is good to see you, David; I will let you get settled.

David Threadgold, I was particularly interested in your opening remarks that you would like to see more of a focus on a preventative approach.

David Threadgold: My remarks are based on the way that we are structured, the demands on police officers and the spans of command. This affects constables in particular, who are, by definition the most numerous officers in Police Scotland. I will always try to ensure that my remarks are evidence based; we have done some work prior to this evidence session, with around 1,600 responses from officers, which I hope will allow me to be very accurate in what I say today.

The feedback is that the lack of appropriate interaction between constables and their sergeants is a key issue with regard to how officers deal with the stresses and demands of being in the police. In simple terms, what I mean by that is that, if you do not have that relationship with your supervisor, they cannot identify that you are not feeling yourself today. I am sure that everyone knows what I am talking about. That relates to some of the responses from Police Scotland, for example in relation to the trauma and risk management programme. TRiM is a key programme for officers to deal with trauma in policing. Some of the feedback is that it is an absolutely excellent programme that delivers exactly what we would like it to. It is referenced in the strategy that Police Scotland has developed.

However, there is clear evidence that it is far too easy for someone to avoid becoming part of the process, because on the phone they can just say no to engaging with the programme. That is because there is a lack of contact with that person and a lack of knowledge about them, for a number of reasons. There is a desire not to get involved and an understanding that people do not need to get involved in the process, which makes it is far too easy to say no. The consequence of that is that my colleagues who perhaps are struggling but do not want to identify that fact to their colleagues will get missed.

I have no doubt that we will come on to talk about Lifelines Scotland. The programme used a very simple analogy of a waterfall—I have done three programmes that have referenced a waterfall. You have calm water, then you have a

waterfall, and then you have chaos at the bottom. We have to get much, much better at dealing with colleagues in the preventative space in the calm water rather than pulling them out at the bottom. As Suzanne Smith said, we are quite good at that, but I am not yet convinced that we have the mechanisms and structures in place to allow us to be preventative and identify colleagues who are struggling at the start of that journey rather than picking them out of the water at the end. The main reason for that is the lack of supervision and contact with line managers.

The Convener: That is very helpful, and the analogy is good and helps us to see what you are referencing.

I will now bring in David Malcolm. Earlier, I asked a general question about improvements since the committee last took evidence on the issue of mental wellbeing and policing in November last year. How have things improved and what still needs to be done?

David Malcolm (Unison Police Staff Scotland Branch): It will not surprise anyone to hear that I do not really get good news stories as a trade union representative. No one comes to me and says, "I've had a really good experience. This has worked really well for me."

On improvements, I can see what Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority are working towards in the reports that have been submitted today. However, the actual evidence of that among my people does not really come across. I still tend to hear stories about the fact that people are unable to access good support from line managers, team leaders and the various services that Police Scotland has set up for them.

The Convener: I am sure that we will come back to that. I will now bring in other members, starting with Rona Mackay.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): My question is about increasing levels of staff and officer absence and the related increase in psychological disorders. Can you expand on the reasons for those increases, which may be related to what you have already said? Have Police Scotland and the SPA addressed those adequately? What is the impact of those absences on the workforce?

David Threadgold: That is a really interesting question and I cannot answer it by sticking absolutely to the subject that we are here to discuss today.

For example, increased absence is linked to officer safety training. At the moment, 3,500 police officers in Scotland are not officer safety trained. That means they have not been trained in using batons and handcuffs or in the tactical skills

required to de-escalate situations. The authority has been notified and that was discussed at the people board meeting the other day. The consequence is that my colleagues are going out without the most up-to-date training that they can possibly receive. There is clear evidence that assaults on police officers increase in that situation and there is a clear link between that and absence due to physical or psychological issues. That is one aspect.

The strategy document is aspirational and makes absolute sense but, in my opinion, it lacks a balance between other priorities and dealing with the wellbeing challenges in the organisation when officer safety, driver training and first-line-manager training are also priorities. In fairness to the service, the discussions I have had with the executive have made me believe that there will be a genuine focus on that, but it must become a priority.

Probationers come into the organisation and they require training, but the people who will train them have to come from other areas of business, which puts pressure on those. There is an ever-growing snowball that comes from having a balanced budget last year. There is a projected overspend of £19 million. Even if it is only that much, the cost will be multiplied many times over as we deliver policing across Scotland, because of the impact not only on my colleagues' health but on the services that we can provide.

I do not know if that gives you much of an answer.

Rona Mackay: That is really helpful in giving the context.

Suzanne Smith and David Malcolm, would you like to comment? You do not have to.

Superintendent Smith: I manage absences for Tayside division. We have more than 900 staff and officers and we have seen an increase in absences that have stress as a contributory factor. Some of that is work-related stress, due to the trauma experienced by staff in their roles; some is due to external factors such as fiscal challenges and other societal impacts as a result of Covid and so on.

You asked about the impact. I have less access to resources, which means that I have fewer officers to respond, which means that, as the committee has already heard, there is a drip, drip effect. There are usually enough people out there to dilute that trauma, but that number keeps reducing so the drip, drip happens slightly quicker, which creates an impact over time.

Rona Mackay: That is interesting.

Superintendent Smith: Rest days are disrupted and officers do not get the same rest periods, which has a knock-on effect.

David Malcolm: You have to look at the reasons for staff absences. Some staff are working in areas of the business where overtime is built in as part of the structure because there are not enough staff to do the job and there is not enough in the budget to pay for staff. If the business is designed on overtime, that will affect people and they are going to burn out. People struggle to get leave or to get breaks during shifts, so they will get run down and be unwell.

Rona Mackay: I have a final question. David Threadgold, you spoke about the TRiM programme. Some people did not feel that they wanted to take that up, or thought that it would not benefit them. Should that be mandatory, or should it always be a choice?

David Threadgold: The programme is voluntary at the moment. Mandating something like that could be detrimental, but if we had better, more efficient and more engaged processes we would probably see a greater uptake and people would benefit from being part of the programme.

My brother is in the police and I can use him as an example. It is far too easy for someone like him who receives a phone call to say, "I'm okay." That does not deal with the potential trauma that he will go through as a traffic officer—there will be similar examples of that for other police officers and for staff.

09:45

I want to pick up on the point that David Malcolm made about overtime. It is a really important point. The chief constable will say that we are people focused, and I believe her when she says that. However, given that our budgeted establishment is so far below what it needs to be and the impact that that has on a reducing workforce, the challenge is how we balance that when we go to the SPA and say that, in effect, we are providing a policing service by using the money that we are not spending on full-time resource to get us to that full-time equivalent. There is a clear imbalance between the reality and the statements about welfare, which is having the effects that have been spoken about.

Rona Mackay: Thank you—that was helpful.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): I will follow up on Rona Mackay's thread. In its submission, the ASPS talks about the

"growing number of police officers unable to carry out full operational duties and placed on 'modified' duties",

which, it goes on to say,

“can be for a range of medical reasons, including mental health. There currently does not appear to be a coherent strategy to reduce this ever-increasing number”.

Why are so many staff put on modified duties?
What are the reasons for that?

David Threadgold: There can be any number of reasons. Through the system to co-ordinate personnel and establishment—SCOPE—process, it is possible to identify those officers who are on modified duties. I assume that that is where that data comes from. The reasons can include injury absence or other issues that are going on in an officer’s world. I know for a fact that a great deal of work is being done at the moment to identify those officers who are shown as being on modified duties and to scrutinise—that is probably the correct word—whether those modifications are still relevant and appropriate. There should be a review period built into the process, but that aspect has slipped over the years.

The chief constable has been very clear about the need to protect the front line, and I absolutely believe that, as I have said. However, that has a consequence for my colleagues, who all of a sudden feel—this is a by-product of a situation in which officers have been allowed to have modifications made to their role—that those modifications are now being questioned. That has an impact. The issue comes down to how we ask those questions, how we deliver that process and the reactions that we get.

It is difficult to explain how officers end up on modified duties, because there are so many potential options, but work is undoubtedly being done to reduce those numbers, because the number of officers who are on modified duties is clearly an issue for the organisation, in the sense that we potentially cannot bring those officers back to the front line.

Sharon Dowey: Would everybody who is on modified duties be unable to carry out full operational duties?

David Threadgold: No. Suzanne Smith might be better placed to answer that, as she will have more detail than I do.

Superintendent Smith: People can be marked as deployable and non-deployable. The language is really important here. We will have people who have been put on modified duties because of a physical or psychological ailment but who are still deployable, with restrictions. For instance, someone who is on certain medications might not be able to work a night shift, but they can still perform their front-facing role. However, some people, because of the characteristics of their illness or injury, cannot be deployed in such a role because they cannot deal with the public, they cannot make quick decisions or they cannot carry

their personal protective equipment because of a physical inability to do so, so they are put into roles in which those skills are not required.

In my view, the service needs to be clear about what deployable assets we need to have in order to be able to deliver the service that the public of Scotland expect from us, and about what we are able to deliver with what we have. If the number of non-deployable staff continues to increase, that will have an impact on the kind of service that we can deliver.

Under the Equality Act 2010, we are required to find roles for people who have a disability. We need to be alive to that, because we must make sure that people are given appropriate employment, where possible. However, looking at the issue through a local policing lens, I know that there are very few roles in my division into which I can put another officer for whom adjustments require to be made. Now, a panel will discuss where else in the service the needs of such an officer can be accommodated.

Sharon Dowey: For how long can someone stay on modified duties?

Superintendent Smith: There are different options. Someone can be marked as “Adjusted” in the long term. They can go on modified duties to begin with, and after 12 months they are marked as “Adjusted”. That could be for the remainder of their service, because whatever has affected them might never change. Occupational health will give us some advice on how long adjustments might be required for. Officers then have the option to stay “Adjusted”, or to consider ill-health retention or, indeed, ill-health retirement if that would be better for them.

Sharon Dowey: We have the lowest police numbers since 2007, and there are reports that 945 officers are eligible to retire before next summer. What are your views on current staffing levels? Are we doing enough to deal with people who are on modified duties? Is the situation sustainable? If you have one person on modified duties and then somebody else comes in with the same issues, you could end up with a whole police force on modified duties, which would mean that officers were not able to do front-line duties.

Superintendent Smith: We need to be clear on the deployable assets that we need, what we can deliver with the deployable assets that we have and, if we are not going to have deployable staff, what that will mean for the delivery of policing across Scotland.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): On that point, for clarity, a great number of police officers who are physically or otherwise disabled are deployable assets and are able to do great work in the community daily.

Superintendent Smith: Absolutely. As I have touched on, there are people with restricted duties—for example, because of their medication—who are out there in uniform serving the public, but there are a number of people who, due to their ailments, are unable to do that.

Ben Macpherson: Thank you. I just thought that that was an important point of clarity.

Police Scotland's submission says that a workforce survey was undertaken in the summer, and we await the results, which will be interesting and important and will give us a refreshed empirical base. This might be anecdotal, but my engagement is similar to that of trade union representatives, in that people in my constituency who come to see me normally do so at a time of challenge.

How is the police interaction with other services still affecting demand? For example, when officers have to accompany people to adult mental health services, the waiting times have an effect on the police service's capacity to attend other cases and incidents, and it is frustrating for officers to have to wait hours in order to fulfil their duty of care. To what extent is that still an issue?

You talked about rest, which is obviously extremely important, and the challenge in scheduling shifts. How much of an impact do other events in our society, such as sporting and cultural activities, have? I know that, in Edinburgh, a lot of officers' leave gets cancelled in order for them to cover such events. How much thought is given by organisations and businesses to the police's capacity to safely deal with such events and to the effect that such events have on the increasing demand on officers in our country?

David Threadgold: First, I will address the point about the police response to, if we simplify things, health matters. That has been identified as a priority by the chief constable. As the chair of the SPF, I certainly think that that is the biggest issue that impacts our ability to deliver policing across Scotland and, as a consequence, it has an impact on our staff.

Our information from talking to operational sergeants and inspectors shows that responding to such matters can take up to 60 or 70 per cent of their operational capacity every day. The time is taken up by, as you alluded to, waiting in hospital accident and emergency rooms or in people's living rooms while waiting for a call from a mental health practitioner.

The service is doing a great deal of work to address the issue and, at the board level, I am involved in that work. There have been some real improvements recently. For example, police officers now have access to all the services on their hand-held devices, which is a real step

forward. In parts of the country such as Lanarkshire, as well as in D division, there are pilot programmes, but situations in which, for 25 and a half hours, double-crewed units sit with somebody in an A and E department, as happened in the pilot area in Lanarkshire, have not yet been removed from our policing profile. Most of the strategic work is still on-going. When I talk to operational officers, they say that, at the moment, there has been no real change to the way in which we police mental health or other health demands across Scotland. If we are going to successfully change our ability to deliver the basics of policing in this country, with the knock-on impacts on the health and wellbeing of our staff and recruitment and retention in this organisation, we very much need to see that change.

The service has been to Liverpool, and we have looked at the right care, right person approach that is being taken by the Metropolitan Police and Humberside Police. We are told that the legislation prevents us from taking that approach in Scotland, so we are going to go for a hybrid model to address the challenges and the impacts on policing. However, if the question is whether it is still a significant issue, the answer is that it absolutely is. In my opinion, it is probably the most significant issue that affects policing in Scotland at the moment. There is no conversation that—to my mind—does not somehow come back to this area as the potential issue.

Ben Macpherson: For clarity and completeness, could you write to the committee on why the legislation in Scotland does not allow us to do things in the same way that has been examined elsewhere?

Are partners, whether it is the national health service, local authorities or others, playing their part effectively and proactively enough to help to deal with this?

David Threadgold: There has been a huge amount of engagement. There is a difficulty, given that there is one police service and 14 health boards, in herding the cats, so to speak, to ensure that there is one process. That manifests itself in areas across the country, where some things work well but some things are not happening.

My question, which has never really been answered when I speak to health boards, is—what is your motivation to change your processes if you accept that the health boards are already broken and are under extreme pressure? Bringing in the sort of change that I believe needs to happen to allow us to deliver policing will only increase the workloads of health boards. However, we have to address that challenge and work with people on that.

Suzanne Smith and I discussed the situation during the riots in Dundee recently, when the police just ended up taking people who were suffering a mental health crisis to the facility in Dundee and leaving them there, because we simply did not have the resource to deal with them. We need to get to the point of having a process for that in policing across the country. The consequence of that situation was that the facility was calling the control room, asking, "Why are you doing this?" We did it because we had no option. That initial part of the process—that risk aversion—still really impacts on our ability to deliver policing.

We can deal with that by having a clear strategic direction from the chief constable. It cannot be totally prescriptive because of the situations that we are dealing with, but first-line and second-line managers must have confidence that, if they are risk-positive in making decisions, the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner will buy in to what they have done—subject to the appropriate scrutiny, of course—and that professional standards will not chase them because they have made a risk-positive decision. When I spoke to the chief the other day, I was very clear that that confidence does not yet exist within Police Scotland and that it needs to.

Ben Macpherson: That is very interesting, thank you.

Superintendent Smith: It is the gaps in the provision in criminal justice and in health and social care that cause the police to lean into spaces that they should not be in. That creates extra demand when our focus should be elsewhere, doing what the public expect us to do, which is to guard, watch and patrol, to some degree, and to be visible in our communities—that early intervention and prevention in the criminal justice space to negate the need for the justice process to take heed. However, we are filling in gaps in other organisations because of how they deal with things.

For instance, in 90-odd per cent of cases of a court citation to be a witness, you are not required to go, but, meanwhile, you have had your rest days cancelled, your shift pattern adjusted and somehow had to get somebody to deal with your caring responsibilities. Then, the day before the court date, you will be told that you are not required. However, our workforce agreement does not allow us to put you back on your night shift, so we then fill that gap with overtime and have to cancel other people's rest days. All those things happen because the criminal justice system is not slick enough to work with the way that we operate.

We need to be better connected. The conversations are on-going and the chief has made her commitment on that really clear. We

need other services to get better at understanding the implications of their decisions on our operating model.

David Malcolm: It is a great strength of our members that their work is a vocation and that they will not leave the most vulnerable in society exposed. However, the police service is absorbing those vulnerabilities from other organisations that colleagues have spoken about, including the NHS and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The chief constable and the SPA board do not have the ability to get them to fix their houses before we can address that problem. We always talk about the police being the last resort, and we absolutely are. We will not leave people vulnerable, so that will continue to be absorbed by officers and staff until other areas of the public sector are addressed.

Ben Macpherson: That was all very helpful. Does anyone want to touch on the impact that regular events and major events have on demand?

10:00

Superintendent Smith: I am happy to do that. I am a silver and a gold commander, so I know that events are a big commitment across Scotland. Whether it is football or the potential Commonwealth games coming over the horizon, there is a huge police footprint. It is not only the event itself but the significant planning that goes on ahead of it and the disruption to officer shifts—we have to give them notice periods and so on. How to absorb that when we are already running under our operating model is very difficult. Officers' rest days are regularly cancelled and they get paid overtime for events. There is a cost recovery to some degree, but we can only cost recover for certain parts of events. We potentially have a wider police footprint at some significant events due to the volume of people travelling in and out of cities. It is a really busy landscape for us.

We are definitely moving into that risk-positive space around events, understanding whether there is a value in the police being present and whether there is significant enough threat, risk or harm for us to be there and if not, there are very good events companies across Scotland. Should we replicate what happens elsewhere in the United Kingdom, where events companies are allowed to run the event without a police presence? We are moving into that space as we get commander comfort and confidence that people are able to deliver safe events without the need for police to be present.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The committee has heard evidence from suspended

officers who say that they were isolated, ostracised and kept in the dark over prolonged periods of time. That has resulted in poor mental health, attempted suicides and even suicides. Do you think that enough has been done to ensure their welfare? That is probably a question for David Threadgold.

David Threadgold: There is a two-part answer to that. My organisation has a process in which we engage with suspended officers. One of our procedures is that we always meet them at the point of suspension to talk through what is likely to happen, with the benefit of our past experiences. We maintain that contact with them, largely based on their needs rather than us phoning every week, for example, because that can become a negative thing.

That takes me to feedback that we have received from officers about the almost—I do not like the phrase—box-ticking element of the contact, if someone just calls to say, for example, “Hello, it is your sergeant,” or whatever, and there is really nothing to say other than discussing the weather or something.

The feelings of isolation are absolutely real. Officers go from having a complete structure in their life—getting up to go to work to work their shift and so on—to having it removed all of a sudden. I have never been in that situation myself, but from speaking to many who have, it is absolutely an issue. Again, we need to have more engagement with those officers to ensure their welfare, because a phone call on a regular four-week interval simply is not doing it.

Suspensions will be reviewed by the service every 28 days, so if circumstances have changed, there is potential for the suspension to be lifted or for that officer to be moved to restricted duties. However, although I am aware of that happening, the reality is that it is far more often the exception rather than the rule, and we have officers in the organisation who have been suspended for many years.

Russell Findlay: In its submission to the committee, Police Scotland says that

“we take steps to ensure that welfare provisions are in place and that investigations are concluded as quickly as possible.”

Is that a fair assessment?

David Threadgold: In some respects it is outwith the service’s hands. If that officer is subject to a criminal investigation and it is sitting with the Crown, I can think of no example where that suspension has been reviewed while that Crown investigation is on-going, and there are very few cases where the decision to move that officer from suspension to restriction has taken

place once that process has finished, although I accept that that does happen.

That takes me back to the point about the number of years that officers can be suspended, which can have an obvious impact on their health and on the public purse.

Russell Findlay: How many hours would one of your members typically work?

David Threadgold: We are contracted for 40 hours a week. There was discussion at the board about providing a service with overtime because of what we do not have in our budgeted establishment. I cannot give you an exact number, because I was not prepared for the question at that depth, but I think that very few operational officers across Scotland work only 40 hours a week. There is a big distinction throughout all this between front-line operational officers and those in a back-office function, who carry out equally valuable work. I suspect that some of them might end up doing the regulated number of hours.

Russell Findlay: Without putting a number on it, are you saying that it would not be unusual for your members to work typically more than 40 hours a week?

David Threadgold: That is absolutely the reality.

Russell Findlay: I ask because the submission from ASPS, Suzanne Smith, says that 97 per cent of your members work for more than 40 hours per week. The difference might be that the salary for superintendents and chief superintendents starts at £79,000 and goes up to more than £106,000 a year. Is that a complaint about 97 per cent of your members working for more than 40 hours a week?

Superintendent Smith: It is a recognition of the role and of the portfolios that we all carry. We generally work office hours of 8 to 4, Monday to Friday, but we all have extra commitments on top. Most of us have specialisms, such as being a silver or gold event commander or a firearms commander, and we have additional responsibilities in respect of those roles. I was on call last night for the north and east of Scotland. Despite working my day shift yesterday, I had numerous calls throughout the evening and first thing this morning because things had happened.

I absolutely understand that that is part of on-call capability, but we are working by reading papers to prepare for the next day. We go to multiple forums, because staff at superintendent rank generally have quite vast portfolios. We might carry significant budget responsibility or lead on work in the estates field. People oversight requires quite a bit of knowledge and information, which takes time when the day job generally means

jumping in and out of meetings to get that job done.

David Threadgold: I have a point to make about something that has been missed. There have been figures published recently about the vast amounts of money that cops make annually from overtime, but what is missing from that is the impact on their health and wellbeing that is caused by accruing overtime from so much extra work. If we are to meaningfully tackle the wellbeing and welfare of our officers, that must be part of the solution. Resourcing units look for a name and number so that they can fill a particular vacancy for a football match or whatever is happening. There is no cognisance of how much work that officer has done leading up to that point or the impact that that might have on them. The two areas of business are not linked, but we have to go there if we are going to deal with the issues that exist.

Russell Findlay: My colleague Sharon Dowey mentioned officer numbers being at their lowest for 17 years. We have initiatives and new training, and there is goodwill from the top down to address the officer mental health issue that we are here to talk about. However, is it not the reality that a lot of that will count for nothing because of the increased pressures that officers will inevitably experience, and that you are effectively running to stand still?

David Threadgold: The answer is yes. I do not have the exact figure, but I think that the service would say that we are about 400 officers under at the moment. We should not forget that that is a consequence of a recruitment freeze from September last year to March this year. That training embargo has had an impact. I know that the Government will talk about record recruitment this year, which is a fact, but more officers leave the organisation every month than is possible for us to recruit. In reality, the number is always on a downward trend, but the demand does not go away and that increases the pressure on those who remain.

Russell Findlay: That goes back to your point about overtime. With fewer and fewer officers, there will be an expectation—almost an obligation—that people will do overtime, which could add to their stress.

David Threadgold: People can be ordered to do overtime; they do not have a choice in certain circumstances. All those things manifest themselves in pressure. At the end of the day, we are just human. Increasing numbers of people are leaving the organisation because they cannot deal with the pressure, or they are going off sick or on to modified duties because of the consequences of trying to do the best for the people of Scotland.

The Convener: David Malcolm, do you want to comment on any of the points that Russell Findlay has covered?

David Malcolm: There is no obligation for police staff to do overtime, but I know that members who work in areas that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland recognises as meeting the definition of being on the front line—that is, members working in service centres, control rooms, resolution teams and custody suites—are certainly doing overtime and taking payment for that or accruing time. That causes challenges for their wellbeing because they will wear out if they cannot take that time or are not getting the required rest between shifts.

Russell Findlay: I have a final quick question. The SPF's submission says that an officer who was seconded from A division—which, I believe, covers Ayrshire—into a suicide prevention role is no longer in that role. Do you know why?

David Threadgold: I should say that A division covers Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland. The legacy force was Grampian Police.

Russell Findlay: Right, sorry.

David Threadgold: As I understand it from speaking to that officer, it was decided that they could be better used elsewhere. However, based on the definition of the role that was submitted—the three or four lines that the officer provided me with—it seems that people in those roles are exactly what we need in the organisation at the moment. If that attitude and those processes were replicated across Scotland, that could have a real impact in relation not just to those who, sadly, complete suicide but to all the preventative interventions that we have talked about.

Russell Findlay: It is that waterfall analogy.

David Threadgold: It is a very simple analogy, but not one that anyone will forget.

Russell Findlay: Absolutely. Thank you.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Good morning. As the convener said at the start of the meeting, we have been looking at these issues for a while. It has always struck me that, as has been referred to today, the police deal with almost everything, including the most difficult situations. I know that some of what they do involves plugging gaps in other services, which has been covered, but the police are always the first ones there for deaths, assaults and incidents involving children—the most horrific stuff that we can think of.

I want to ask about thresholds. When a police officer is dealing with something, is there a particular threshold? Do individual departments have a threshold? For example, if a police officer

has to deal with a really difficult child protection issue, perhaps alongside social work or other services, do they get a debriefing afterwards, or do they just go on to do something else, such as dealing with an individual in a really difficult mental health situation? Are there thresholds that kick in, with officers being told, "You need to come in for a debriefing and not do anything else for the rest of the day"? Does that question make sense? Suzanne Smith is nodding, so I will go to her first.

Superintendent Smith: I am nodding because the issue resonates with me, in that a lot of people who join the police are attracted by the sheer variety of what could occur in a 10-hour day.

There is no threshold that sets out that someone should, for example, deal with only two or five things or go to only two deaths. Such a threshold does not exist, but there is the expectation that line managers will provide a debrief and a cross-check to see whether someone is okay. In my various roles, I have experienced all that. The challenge relates to the supervisory ratios and having leaders and supervisors in the right places to have those conversations. As we get slightly thinner on the ground, there are fewer people who are able to make those interventions, as David Threadgold has touched on.

We regularly record near misses in relation to physical injuries, but we do not currently have a mechanism for recording near misses in relation to trauma. I do not know whether that would even be practical to do, but, when you read comments from officers who might be going down the route of retirement due to ill health, you find that, quite often, in their submissions, they recall events when they believe their trauma began and what happened thereafter, so I wonder whether we should be doing something to record trauma. However, I do not know how we would do that, and people do not always recognise that an event was traumatic until some time afterwards, because we all react differently to trauma. We have spoken about the drip, drip effect a few times. The issue might be not the event itself but something that happens two or three years afterwards.

I am not sure whether I have answered your question, but I hope that I have.

Fulton MacGregor: That was a good answer.

David Threadgold: The one word that would describe our job is "relentless". I will talk mainly from an operational policing perspective. What Fulton MacGregor has described would be a very good way of doing business, but the reality is that officers who perform these functions—because of the demand and because of the numbers—do not have the opportunity to decompress at the end of incidents. Part of the challenge relates to the link with supervisors and the fact that, under the TRiM

programme, which we have spoken about, the officer might be dealing with somebody completely random who has no knowledge of their previous life in the police. Cops talk to us about that all the time.

Other agencies have hot debriefs, if you want to call them that, or opportunities to discuss things more slowly, decompress and talk through the challenges of what someone has just dealt with. That does not happen in the police, and it is a real issue. Again, that is part of the solution that we need to reach in order to provide for better wellbeing in the organisation.

10:15

Fulton MacGregor: You have started to answer my next question, because I was going to ask whose responsibility it is to initiate debriefs. Is it the responsibility of the management or the individual officer? What would happen if an officer who had dealt with a death, for example, said, "I've dealt with a really difficult situation this morning. I do not want to go out to anything else that's potentially difficult or traumatic this afternoon"? What sort of response would that officer get from management?

David Threadgold: There are two aspects to that. Some supervisors take a proactive individual approach, and I have no doubt that, if that happened, you would be dealt with. However, there is a cultural issue that means that huge numbers of police officers would not be comfortable saying that, and they take their lead from their sergeant. If the team has been in an incident, and the sergeant does not accept TRiM, our information shows that it is very unlikely that the constables in that team will accept it.

The big challenge with regard to the supervisory aspect of such a situation is that, as we have discussed, supervisors are largely not there. Previously, you might have had five teams with five sergeants, but now you might have five teams with one sergeant. If the sergeant is not on the same shift as you and your days off are different, you might not see that person for a month at a time. Therefore, the link with the first-line manager, which is so important in our organisation, not only for us but for our ability to do policing, is absolutely missing in some areas of Scotland. That has an impact on exactly the point of your question.

David Malcolm: I deal with members in Police Scotland and in SPA forensic services. We have spoken to SPA forensic services about the forensic scene examiners, who go out to scene after scene and are sometimes exposed to very horrendous sights. Through its tasking unit, it has taken advice on how it would deal with that.

However, I do not feel that we have that approach in other areas. For example, some staff take traumatic calls or are exposed to sensitive images, and some of our document preparation staff listen to audio recordings of very disturbing events. I have seen that situation being handled very positively by individual team leaders and managers. In other cases, I have seen that approach to be completely lacking, so the organisation does not have a standard approach that says, "Please consider taking someone aside and giving them some time after they have been exposed to something."

Fulton MacGregor: Do other organisations or services deal with vicarious or impact trauma better than the police? Can lessons be learned in that regard? We are not here to talk about other services, because there are probably lots of concerns about those services, too, but could anything be learned from them?

David Malcolm: We have had feedback from members who have knowledge of NHS processes or who have family who work in the NHS. For example, we heard about a traffic light system, which meant that, if you had dealt with a red incident, you would not go out to anything that was not categorised as green or amber. Something such as that would probably help.

Fulton MacGregor: The other side of it is the number of incidents that the police are dealing with, which is hard.

I have one more question, convener.

The Convener: I will bring in Pauline McNeill and come back to you, if there is time.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning. Fulton MacGregor's line of questioning was helpful, because it got to the heart of what I am hearing about the job of a front-line police officer.

David Threadgold said that there is not always the opportunity to decompress after difficult situations. For example, if police officers have to deal with a very violent situation and use their batons or sprays, is there no standard response to that when they return from the incident?

David Threadgold: In the case of the use of batons, there would be an administrative process to record what happened. Through the officer safety trainers, there is a process to proactively go back to the officers involved if something unusual happened, as I think it is described.

However, Mr MacGregor used the word "time"—time is the most important thing that you can give people, but that is what we do not have in this organisation. The reality is that you will go to a serious road accident, go back to the station and then be sent out to deal with something else.

The demand from the control room and those in the contact, command and control division—C3—is relentless. We have situations where the calls that cannot be dealt with at the end of a shift are cut and pasted to the duty sergeant's desk for that area so, before you even start, you have a list of calls that require your attention, which immediately focuses your attention on that work and takes it away from your people.

On the suggestion that we have opportunities to debrief, it would take a strong supervisor to say to the control room, "We are not doing that any more because I have to sit with my team." We talk about wellbeing and welfare as a priority. If you were to look at the diaries of the people who are in management positions in the organisation, how much of their time would you find was set aside for wellbeing and welfare? I wager that it would be very little, if any at all. That is a simple but powerful example of how we are not dealing with our staff particularly well, in my opinion.

Pauline McNeill: Does something need to be standardised?

David Threadgold: It is difficult to standardise our role, because it is so spontaneous. However, we have to have a culture and a relationship between our officers and their supervisors that allows for those things to take place. That is difficult because of the demands that we have, but it is necessary if we are meaningfully to take the words from the pages that have been produced on the matter and turn them into a reality for cops, to prevent me from having to listen to dozens and dozens of testimonies and thousands of pieces of feedback that say how the approach is not going well.

My role in the organisation is to try to make sure that we change what we are doing for the better. I believe that the chief constable has the same vision as I do, but the reality is something different. We need to address some of the responses from Police Scotland about how we will do that, because those mitigations will not change our culture and will not impact on police officers across Scotland, simply because of the examples that have been given.

Pauline McNeill: Has the reduction in police officer numbers exacerbated the situation that you describe?

David Threadgold: It is inevitable that it will but, at the moment, all that we would do if we had another 10,000 police officers would be to increase the demand on them. We will never finish policing. It is not possible that we can service the demand entirely. We have to accept that it is unlikely that we will have an increased establishment or massively increased budget, so we have to become more efficient at dealing with

what we have and in how we deploy those officers and staff to service the communities across Scotland. We are still some way away from dealing with that effectively.

Pauline McNeill: You said to my colleague Ben Macpherson that the confidence to be risk positive does not yet exist among police officers. Why is that?

David Threadgold: It is simple. There is the unknown and the perception among first and second-line managers that the organisation does not fully support them. They fear for their pensions, their ability to pay their mortgages and their liberty in some cases. Those are real challenges that are ingrained in the first and second-line manager cadre across the organisation. I have absolutely no doubt about that.

The change has to come from the top. The chief can provide us with a strategic direction to allow us to become more risk positive. There are examples in which there has been a police contact death and the PIRC has been absolutely behind the decisions that the police officers made—there is no issue for the PIRC—but the perception across the country is that that is not the case. That prevents my colleagues at first and second-line manager level from making the type of decisions that I and members of the public across Scotland expect.

Pauline McNeill: His Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, Craig Naylor, made a point to the committee some time ago in this inquiry that is similar to the issue that you describe. He said that police officers are asked to do difficult things, such as use firearms, and if they are not backed up by senior officers, they feel vulnerable. Is that what you are talking about? Is it the same issue?

David Threadgold: Exactly. In my experience, police officers have no problem making difficult decisions but they are not doing it, because they do not feel that the organisation is providing the support. That comes through the training of first-line managers upwards and from those who make more strategic and tactical decisions giving those people the confidence to make such decisions. That key area is missing at the moment and I have discussed it with the chief many times. The reality is that it is a priority for her but the perception on the front line—I spoke to her about this and will say it publicly—is that nothing has changed since she started and there is still absolute risk aversion and a reluctance to make decisions that, when you look at it objectively, are common sense.

The impact is that we get tied up for countless hours at a time across Scotland. We cannot provide a service and we end up with proportionate-response-to-crime models, which

are a direct consequence of our inability to do the basics of policing, in my opinion.

Pauline McNeill: Your submission says:

“There was very mixed feedback regarding the introduction of the Duty Modifications Posting Panel within the service”.

Please explain to the committee what the duty modifications posting panel is.

David Threadgold: Suzanne Smith will probably do that better than me, but I will have a go.

Pauline McNeill: Suzanne?

David Threadgold: Do you want to do that?

Superintendent Smith: I am happy to.

We have touched on the issue of officers having modifications or adjustments. If a division cannot absorb a person because it does not have a post that is suitable for their needs, there is an opportunity to put in a briefing paper detailing the circumstances and what has been tried locally. That paper goes to the duty modification panel, which will consider an alternative posting. There is a discussion about the circumstances and options, which include capability considerations, ill-health retirement, ill-health retention or a post. For example, if someone cannot wear their PPE, they might be found a post in a control room. They will still be delivering a front-line service, but they will not be public facing—they will work on a computer or over the telephone. Their police officer skills are still being utilised.

The duty modification panel is quite new and has run only a couple of times. We have had no training in what to do, so we are all trying to navigate our way through that. One aspect that is really important to me is having a conversation with the officer who is affected by the move or modification about why we are doing that and what the purpose is. If you do not get that bit right, that might undermine the whole process, because you could lose the officer's confidence. The purpose of the panel is to ensure that we use the officer's skills in an area where their skill set can be absorbed. It also frees up a post in the local policing environment for someone who is operationally fit.

Does that make sense?

Pauline McNeill: Yes, thank you.

My final question is for David Threadgold. The Police Scotland submission says:

“This Autumn, Police Scotland will publish a long term vision for the service and a three year plan to deliver the next wave of policing reform. A thriving workforce is a central ambition in that work.”

Given what you have said, do you have concerns about that plan or is it all interwoven into the same issues about policing reform?

David Threadgold: The success of any plan comes when it moves from the page to reality. I will highlight some things that are in there, without intending to be destructive in my comments.

The idea of wellbeing champions, which is in the submission, is often spoken about publicly as part of the solution. The information that we have is that that programme has achieved little, if anything, for a number of reasons. Officers just do not buy into it, because it is not part of our culture. It has the potential to achieve something, but absolutely does not do so at the moment.

Lifelines is a brilliant product, but the numbers who have been exposed to it are low. That goes back to the HMICS report and to taking a corporate approach. How do we get to a situation where every officer and staff member in Scotland has received Lifelines training? Extending that in the way that the service is talking about, by utilising officers and staff to deliver it, will take resources away from the front line. Is there a better way of doing that? Could we bring in people to deliver training for us? That needs time and investment.

There is stuff about trauma impact prevention techniques, which is a programme led by Police Care UK. We have trained people to deliver TIPT across Scotland and I am a trustee of that charity, but that programme has been suspended and is going through a complete review at the moment. I do not believe that we should base a potential strategy on things that might never happen, that are having no impact whatsoever across the organisation or that are having a limited impact, no matter how good it might be for those working in back-office functions or in the central belt. There should be no difference in the support that officers receive, whether they work in Orkney, Aberdeen or Glasgow, but that is what happens at the moment.

There is real positivity in the document but, because of the challenges that we have spoken about already, delivery will be key and investment in first and second-line managers is absolutely critical to its success.

The Convener: We are just about out of time, but I have a question about body-worn cameras. We are aware that there has been a delay in the roll-out. What is your view of that? That question is for David Threadgold and then for Suzanne Smith.

David Threadgold: It was not helpful that the chief constable said that the cameras would be rolled out in late summer 2024. That gave officers an expectation that it would happen, which has clearly not been the case.

The organisation has now said that we are looking at the end of March for the roll-out of body-worn cameras. I am not heavily involved in the project team, but I will be pleased if that happens, because body-worn cameras are absolutely a benefit to officers. The longer we go on without them, the more there is a real danger, in my mind, that we turn a positive aspect of policing into a negative, because officers are continually asking, "When is this happening?" The benefits are clear in terms of interactions with the public, reduced complaints and reduced assaults, so the sooner that we have those, the better.

10:30

It is absolutely right that, when the technology eventually comes—it will go to Suzanne Smith's division first and roll out from there—it must work. However, because of the infrastructure of Police Scotland's buildings, there are challenges in getting the technology in. The interface between the street, the digital evidence sharing capability project, which will act as the middle person in the process, and the Crown Office will be a real challenge. Our conference is towards the end of March next year, and I hope that I am not going to be standing there saying that we still do not have body-worn video cameras. However, I will be pleased if we have them.

Superintendent Smith: We will be the first division to receive body-worn video cameras, so we are delighted with that. We already have DESC and we are already piloting summary case management, so it will be that transition from the pavement to the courtroom that will speed up justice, not only for officers but, ultimately, for members of the public who come to our attention.

David Threadgold touched on the challenges of the information technology infrastructure, but those are not unanticipated. Two different companies are supplying us with products, so they need to speak to one another, but there is an absolute commitment from the service to get that bit right and to take out any human inefficiencies in the process so that, when it is delivered, it is as efficient as possible. It is hoped that we will reap the benefits that we have already touched on, and we are looking forward to it coming next year.

The Convener: Russell Findlay has a super-small question.

Russell Findlay: I will not ask about body-worn cameras, but I will just note that, in 2012, Grampian Police was the first force to pilot these cameras, so it is nice to see that, after all these years, they will be returning there, operationally.

David Threadgold, you referred to the Lifelines training. More than 1,000 officers and staff have attended that training, and you talked positively

about it. Who provides that training? Towards the end of the Police Scotland submission, it says that it is moving towards having 110 officers and staff in the organisation who can facilitate that training, so it is clearly going to be an on-going thing.

David Threadgold: It is done through the NHS at the Rivers centre in Edinburgh. The distinction between officers and staff is an important one for Mr Malcolm and for me in order to understand the impact that the training will have on police officers. If we are looking to get to a point where we have a consistent product to help our staff, Lifelines might be part of the solution but, without a significant amount of investment, there are challenges, and I do not know whether the programme could facilitate it even if we had that investment.

Russell Findlay: That is confusing me. We have Lifelines, Vivup, a new occupational health contract, TRiM and pilot schemes in different parts of the force, so the picture seems a bit inconsistent—it is a bit of a patchwork quilt.

David Threadgold: I agree.

Russell Findlay: Okay. Thank you.

The Convener: I will have to close the evidence session there. Thank you for a very useful insight and update and for your evidence. The committee will have a short suspension to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:33

Meeting suspended.

10:38

On resuming—

The Convener: Our second panel of witnesses consists of senior representatives of Police Scotland. I am very pleased to welcome Chief Constable Jo Farrell; Katy Miller, director of people and development; and Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs, who has responsibility for people and professionalism.

I intend to allow around 60 minutes for the evidence session, and I invite the chief constable to make a short opening statement.

Chief Constable Jo Farrell (Police Scotland): The invitation to give evidence today is very timely, because, as committee members are aware, yesterday was world suicide prevention day. I welcome the opportunity to provide the committee with assurances on the work that I and my team are driving to support our people's safety and wellbeing.

When I took on the role of chief constable in Police Scotland last October, I made it clear that strengthening and protecting our front line was a

central priority for me, and that has not changed. My 30-year career in policing has been built on that commitment. I have served on the front line of policing in a variety of roles, and I know just how challenging and rewarding that work is. Strengthening our front line is about maximising the number of officers in our communities while enhancing their capacity and capability to engage with and respond to the needs of the public. It is about supporting, equipping and protecting those colleagues who provide such valuable service to the public—from answering a call for help in an emergency, to being the first responder on a scene, to providing a point of liaison for victims of crime and their families during investigations. That all places our people in moments of crisis and trauma on a daily basis and we do not underestimate the impact that it has on them.

Later this month, I will present to the Scottish Police Authority a long-term vision for Police Scotland and a three-year plan to realise that vision. Last year, we committed to developing a new sustainable and affordable model of policing. That vision will drive the work. I am determined that we will simplify our approach to planning and focus relentlessly on the delivery and prioritisation of what is important, and that a thriving workforce will be central to that vision.

When I took up my role, I made the commitment that I would listen to our workforce and work hard every day to improve their day-to-day experiences. That means making real progress with measures such as technology, body-worn video, enabling the sharing of digital evidence across the criminal justice system, working with our partners to improve the efficiency of that system, and being clearer about our role in relation to vulnerable people suffering mental health and other crises.

As well as those measures, I am committed to providing better support to individuals in their time of need, and we have invested to improve our employee assistance programme and our occupational health service. Our wellbeing action plan was published last month and it has been shared with the committee.

I have also committed that we will undertake an annual survey of our officers and staff to understand their experience and focus on improvement. Our most recent survey closed in late August, and I am pleased that more than 50 per cent of our workforce—11,500 colleagues—responded.

Finally, I recognise the committee's interest in officer and staff suicide. The death of any officer or staff member by suicide is deeply felt by family, friends and colleagues across Police Scotland. Please be assured of the seriousness with which we take the issue. We are not complacent. Supporting colleagues at a personal and

professional level is central to our long-term vision of a thriving workforce.

I and my colleagues are happy to take any questions that the committee may have for us.

The Convener: Thank you very much, chief constable. As usual, I will ask the first question and then open it up to members. You mentioned in your introductory remarks the long-term vision for the service and the three-year plan to deliver the next wave of policing reform, which is welcome. Can you expand on how that piece of work will impact on officer and staff wellbeing and to what extent that will be addressed in that work?

Chief Constable Farrell: I have committed that one element of our vision is a thriving workforce. That is in no way different to the comments that I made when I took over the role of chief constable. Safety, wellbeing and the focus on making sure that our people are best placed and feel confident and well in their role is central to the delivery of policing in Scotland.

The changes that we have made in the past 12 months and the changes that we will make moving forward are very much about moving into a space of investing in greater prevention so that our staff are better supported. We want to provide staff with support that enables them to deal with the issues that might be affecting them early on so that they do not get to a crisis position.

10:45

In addition, we will invest more in occupational health to address trauma. You all know, as we do, that police officers and police staff face trauma daily, because that is the nature of the policing role. Following the pandemic, across the whole of society, there has been an increase in psychological issues. Policing is not unique in that regard, but we recognise that our colleagues face trauma daily.

We are focusing on greater prevention and better facilities through occupational health, and our employee assistance programme can provide early help. The committee has heard about interventions such as our trauma risk management—TRiM—programme, which gives our supervisors, sergeants and inspectors, as well as other police staff in leadership roles, the tools to provide support for individuals. It is about leadership behaviour and the tools that people need to drive a values-based organisation. People should feel confident to support colleagues if they think that they might be struggling, by having early conversations. Through our investment, they should be able to support them and signpost them to the best help, so that we prevent the impact of trauma and the risk of people being unable to

come to work. That has been our approach to driving a thriving workforce.

The Convener: I am glad that you spoke about prevention, because our earlier witnesses, particularly David Threadgold from the Scottish Police Federation, spoke about that. What I have interpreted from what has been said is about the value and importance of picking up on signs of change in somebody's mental wellbeing earlier, in a preventative context. David Threadgold spoke about there almost being a separation between the work of operational officers when they are out and about doing their job and their contact with their immediate line managers, who are, invariably, sergeants. He was concerned about the lack of contact. Will that issue be considered in the reform programme?

Chief Constable Farrell: I have talked about strengthening the front line of policing. When I took up the role, I felt that there was a lack of focus on the number of officers on the front line, including sergeants and inspectors, and that there needed to be a rebalance, with a focus on local policing. I have made it my mission to hear at first hand from officers and staff who are delivering on the front line, including those in response policing, community policing, detective roles and custody staff. As an executive, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that those roles are as strong as they can be.

I have looked across our corporate functions and, although in no way would I say that individuals are not working hard, I have made a change so that there is a shift in emphasis, with the core role of front-line policing prioritised. We are not there yet, but that is my focus.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at a seven o'clock early-turn briefing in Inverness to listen at first hand to police officers, sergeants, inspectors and custody staff. What are the challenges? What draws capacity away from the front line of policing across Scotland? How do we, as an executive, improve the situation? As you know, it is only by listening to people at first hand that we get a sense of the stressors and the areas where we need to step in. For example, we might need to shift business in areas that do not sit entirely with policing, although we have a role, because pushing lots of daily capacity into those areas might draw capacity away from the delivery of policing. I want front-line policing to be as strong as it can be. It is only by listening to people at first hand that we get a sense of the issues that are affecting the ability to do that.

The Convener: I will bring members in now, starting with Russell Findlay and then Rona Mackay.

Russell Findlay: Good morning, chief constable. In your opening remarks, you said that more than 50 per cent of staff had responded to the survey. Do you have any data about their views on welfare issues? If not, will the survey be published, and when?

Chief Constable Farrell: We were really pleased by the number of people who responded to the survey, which asked questions on a range of areas, one of which was welfare and wellbeing. There were also questions about leadership, environment, training and development, so it was a wide-ranging survey.

The survey has now closed and we are analysing the data. To answer your question, we will be able to provide the results to the organisation, and to this committee if you wish to see them, at the end of autumn. We will then be able to act on them.

I plan to carry out the survey annually, because if you ask me how I know that the wellbeing and health of the organisation and our people are improving, one way to demonstrate that would be through responses to the survey. Over and above that annual survey we will, at times throughout the year, do what we call a pulse survey, which will ask colleagues for their thoughts and feedback about a particular issue. We continually monitor both data and what people actually feel.

Russell Findlay: Was the survey not previously annual?

Chief Constable Farrell: No. We have not done one for three years.

Russell Findlay: It has not been annual.

We have heard a lot about the work that has been done and about initiatives that are taking place. In no particular order, there is your leadership matters, there are wellbeing champions, there is Police Care UK, act don't react, timelines, Thrivewise, TRiM, Vivup and a new occupational health contract. That confuses me and I dare say that a front-line police officer will not have the time even to begin getting their head around what that all means. Is there not a danger that it is overly complicated and should be streamlined? What is your view?

Chief Constable Farrell: You are right. You have listed a number of approaches and initiatives. Earlier in the year, director Katy Miller carried out a review of all the offers, facilities and programmes that exist across welfare, wellbeing and leadership. We will seek to rationalise those and to better signpost officers and staff so that the routes through them are clear.

There are high rates of take-up for our new occupational health offering and our employee assistance programme. That is positive because it

means that people know how to access them. There will be an on-going endeavour by us all to ensure that, wherever people are and whatever role they are in, they, their sergeant, their colleague and their peer all know how to access the best support available. We will ensure that the extra investment that we have made provides value for money and supports colleagues.

Russell Findlay: I was going to ask about those two contracts because they are both new. Your submission does not say who is providing the occupational health contract. Do you know who that is?

Chief Constable Farrell: The occupational health contract is with Optima Health.

Russell Findlay: Is it Vivup that provides the employee assistance programme?

Chief Constable Farrell: That is correct.

Russell Findlay: That is an Essex-based limited company called SME HCI Ltd. It describes itself as an "employee benefits programme". What are the costs and durations of both those contracts? Critically, what kind of formal assessment is being conducted to see if they are effective and value for money?

Chief Constable Farrell: I will ask director Katy Miller to come in on the detail, because it is important for the committee to hear that.

Katy Miller (Police Scotland): As you rightly pointed out, both are relatively new contracts to Police Scotland, so we are in the early days of the evaluation of contract performance. However, we have provided some evidence of that and I can talk more about it.

Earlier, you rightly talked about how confusing the landscape could be for colleagues. That situation has come about through well-intentioned actions on the part of Police Scotland. A number of recommendations have come about through the HMICS audit and the independent review, and we have tried to distil those into a new health and wellbeing action plan, which was submitted as part of our documentation.

In doing that, we have looked through three lenses. We have looked through an undo lens, which is about what support we have in place for staff and officers at the point of exposure to harmful factors. We have looked at mitigation, which is about what support we have in place at the point of the impact of exposure to harmful factors, and then we have looked at prevention. We have taken the opportunity to step back and think about how we reframe all the relevant work that is under way.

With regard to the EAP and occupational health, I have worked with Vivup before, although that

was more on the benefits platform side, as you said. Vivup is relatively new to the EAP market, but both contracts were about a year in the making. The procurement process was extensive and involved numerous stakeholders.

Vivup provides an access platform that is much more digitally enabled than was the case with previous suppliers, which means that staff have instant access to qualified health professionals. Previously, one of the gaps that we heard about from our staff was the ability to access more bespoke support, such as cognitive behavioural therapy and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing—more specialised trauma-related counselling. Through the EAP, we have found that we are able to drill much more down into the types of issues that are coming up, and we are seeing anxiety, stress, low mood, depression and family difficulties.

Russell Findlay: How long are the contracts for?

Katy Miller: I believe that the contracts are three years plus one. Although the Optima contract was in place beforehand, we enhanced its requirements with the introduction of the new contract. We have robust contract performance monitoring in place, and it will be reported up through the SPA committee and board.

Russell Findlay: When I first raised the tragedy of police officer suicides, the committee was surprised and concerned that they were not being recorded. They had not been quantified or measured in any way whatsoever. Then, last year, an assistant chief constable came to the committee and told us that five officers had died in three years. That information was based on doing “a manual trawl”—to use his exact words—of the databases. In today’s submission, Police Scotland has said that, in the 11 years since its formation, there have been 20 suicides and that that data has come from National Records of Scotland. How confident are you, collectively, of the accuracy of that number and that being the sole source of the data? How many of those 20 officers’ deaths were subject to fatal accident inquiries?

Katy Miller: I can answer the first part of your question. We are 100 per cent assured of the figure that has been submitted. Subsequent to our previous committee appearance, we put in place a mechanism whereby we can hold data on death from suicide in relation to officers or staff. I will hand over to DCC Speirs to talk about fatal accident inquiries.

Deputy Chief Constable Alan Speirs (Police Scotland): In every instance of an unexplained death in Scotland, the circumstances are reported to the Crown Office and fully investigated. The circumstances of those suicides during that period

of time have all been reported to the Crown Office. Any decision on the instigation of a fatal accident inquiry is a matter for the Crown Office, and it is decided by the fatal investigation unit. We cannot determine whether that will take place.

The number of fatal accident inquiries is fairly well publicised. To my knowledge, there are few instances where those deaths have led to fatal accident inquiries, but that question is probably better asked of the Crown Office.

Russell Findlay: Does Police Scotland know how many of those 20 tragic deaths have been subject to a fatal accident inquiry?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: I do not have that information to hand.

11:00

Russell Findlay: In England and Wales, there are statutory inquests in such circumstances. My understanding is that none of the eight suicides that we spoke about has been the subject of a fatal accident inquiry and that, in some of those cases, there were potential contributory factors that related to workplace issues. I wonder whether there is a bit of a blind spot in respect of officers who have died in such circumstances. If there is no fatal accident inquiry, such issues could be missed and lessons not learned.

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: We can give the committee the assurance that, in every instance, there is a high level of reporting, which is confidential and recorded on our system, and we are looking for lessons to be learned.

You will appreciate that the complexities around officer suicides and deaths are very difficult. Regrettably, the control over whether a fatal accident inquiry takes place is entirely out of our hands.

Rona Mackay: Chief constable, you spoke about the trauma that is due to the nature of the job, and there is evidence of a rise in psychological disorders. I am not sure whether you heard David Threadgold’s evidence. He spoke about a lack of training and about training difficulties. The SPF’s submission to the committee suggests that

“a significant number of officers, including supervisors, do not feel like they have the appropriate skills, training or strategies to identify challenges in their or their colleagues mental health and wellbeing”.

What are your views on the research that has been done on that, given your comments about wanting to boost front-line wellbeing? What are your plans to address that?

Chief Constable Farrell: We have already talked about the existing specialist provision and

our investment in it. However, as you rightly point out, the responsibility will be with the people—sergeants, inspectors, colleagues or peers—who are closest to an individual, as they are likely to know what trauma the individual has been exposed to and see the effects on them. The your leadership matters programme goes some way to providing skills to first, second and other managers. Part of that involves understanding and recognising the effects on individuals when they are not able to operate in a policing environment, and providing support.

In addition, our people management programme gives supervisors skills and knowledge on issues such as health and wellbeing—how to embark on those difficult conversations to get a sense of what has happened to the individual and be able to help them in the best way. The programme offers practical skills relating to what services are available, how to embark on such conversations and how to best support a colleague to navigate their way and get the best possible treatment and support. We have put just under 1,000 supervisors through the people management training. That is an on-going programme.

It can be thought of in two parts. The your leadership matters programme is values based in relation to setting the right culture and behaviours in the organisation and providing people with the psychological safety to speak openly. The people management approach involves practical tools to support officers and colleagues.

However, we recognise and cannot deny—policing is not unique in this regard—that there is a stigma around mental health and psychological wellbeing. Giving our people the tools, courage and confidence to support a colleague and open up those conversations is key to dealing with that. As the research would say, that stigma is community wide.

The programme is on-going and is a practical approach to supporting and guiding our people, and to getting somebody the best possible help if colleagues feel that they are starting to suffer from psychological issues that might have been affected by the policing role.

Rona Mackay: I am sorry to press you but, on the SPF's specific evidence on training, are you saying that there is enough training on mental health and wellbeing?

Chief Constable Farrell: I am saying that we have embarked on two big programmes on leadership, support and wellbeing, and they are on-going. In relation to training, I try to provide the best possible tools to our people, and we give them access to those programmes.

In addition, DCC Speirs leads on our work relating to the your safety matters campaign,

which is about giving people the skills and equipment to keep themselves safe. We look at data on where officers are injured or assaulted, and we look at the trends. What are the circumstances in which our people find themselves in danger and on the receiving end of violence?

In recent times, we have noted that the number of assaults on officers by under-18s is on the increase. Our assessment of that is that, when officers step into the operational space of supporting vulnerable people, who are often children, they are doing the right thing. If the kids are missing, we return them, and there can be assaults when that happens. There has also been a rise in the number of incidents involving weapons and bladed articles, as well as other violent incidents.

All of that needs a response, and the your safety matters campaign is the operational and practical application of that response. It is about equipping our people with the best skills to deal with conflict or violence, including situations when they face somebody who is armed.

I will bring in DCC Speirs to provide a bit more detail on that.

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: The three-year programme is about reducing the impact of assaults and improving safety and wellbeing. A big part of that involves focusing on where and when assaults take place. Regrettably, the number of assaults on our officers has not really reduced over the past three years. However, the severity of a large number of those assaults has reduced.

On the practical side, the approach has enabled us, in the past 18 months, to roll out an enhanced officer safety training programme. In the past, officers would have given up a proportion of a day for that training, but now they are committed to two days of training annually. In that environment, we are trying to equip them as best we can. I lead on that work, and every part of the force is focused on learning from it.

Rona Mackay: How is that work evaluated? How do you respond to the SPF evidence that officers do not think that they have the appropriate skills to help their colleagues?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: You have heard today that we are trying to introduce a range of measures, but we recognise on a regular basis that there is more that we can do.

Another example is that we have refreshed our probationer programme for new recruits who come into the organisation. The training programme has a different duration, and the content is shifting, so we have a lot more trauma-informed practice. We

are looking at themes such as “act, don’t react”, which is about communication skills.

The simple answer to your question is that there is not one perfect training programme that will get us into the perfect place, but you have probably heard a bit about Lifelines and how we endeavour to use TRiM. There is a range of measures, which makes the landscape look complicated, but they all have a place and a fit. As an organisation, from a training perspective, we are open to looking at other things that we can do to invest in the wellbeing of our people.

The Convener: Ben Macpherson has a brief supplementary question.

Ben Macpherson: You mentioned the behaviour in the community of a small minority of under-18s towards officers. Anecdotally and more widely, it seems that that is a growing problem and concern. Could you provide some written feedback to the committee after the meeting? I do not want to detract from the issue of mental health, but—

Chief Constable Farrell: So that we are clear, can you repeat exactly what you require from us?

Ben Macpherson: After the meeting, could you provide information on the scale of the growing challenge of a small minority of under-18s and their, often violent, behaviour in communities, including towards police officers? We discussed that issue in the Parliament last week in relation to the use of off-road vehicles, for example.

Chief Constable Farrell: That is understood—thank you.

The Convener: Russell Findlay has a supplementary question. Please be very quick because we are limited for time, and I want every member to have a chance to come in.

Russell Findlay: On the issue of under-18s and assault, according to the SPA, it was decided that police cells are no longer appropriate places to keep under-18s. In a recent tragic case, the details of which I will not go into, someone was released from police custody and committed a serious crime. Do you feel that your hands are tied in respect of your inability to hold under-18s when they potentially pose a danger to officers and the public?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: One of our greatest challenges when dealing with under-18s is that, often, we do not arrest them on the police estate. We deal with a large proportion of young people who go missing and a large proportion of people who are vulnerable. The your safety matters work tells us that, often, we convey young people to a place of safety and do not constrain them in the same way as we would somebody who had been arrested using handcuffs, so a lot of the assaults take place in vehicles. We are trying

to understand that better and to take a broadly different approach. What is coming across to us is that the challenges are about handling vulnerability and mental health as much as they are about dealing with crime and routine operational policing matters.

Sharon Dowey: We have heard about the many benefits of body-worn video cameras, not least the change in behaviour of the public, which it is hoped will lead to a reduction in assaults on officers. Will you advise the committee of the reasons for the further delay on issuing those to officers?

Chief Constable Farrell: You are right that the benefits of body-worn video cameras are significant. We have now completed a complex procurement exercise. Ultimately, over the next few years, we will equip 17,000 officers with body-worn video cameras. The contract was awarded during the summer, and we are now working with the suppliers on the integration of the system.

You will be aware that part of the programme is to maximise the benefits through the already-established digital evidence sharing capability platform. We are part way through roll-out of that. DESC enables us to digitally upload evidence, which can then be shared with the Crown Office, the courts, the defence and the judiciary. Body-worn video cameras are part of that digital evidence, so we are now working with the suppliers to integrate the two systems. Once that integration is complete, we will roll out body-worn video cameras, which will follow the same programme and path as DESC.

We already have DESC in a number of areas; it started in Dundee, where it is being used very effectively. We are seeing really good and more timely outcomes through the judicial system. The use of body-worn video cameras will also start in Dundee.

On the timescale, I would make a request of the committee that I update it in due course, because a significant amount of work is still to be done. When I am more confident about the precise date, I will come back or write to the committee.

11:15

You highlighted some of the benefits, which include increased trust from the public, because people will be able to see what police interactions are like; operational effectiveness, as a result of the movement of data and evidence in the criminal justice system; and the safety and wellbeing of our people, which relates to the committee’s interest today. Interactions are captured, and where we see any criminality or assaults on police officers, we are able to provide the evidence to the courts in a timely and effective way.

Another big advantage of body-worn video cameras is that they enable us to share images and films with partners, such as those in child protection or in domestic abuse support services. In those cases, a picture speaks a thousand words, and being able to share images with partners so that they can make good risk assessments and take action to protect vulnerable people has huge benefits. I am very familiar with that.

Sharon Dowey: Given the benefits of body-worn video cameras, I would hope that it would be the number 1 focus so that there are no further delays in rolling them out.

Chief Constable Farrell: There is almost no greater priority for us than rolling them out. No one wants the roll-out of body-worn video cameras more than I do, because I see the benefits of doing so. However, it is a national roll-out, so compatibility and how they will feature in the broader criminal justice system are significant issues. Putting cameras on officers' shoulders is straightforward; we need to ensure that the capability is national and that evidence from them is able to feed into the criminal justice system.

Sharon Dowey: You said that you would issue 17,000 officers with body-worn video cameras, but we know that, at the moment, police numbers are at their lowest level since 2007. Unfortunately, I do not think that you have 17,000 officers to give them to. What are your views on the current staffing levels and the impact of that on police officers' mental health? What staffing levels do you think would be sufficient?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: As of today, the number of police officers is 16,467. In simplistic terms, we are half an intake away from achieving our goal of having 16,600 officers in our establishment. This year alone, we will have trained and recruited more than 1,300 officers, which is more than we have done in any year since Police Scotland was established. In the current financial year, we will achieve our aim of having 16,600 officers in our establishment, which is positive.

One of our bigger challenges is managing some of the abstractions that we have as a consequence of the different tasks that our officers undertake. The committee will have heard of modified officers and some of the challenges that that brings with it. Court abstraction is an enormous challenge for us. More than 500 officers are called daily to court, but only a small proportion of them have to give evidence.

We are working really hard to recruit to get up to 16,600 officers, and we have a strong pipeline of people across Scotland from all backgrounds and experiences who have a desire to join the police.

We are trying to provide them with the best possible training. The broader challenge is to ensure that we employ those officers and get them deployed on the front line, which presents some challenges for us.

Sharon Dowey: Did you say that we should have 16,600 officers?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: That is our budgeted establishment. We will arrive at that position during this financial year.

Sharon Dowey: That is a budgeted establishment. Is that the same as required levels? Do you think that you need more officers?

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: That is a difficult question to answer. We want to have the right balance in the workforce mix. We have a lot of functions that can be carried out by staff. You will have seen that we are recruiting civilians into investigator roles in our crime division, into our people function and into our complaints handling. As an organisation, we want to work hard to get the right blend and workforce mix between police officers and police staff, and do all that we can to ensure that they are doing the job that we want them to do.

Sharon Dowey: We have heard about the proportionate response to a crime, and about pilots in which minor crimes have not been investigated. What level of response do we need? Another reason why police officers have issues with their mental health is that they want to investigate every crime. The proportionate response to a crime is to investigate it. Would that number of officers allow you to investigate every crime to the required level?

Chief Constable Farrell: I will reinforce a couple of points in response to your question. It is really important that I make clear that we have a workforce of 22,000 people. I know that some of our police staff do not always feel included in the organisation. I have gone out of my way to talk about having 22,000 people and what those 22,000 people can do.

To reinforce DCC Speirs's point, officer numbers are really important, but the capacity to investigate crime, to keep the people of Scotland safe and to support victims is an issue of great focus for me and the whole executive. The demands made by the criminal justice system form one of the largest elements that saps away the capacity of policing in Scotland. Going to court takes away 500 officers a day; on many occasions, they will not give evidence.

Equally, if not more, important is the fact that, every time that we as professionals go to court but do not give evidence because the trial does not go ahead, there is also a victim. In order to maximise

the front line of policing and deliver all the things that we need to deliver, we, as leaders in a system, must make sure that the criminal justice system works more efficiently. The position does not sit well with me, and I have made that clear. I want those officers to be on the front line of policing, delivering for communities. Collectively, we need to make the criminal justice system work more efficiently. We cannot have victims coming to court over and over again, and we cannot have police officers going to court and not giving evidence.

The figure of 16,600 officers is important. The proportionate response to crime is important. When it comes to investigating an issue, we assess whether there are lines of inquiry. If there are no such lines, we bring that crime to a close at that point. That is not to say that we would not reopen it if we got further information or evidence. However, there is workforce capacity to consider. Our team and I have a focus on what is drawing capacity away, and on—to go back to the committee's purpose today—what is putting pressure on colleagues and how we alleviate those pressures. We have direct control over some of those issues, but some are system wide. Earlier, you discussed with the Scottish Police Federation witness our response on mental health. We have a role in that, but it is not our sole responsibility.

Sharon Dowey: Other stakeholders need to play their part.

The Convener: I will have to come in here, as we have about 10 minutes left and two members still to come in. I bring in Fulton MacGregor, to be followed by Pauline McNeill.

Fulton MacGregor: I do not know whether any of the witnesses caught the previous part of the session when I asked about thresholds for police officers' daily work, and at what point such a threshold would kick in for management to say that a police officer had done too much that day—that is, that they have had to deal with too many things that could be considered to be traumatic—or for a police officer to say that. I got some good answers on that. Where would the line be for you and your management staff in saying that you cannot expect officers to do any more until they have had time to decompress?

Chief Constable Farrell: I will respond by saying that everybody is different, are they not? Some of that is based on experience, individual resilience and quality of leadership, and some of it may be based on personal issues that are being experienced outside the workplace.

I am not able to give you a definitive description, but I hope that we have described to the committee today the skills and tools that enable our people to have the confidence to say, "I am

struggling here, I need some support," or for someone to recognise those signs in a colleague and be able to intervene.

We know that officers attend traumatic incidents, and officers would say to us that the top three traumatic incidents—you will not be surprised by these—are road traffic collisions, suicides and deaths involving babies or children. There is an obvious and absolute need for us to wrap around colleagues when they have attended such incidents and experienced those things.

However, people react in different ways. Some people need immediate support on the day, whereas some people go away and come back in due course. It is difficult for me to give you a precise description. It is about our ability to be emotionally aware of what our colleagues are facing. Some people would report that the effect of trauma has an impact over years—it can build up over time; it is not a single incident.

Deputy Chief Constable Speirs: You have heard a bit about TRiM post-incident procedures in the operational context. Those processes are designed to come in immediately behind such traumatic experiences. In my experience, having dealt with the types of incidents that the chief has described, we all react differently. Some of our staff would want to get home and be supported by their families but others would want to engage in our TRiM process, which is that trauma-informed support.

Over this year alone, more than 1,500 officers involved in almost 400 incidents have participated in TRiM processes. We are continually looking at how we can enhance that, but it is complex and there are many different circumstances. As I said, we are looking at what elements of training we can introduce way before officers face those types of circumstances.

Fulton MacGregor: You are right, and I was going to come to that issue. Experience tells us that people react differently, and many people will not respond to the traumatic event right away—that is not the normal reaction. People can react sometime in the future, and, depending on the nature of the incident, the reaction can be significant.

I have a rough idea on monitoring, but I know that it probably cannot be done like this. Is any work being done on all the processes that you have spoken about to record the number of incidents that officers attend? Are the three types of incidents that you mentioned, chief constable, being logged? Does someone then pull the person in and say, "You've actually had quite a tough year"? Is anything like that being done?

Chief Constable Farrell: That was part of the health and wellbeing action plan. At the beginning,

I talked about one of the themes being “undo”, which recognises that we cannot always avoid trauma for police officers. Therefore, the question is, how do we help undo that exposure at the point of exposure?

11:30

Since the EAP contract went live, we have provided 1,132 instances of support, from in-the-moment counselling to enhanced counselling and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing. We have that range of support because the new EAP recognises that some people need help in the moment, while others need something reflective and cumulative.

We are also seeing broader issues coming through, including staff and officers asking for support with family difficulties.

Fulton MacGregor: Do I have time for one more question?

The Convener: I will bring in Pauline McNeill because we need to finish soon.

Pauline McNeill: His Majesty’s chief inspector of constabulary, Craig Naylor, kicked off our interest in this subject when he gave compelling evidence. I am going to read it again, because it is important to establish where we started from. When I listened to him, I felt that he was describing a crisis in police mental health, which is why we are here asking questions today. Do you and you senior officers accept that there is such a crisis, chief constable?

Chief Constable Farrell: Psychological issues are having an increasing effect on police officers and staff. As I said, Police Scotland is not unique: it is part of a broader community. I hope that we have described our measures, tools and investment. We recognise the effect on our people and on our ability to deliver for communities.

We also recognise that a range or suite of approaches is required. As director Miller said, we are trying to move to prevention and to deal with issues in the here and now so that things do not build up to the point where someone is overwhelmed. I believe strongly that that approach should be wrapped up in quality leadership, recognition and emotional intelligence, along with some very practical measures. DCC Speirs spoke about learning from assaults on officers and staff, looking at the equipment that we are providing, adapting our training and learning lessons from the times when officers and staff have been exposed to particular incidents. We must learn from and build on that so that we are giving people the best information, advice and support to keep them safe.

Pauline McNeill: The Association of Scottish Police Superintendents said in its submission:

“There is some evidence to suggest retention rates, historically very low in Scotland, have begun to increase, with more officers leaving the service early in their career.”

It also points out that

“police officers joining the service today require to work until 60 years old to obtain a full pension”.

That requirement is quite different, because, up to this point, many police officers have had the benefit of retiring much younger. Is that a factor in your thinking? I presume that telling many police officers to work for longer will make it harder to retain them.

Chief Constable Farrell: When we look at the data on people leaving the organisation, it is no surprise to see that more than 70 per cent of them are retiring. A change in the pension regulations for police officers in Scotland means that we have seen people taking advantage of having 25 years’ service and being 50 years old, which has had an impact. Experienced people who have spent years in policing, have high levels of skill and can provide really professional, high-quality service are leaving the organisation. The change in the pension regulations has created that situation.

We also have a different workforce now. I do not think that everyone who joins policing thinks of it as a 30 or 35-year career and we need to accept that. Of course we want to retain people, but we lose some early in service because policing is not for them, partly because of some of the things that we have heard about today. That is unfortunate, but this is a really important job and someone who is double-crewed with a colleague wants to know that that person is completely committed and is not having doubts about whether the job is right for them. We would always tell new recruits that we want them to stay and we want to support them to be the best officers that they can be, but that if they recognise that the job is not for them—as some people do—it is too important for colleagues to have someone alongside them who is not completely committed.

Pauline McNeill: Katy Miller, you mentioned that the EAP includes EMDR. I have a strong interest in mental health. A lot of people think that cognitive behavioural therapy is too basic and that EMDR could be really important, because that programme is designed to deal with trauma. Will you confirm that officers can access EMDR through the EAP?

Katy Miller: Yes, they can.

Pauline McNeill: Based on what I have heard about the results, that is very positive.

Katy Miller: It is. EMDR is particularly recognised as being an effective form of support and treatment for post-traumatic stress.

The Convener: We are just on time. Chief constable, I know that you have to leave quickly, so we will bring this part of the session to a close. Thank you very much indeed for your evidence.

We will have a short suspension to allow for another changeover of witnesses.

11:36

Meeting suspended.

11:42

On resuming—

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener: Before we begin, I advise members that, earlier, I omitted to ask whether they agreed to take agenda item 3 in private. Do we now agree to do so?

Members indicated agreement.

Policing and Mental Health

11:43

The Convener: Our final panel consists of senior representatives of the Scottish Police Authority. I am pleased to welcome Fiona McQueen, vice-chair; Lynn Brown, chief executive; and Alasdair Hay, board member.

I intend to run allow around 60 minutes for this session. I invite Fiona McQueen to make a short opening statement.

Fiona McQueen (Scottish Police Authority): Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to attend this morning and to continue to contribute to the committee's very helpful scrutiny of wellbeing across policing.

I begin by offering apologies from our chair, Martyn Evans, for his absence today, which is due to a family bereavement. As vice-chair of SPA, and chair of its people committee, I will step in for Martyn. As the convener said, I am joined by my fellow board member Alasdair Hay, who sits on the people committee and chairs our policing and performance committee, and our accountable officer and chief executive, Lynn Brown.

Woven throughout the authority's governance and scrutiny of Police Scotland are matters of workforce wellbeing. Earlier, the committee heard from representatives of police staff associations

and Unison. Our chair holds regular meetings with representatives of those bodies. In addition, our people committee's oversight is greatly enhanced by the workforce voice, as those representatives attend the committee's meetings and are most helpful in giving us their perspective.

On the wider front, all aspects of the work of our committees—from approving a business case for the roll-out of new software to probing a rise or fall in demand or performance, or considering the time taken to investigate complaint and conduct matters—have a people perspective that they explore in detail.

In our submission we explained that the authority has centred its oversight on three specific areas: leadership commitment; assessing whether clear organisational plans are in place to address wellbeing requirements; and measuring progress on, overseeing and reviewing how staff wellbeing is measured, reported and acted upon.

From a leadership perspective, we are in no doubt about the chief constable's commitment to wellbeing. Secondly, we are confident that the wellbeing action plan draws together, in a comprehensive manner, the range of wellbeing activities and initiatives, both preventive and reactive, that are essential for the workforce of a large emergency service.

11:45

The Lifelines Scotland project is an example of learning from other services that we have brought in, and we have overseen Police Scotland bringing in, as a direct consequence of our holding an event on trauma that was successful in enabling learning about and reflection on what Police Scotland's workforce needs.

However, delivery is key. The third strand, which is about measuring progress and understanding impact, will flow from tracking the specific actionable and measurable steps that underpin the wellbeing action plan. Major steps have already been taken and, going forward, we will build on those foundations as part of our commitment to improving wellbeing. I expect to see progress being reported to our people committee.

My final point is on officer and staff suicides. I echo others' comments that every single suicide represents a devastating tragedy that is deeply felt. I hope that Police Scotland's submission and our input today will give the committee more assurance about our corporate awareness of the officers and staff who have died by suicide.

As part of our oversight of such matters, Martyn Evans has met Rose Fitzpatrick, the former deputy chief constable of Police Scotland who is now chair of the national suicide prevention leadership

group, which was established to champion and drive suicide prevention measures in Scotland.

Separately, he met Sergeant Laura Gibson of Police Scotland, who published a research report for the Churchill Fellowship on wellbeing and resilience in law enforcement. Sergeant Gibson's research focuses on the concept of police officer resilience and explores US police service training programmes on providing officers with the skills required to cope with the demands of their roles. We expect to see evidence of that work being integrated into Police Scotland's response to wellbeing. In addition, it should ensure that safe systems of work and workload for all officers and staff are built into the revised model of policing that it is developing.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to make an opening statement. My colleagues and I will be pleased to take any questions.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That is very helpful.

I will kick off our questioning by picking up on a point that you made early in your opening remarks. It is about your work to ensure that clear plans will be in place at Police Scotland, one of which will be the wellbeing action plan. I am interested in hearing a little more about what that will involve.

I would also like to raise a point that I raised with the chief constable, and which David Threadgold also mentioned. Police officers feel that there is a disconnect from their immediate line managers, which can potentially impact on their wellbeing and on opportunities for a preventative approach to work as it could do. Do you intend to scrutinise that aspect in the context of how Police Scotland is delivering such plans, particularly with regard to mental wellbeing?

Fiona McQueen: Very much so, convener. We are beginning to tie down a number of aspects with Police Scotland, which are about measurement.

As I said in my opening remarks, representatives of the Scottish Police Federation, ASPS, Unison and Unite attend our people committee's meetings, and hearing their voice is incredibly helpful. When we are overseeing what happens within Police Scotland, the staff organisations give us their perspective on whether they agree with what is being said and, perhaps more importantly, on what could work or make things better. We could look at indicators, but we are having them refined so that we can measure whether the work that has been implemented is having the desired effect.

For example, if we are saying that debriefing is happening and that services are available through

Lifelines, we would expect those to have an impact on officer and staff wellbeing, so we might ask where the evidence is.

On matters such as sickness absence, we are not always looking at a reduction. This morning, we have heard about the culture, and it is important that people feel confident to come forward, particularly in a policing environment where the culture has perhaps been to say, "Yes, I'm okay. I don't need to come forward or be off sick."

We will be looking at sickness absence and the range of that. We are not going to be looking at the average across 22,000 staff. We have had some indications from officers who have left the service that a low sickness absence rate can also be a red flag, if it means that people are afraid to be off sick. Therefore, we will look at the range of sickness absence right across individual specialty areas, as well as the average rate.

We will also look at the uptake of the employee assistance programme. In the first instance, we would certainly expect to see more uptake. We cannot continue to see increase on increase on increase without being alerted to the fact that something is wrong, but overall, we want to see an increase in the uptake of the employee assistance programme. In the staff survey, we will want to see evidence, year on year, including in the pulse surveys, that things are improving, and we need to learn from ill health retirements and exit surveys.

Those are examples of where we would look to see evidence from Police Scotland that what it is doing is making a positive difference to the workforce.

The Convener: I want to come in on that. It is good to hear about the importance of measurement, as you said. I suppose that a lot of that is around the delivery of wellbeing responses and approaches. However, the example that I spoke about earlier was perhaps more of an operational matter.

Fiona McQueen: I am sorry, convener. The officer to staff ratio is also important, and that will also feature. Again, we need to go into more granular detail with Police Scotland, because, at the high level, the officer to staff ratio might look as though it is acceptable, but, when we look across the country, we might find that there is a very high ratio that is unmanageable for some officers. We are looking at that and at refining how much we take from that figure. The quality of that relationship, how it moves and how teams are grouped together also matter, so it is more than a straightforward number; we need to look beyond the numbers to ensure that the quality of that relationship and the team building are what we need.

Fulton MacGregor: Good morning. We are hearing, and there are indications, that staff absences because of psychological disorders are rising. Do you have any idea what the reason for that is? Has the nature of policing changed in recent years?

Fiona McQueen: Our role as an oversight body means that we have to oversee that. There have been some changes in society, but I will hand over to my colleague Alasdair Hay, who chairs the policing performance committee.

Alasdair Hay (Scottish Police Authority): One of the things that came across as I listened to the evidence that was given earlier by the trade unions and statutory staff bodies and by the chief constable was the importance of culture. We recognise—I myself have more than 40 years' service in the emergency services—the change in culture, in that people are now prepared to come forward and say that they have issues with their mental health, and I really welcome that.

When we reflect on the fact that one in four people in society will have an issue with their mental health at some point in their lives, it should not surprise us that people in the police service might experience issues at different points, especially given some of the unique aspects of the job. Previously, the culture was that people would not speak or be open about these things. However, the fact that we are seeing an increase is concerning—absolutely—and there should be no complacency about that.

In some ways, the increase should also be welcomed, because, if we know where we are and we can understand what people are experiencing, we can really begin to bring them the right help. Those trends and the causes of sickness absence in Police Scotland are absolutely considered by the Scottish Police Authority performance committee.

Fulton MacGregor: I ran out of time to ask the previous two panels of witnesses about that, but I ask because I wonder whether the types of offences that police officers are dealing with are changing. Are those offences potentially more traumatic and, from your oversight perspective, is it the case that Police Scotland does not have the resources or the expertise yet to deal with that?

I will give the example of the internet, which is probably an obvious one. You said that you had been a police officer for 40 years—or you worked in emergency services for 40 years—so you will have seen a big change in that area of internet offences and online crimes. To go back to the initial question, I guess that I am asking whether part of the reason for the increase in psychological disorders is that the nature of policing is changing. Does Police Scotland have the ability and

expertise to deal with that, or is it playing catch up?

Alasdair Hay: I was not a police officer—

Fulton MacGregor: I am sorry. I quickly changed what I said because I knew that.

Alasdair Hay: I will reflect on the chief constable's evidence. We have seen an increase in psychological disorders in society, so society is changing, and, if society changes, the nature of policing changes with it. That will certainly have an impact, and that area could and should be explored more. Police Scotland has a focus on that at the moment.

However, the main point that I want to get across is that it is very concerning that people have psychological disorders and that it is an increasing trend in the performance statistics that we are looking at, so we need to get an insight and an understanding. However, I also welcome the fact that people are now prepared to come forward and begin to speak about these things, because that gives us a real opportunity to make a difference and to help people in a timely fashion.

Russell Findlay: Good morning. Suicide is, of course, a very sensitive subject and extremely complex, and I am fully aware of the Samaritan guidelines that you refer to in your submission. However, when I first asked the SPA about police suicides in May 2022 in this very committee, there was not even any process for recording the numbers. As of today, we know that 20 officers have lost their lives. Alasdair Hay, you have already referred to the culture changing, but that committee meeting was only two years ago. With hindsight, could the SPA have done more sooner?

Fiona McQueen: There is always room for improvement, and it is important that we learn, reflect and move things forward. The operational independence of the chief constable and the SPA's oversight are never blurred, but I think that the SPA's people committee is getting clearer about our requirement of Police Scotland to demonstrate what it has looked at and reviewed. There is no doubt that learning from not just suicide, but ill-health retirement or other feedback from staff is incredibly important in our process of gathering assurance and evidence that there are safeguards for the workforce in Police Scotland.

We can always improve on what we are doing and how we are learning and moving forward. Therefore, we need to pay attention to the more granular level of information that we have about mental ill-health and distress in the workforce.

Russell Findlay: The SPA also said that it had asked Police Scotland whether work-related matters were potentially a contributing factor in relation to any of the deaths that were known

about and that it was satisfied with Police Scotland's response, which is that they were not a factor. However, the families of officers who died tell me that those very much were a contributing factor. In the light of that, will the SPA look at the matter again? I ask not least because it looks as though there has not been a fatal accident inquiry for any of those tragic deaths.

12:00

Fiona McQueen: As the chief constable and DCC Speirs have said, the fatal accident inquiry is a matter for the Crown. The discussions that I have had with Katy Miller, which I am satisfied will move forward, are about that whole learning piece.

It is important to learn how distress in the job is a contributory factor in suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder or feelings about traumatic events that officers and staff have. We have asked Police Scotland to learn from those tragic deaths in a sensitive and appropriate manner and by reaching out to families. That reaching out is not always welcome, but we need to find a way to do it in a sensitive and professional manner.

Russell Findlay: The chief constable has just told us about a rise in the number of assaults on Police Scotland officers by under-18s. Just last year, the SPA made a ruling that police cells were

"not an appropriate setting and not in the interests of the child",

with the definition of "child" being a person under the age of 18.

Does that fairly profound and far-reaching position that the SPA arrived at have some bearing on the uptick in assaults on police officers by under-18s?

Fiona McQueen: The pronouncement about where children are kept in custody came from a human rights-based approach to policing. It came from a conference of wider stakeholders—Police Scotland and the authority—where it was genuinely recognised that the most appropriate place for under-18s is a secure residential placement. We do not yet have the data on that, but the chief constable will be looking at it, because she has given that commitment about what is happening with under-18s.

The SPA chair has asked committee chairs to have three priorities for their committees. One of the priorities that I have chosen, with the support of my people committee colleagues, is a reduction in officer assaults, because we see that as absolutely critical to the safety and welfare of the workforce. We can take what you said into account when we look at stratifying where the assaults are happening—which Police Scotland

has a good knowledge of—and at the assaults by under-18s.

Russell Findlay: I mentioned that particular ruling because it was made by non-elected individuals. I do not know whether any communication was made to the committee or to Parliament more generally about that decision.

Fiona McQueen: I would not necessarily describe it as a ruling. We could come back to the committee with a broader outline of the timeline of the dialogue that we have had and the decisions that have been taken about how to go forward.

Russell Findlay: Police Scotland remains the only police force in the UK without body-worn cameras, and we have heard that their introduction has been delayed yet again. Does the SPA take any responsibility for that failure?

Fiona McQueen: We have an oversight responsibility. With regard to challenging plans that come forward, once we do a lessons-learned exercise about the timeline of when it was hoped that body-worn video would be in place, compared with when it was actually in place, there will probably be learning to take from that.

The chief executive or Alasdair Hay might want to say more about that.

Lynn Brown (Scottish Police Authority): The authority and the resources committee have been really clear about that and have pushed for body-worn video. A few years ago, there was an assumption within policing that the authority was averse to technology, based on its experiences with the cyberkiosks. The authority made it clear that that was not the case and that, where there was public acceptance of technology being used to promote trust and confidence in policing, it should be pursued.

Two things have happened with that. The first is the use of technology in child sexual abuse cases, for officers who have to look at the evidence. Technology has helped them to reduce, from days to hours, the time that they have to spend doing that.

The second area is body-worn video, which the chair set out as a priority for him. We have been clear in public that body-worn video has to be delivered. My view is that a delay from September to March is not unacceptable because, for years and years, we have not had that technology.

In the past, the explanation has been given, quite rightly, that eight legacy forces had to come together and sort out other systems before they could turn their attention to body-worn video. The authority is clear that it has to be delivered and it is keeping the public focus on that through the committees.

Russell Findlay: To come back to that point, it is not just a delay from September to March—it has been a delay of more than 10 years. We have the only police force in the United Kingdom without body-worn cameras.

At some point, somebody from the police put a figure of £25 million on the cost, against an annual policing spend of £1.6 billion. The delay seems unacceptable. It was only when the chief constable came to this committee for the first time that we discovered that eight separate computer systems from the legacy forces were still operating. The SPA seems to have completely taken its eye off the ball. Where Police Scotland's management has failed, surely it is the SPA's job to ensure that Police Scotland gets it right.

Alasdair Hay: In the past three years, one of the resources committee's biggest focuses has been the delivery of body-worn video. It is a complex procurement process, which has been successfully conducted. It also has strong interdependencies with other projects within an overall programme. Sometimes, the interdependencies have not been fully recognised and taken into account.

We are pressing Police Scotland on programme management, on which it is already strong but is getting stronger. In the case of body-worn video, one of the challenges is network connectivity and the relationship with DESC, to ensure that all the timelines coincide.

I absolutely accept that we have an oversight responsibility. We will challenge those matters and continually press not only for delivery but for improvements in the approach, so that we do not get into those types of situations in the future.

The Convener: Ben Macpherson has a short supplementary question.

Ben Macpherson: I will follow the previous line of questioning. We are all aware of the difficulties with the i6 programme and the continued need for improvement in the overall infrastructure of Police Scotland's IT systems. Will the roll-out of body-worn cameras be future proofed for further IT enhancement in the service?

Alasdair Hay: It is difficult not to reflect on the past, because Police Scotland deserves a huge amount of credit for bringing together the eight legacy forces and the various systems that existed, while supporting and enabling delivery of front-line policing in all the areas.

Ben Macpherson: Let us remember that there was also a significant cost saving.

Alasdair Hay: Absolutely. The cost saving meant that £2 billion was returned to the public purse and could be spent on other priorities across Scotland. The arguments are there, but the

challenge was not insignificant and Police Scotland deserves for credit for what it has achieved.

Once a single system is in place, some of the problems will not be faced in the future. When it comes to future proofing, it helps that we are dealing with one system and one set of priorities. Nobody can guarantee that there will be no challenges in the future, but I believe that there will be fewer risks once we have a single effective functioning organisation that has the proper management infrastructure, systems and technology in place.

Ben Macpherson: I am just checking that the roll-out of body-worn cameras will last if and when there is a change to the software that is used at national level. Are we procuring technology that is going to last and be cohesive and coherent?

Alasdair Hay: We look forward and include appropriate upgrades in the initial procurement processes. As systems come towards the end of their life it is necessary, at the right point in time, to bring forward the next procurement process in order to keep the systems alive. We have had such conversations in our various committees—specifically, in the resources committee.

Rona Mackay: Good afternoon.

I will go back to mental wellbeing among officers. I will not repeat my questions to the other two panels of witnesses, which related to training—or lack of training, according to the SPF. Are you satisfied that there is enough training? Supervisors and officers say that they do not have the appropriate skills to detect when there is a problem with a colleague.

Fiona McQueen: I have no doubt that the evidence that we are getting at our people committee is that improvements need to be made. There is no question about that and we are making progress. A couple of weeks ago, we had a people committee meeting at which we talked about the lack of training and what is needed. At our next meeting, I will get a plan that demonstrates how we can catch up on some of the training that has been delayed and on what we are doing proactively about training for mental health and wellbeing.

The issue is wider. You heard from both the previous panels that there is a need to know and understand that one person in a team being quiet and another being rowdy could mean that both of them are struggling equally. We have heard that some people are just like machines—they can go on and on—and we have heard about others who might go to a child's death and who have a child who is the same age.

A high level of skill is needed in managing the workforce on top of knowing and understanding other leadership behaviours that are needed to engage with the workforce and to manage and build the team. It is a highly skilled job. There is more to be done. I expect, from Police Scotland, evidence not just that training has been carried out—it is not, as David Threadgold would say, a tick-box exercise—but of improvement for the whole workforce.

Rona Mackay: Will that continue to be monitored?

Fiona McQueen: Yes—very closely.

Rona Mackay: I have a question about staffing levels. There are reports that 945 officers are eligible to retire before next summer. It is important to say that Police Scotland plans for the highest number of recruits since its inception in 2013. You can confirm whether that is true. With that in mind, are you concerned about the immediate staffing levels? Is it on your radar that there could be a problem?

Fiona McQueen: Looking at where we are is always on the risk register. Obviously, people need to give a number of months' notice for retirement. They do not necessarily give a year's notice—it could be three months—so retirements can happen quickly for all workforces. However, it takes two years for a probationer to complete their training in Police Scotland. Therefore, bringing people in, training them and getting them ready and fit for purpose in time for people leaving—they might not leave—is always a balance to be struck.

That is most certainly being kept in mind. We had a first iteration of new reporting at our previous committee meeting: the papers are available. That reporting shows what I would call a dashboard, and it shows with much greater clarity the number of leavers, why they are leaving and the number of probationers who are coming in.

You might be interested to know that, for the first time in Police Scotland's history, we have a non-residential group of probationers coming in. Until now, training has always been residential. However, to provide a future focus on how we widen our access to probationer training, a non-residential programme is going on at Jackton.

Rona Mackay: When you talk about residential training, are you talking about Tulliallan?

Fiona McQueen: Yes.

Rona Mackay: So the training is not all done there, now.

Fiona McQueen: The non-residential training programme is a toe in the water. It is the first time that it has been tried. It is partly to try to increase numbers, but it is mainly, from an equality and

diversity point of view, about determining how we support people who cannot go to Tulliallan for the residential programme and can manage training from home. It clearly needs to be closely evaluated.

The people committee is overseeing a number of factors to make sure that we have the right size of workforce.

12:15

The Convener: I am particularly interested in leadership training. You spoke about managing the workforce. There is clearly a leadership role in that. We also spoke earlier about the amalgamation of eight forces into one. There was a cost-cutting exercise in that. Was some of the training that was previously delivered across forces interrupted or withdrawn as part of the amalgamation and was some of it leadership training? I might be wrong, but I have been curious about that, over the while. I am interested to hear a wee bit more about leadership training, particularly in the context of mental health and wellbeing, and in checking in on how that training is being delivered and is bearing out. It is almost about whether there is a quality assurance process around training.

Fiona McQueen: I ask my colleagues to come in and help me.

We currently use the your leadership matters programme, which is an online programme with some in-person elements. Some of the feedback that we have had from the federation is that more needs to be done in person. We expect Police Scotland to evaluate the programme—which is being evaluated positively. A significant number of officers have gone through it.

Lynn Brown: I am not sure whether committee members were in post when there was a report from Gill Imery, the previous HM chief inspector of constabulary in Scotland, on training, particularly at senior levels such as superintendent—the area that would be covered by the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents. Her conclusion was that that had been neglected in the set-up of Police Scotland. There are reasons why that was the case, which Police Scotland set out at the time. There was recognition of that. The your leadership matters programme was introduced in response to that report. There was definitely a gap, which Police Scotland is trying to address.

The Convener: Has there been any evaluation of the your leadership matters programme or are there plans to do that?

Fiona McQueen: The people committee receives on-going reports on evaluation of the programme. On the whole, the evaluation is

positive, but there has been advice from the Scottish Police Federation that a bit more training could be done in person.

The Convener: I am sorry—I interrupted.

Alasdair Hay: I do not have much to add. We understand that the focus of the your leadership matters programme is moving down to the first-line supervisory management level in the organisation—sergeants and inspectors—having started with the most senior officers. We have heard evidence about the importance of front-line managers having the right skills to support their staff in every way, particularly with mental health and wellbeing. I welcome the support that is being given to those front-line managers in the organisation.

It was noted at the previous policing performance committee meeting that the employee assistance programme provides a 24/7 support and advice helpline for line managers. If line managers have any specific and particularly complex people-related issues, they have online support. That is not the only tool, but we welcome it as an additional tool, alongside the training that they are getting.

Sharon Dowe: I will come back to staffing levels. We already know that policing levels are at their lowest since 2007. We heard from witnesses on the previous panel about the challenges that they currently face. We heard from DCC Alan Speirs that staffing levels are budgeted at 16,600 officers, which is Police Scotland's target. What levels do you see as being sufficient, and do you have any concerns about the upcoming budget?

Fiona McQueen: As the chief constable said, the number is 22,000. When you need a warranted officer, you need a warranted officer: there is no question about that.

However, the whole workforce is important. Tomorrow, we will have a meeting of the oversight group on the revised model of policing, which will come to the authority's meeting at the end of the month. That will take into account the changes in policing that the chief is looking for—more people on the front line—and changes to the roles and responsibilities of police staff, to see what they can do more effectively and efficiently than would be the case using a warranted officer.

Once that is in place—I will hand over to Alasdair Hay in a moment to talk about the policing performance committee—there will be something to do on how we triangulate right across our scrutiny and oversight to make sure that the workforce is sufficient. Part of that is about workforce wellbeing—attendance figures and attrition rates—so that we can make sure that we have a meaningful and stretching job for officers

and staff, and so that they thrive, as the chief would say, in the workplace.

However, this is also about how we meet public demand and make sure that the performance of Police Scotland is where it should be. I ask Alasdair Hay to talk about the performance measures that are looked at.

Alasdair Hay: Ultimately, it is for the chief constable to determine how many officers she needs in order to meet her statutory responsibilities and other expectations. She has clearly articulated what her priorities are. Police Scotland then has to determine how many officers, and with what skills, are required to deliver that. The organisation is currently working through that, as my colleague Fiona McQueen has just said, in its revised model of policing. At the same time, it is reviewing the model of local policing in Scotland. Work is therefore in process to determine how many warranted officers and other staff should be in that workforce of 22,000, and what their skills mix should be, to deliver a sustainable model of policing.

Once the chief constable has made that professional determination, we need to hold her to account for that, and to make sure that the intended outcomes are delivered. An outcomes-focused performance framework is in place. The chief constable spoke about presenting a vision for the service: she said that a three-year action plan will be put in place. An outcomes-focused performance framework will also be put in place for that.

In those performance frameworks, we will gather data, listen to narrative and look for insights from a cross-section of staff, their representatives, communities, local government and other stakeholders in order to provide us with an evidence base that demonstrates that the stated and intended outcomes are being achieved. We will gather that evidence in a very structured way. That is the value and the strong role of the Scottish Police Authority in relation to police numbers.

Fiona McQueen: You asked about the budget. Given that the proportion of the budget for the workforce is so large, that budget is very important. I wonder whether our accountable officer, the chief executive, could say something.

Sharon Dowe: Can you clarify something? You talked about warranted officers. Are they people who are basically on the front line—out in the street?

Fiona McQueen: A warranted officer is a police officer, rather than police staff.

Lynn Brown: They are called that because they have a warrant card.

Alasdair Hay: They have the powers of a constable.

Lynn Brown: Your question was about the budget for next year. We are formulating, with Police Scotland, our ask of the Government for the budget. That will be based on the three-year business plan. That was asked for by this committee last year when it looked at the budget. It was Mr Swinney, I think, who asked whether the model of policing was sufficient for society, given the level of crime and so on, and about how we wanted it to work and the role of technology. That is what the three-year business plan is about. It is based on that ask from the committee last year, and we will feed it into our ask of the Scottish Government.

On financial parameters, we will set out options against flat cash, depending on what that looks like. Flat cash is the current view; nothing more has been indicated on that. I understand, convener, that the committee will look at that in a bit more detail. We are formulating our ask at the moment.

Sharon Dowey: Okay. I have one more quick question, which goes back to training. It is about the number of courses and how much focus there is on training. We heard from the first panel about a lack of training on human resources issues—that people were not always trained to the right standard. The SPF said that 3,500 officers were not safety trained. Does that number refer to warranted officers, who should be out on the streets?

Fiona McQueen: We receive reports at our people committee. Officer safety training is refreshed; officers have training. Excellent health and safety data shows that maintaining that level of training improves officer safety. I have asked that information about when the backlog will be resolved be brought to the next meeting of that committee. It is not that the officers have never been trained; it is that they have not had refresher training, and it is important that they have that for their protection. Not all the people will be front facing. Some, as the chief constable talked about, will be in the middle office, but we are looking for the number to be reduced. It will always be the case that a small number of officers are out of training because of sickness absence or annual leave, for example. However, that number is not acceptable to us, and we expect it to be significantly reduced.

Sharon Dowey: You are getting information on that.

Fiona McQueen: Yes. We are actively monitoring the matter.

Pauline McNeill: Good morning. My question is similar to Sharon Dowey's. I do not recall Police

Scotland using the phrase “warranted officer” in the past. An officer is, by definition, warranted. Is that not more an English term?

Fiona McQueen: No—it is a police term. The previous chief constable, Sir Iain Livingstone, used to talk about the “warrant of a constable”. I apologise for confusing you with my shorthand for police officers versus police staff. Civilian staff working in custody or in the C3 division are not “warranted”.

Pauline McNeill: I just wondered why we are now adopting that phrase. By definition, an officer has a warrant card. You will tell me if I am barking up the wrong tree. Is the definition being made because, through the reorganisation plan, you will introduce police community support officers—as England has done and which we do not have in Scotland—who do not have warrant cards?

Fiona McQueen: No.

Pauline McNeill: I am just a bit concerned that maybe Police Scotland is not being up front with us. Surely, if that is the plan, there should be full transparency.

Fiona McQueen: There would absolutely be full transparency. I joined the Scottish Police Authority in April 2021 and have heard the term being used. It is a way to distinguish the office of constable from police staff. There are subtle but distinct differences in conditions and regulations. You heard this morning from David Malcolm that police staff cannot be required—although they may feel morally obliged—to do overtime. I apologise for any confusion, but there is no question of the term being used for that reason. It is used to make a distinction. There are—or there ought to be—16,600 warranted officers. There is no question of anything untoward or underhand about it.

Pauline McNeill: An advert that was put out a month ago caused controversy because it said that civilians would be employed on the same salary as a police officer to do some of the jobs that police officers do. To my knowledge, we have not had such a development. I did not understand why you would want to do that. Why would you want to take the role of police officers who, by and large, are complaining about a lack of resource on the front line? I am confused by it.

12:30

Fiona McQueen: The chief constable will talk about ensuring that only warranted police officers are doing what a police officer can do.

Where things could perhaps be more efficient or effective, because police officers tend—I apologise, Ms McNeill, because “police officer” is probably a good way to describe it—

Pauline McNeill: You do not need to apologise. I am just being honest. I am unsure about the reason for the change in terminology. The background is that there was a subtle change to say that we will not have police officers doing the job that they used to do.

Fiona McQueen: No—

Pauline McNeill: I do not think it is just me who is concerned about that; I think that the federation was also concerned. Do you know what I am talking about?

Fiona McQueen: I know completely what you are talking about. Police officers get moved around, so where we can have consistency with a member of civilian police staff being able to do something, then they keep the expertise and there is a career path with that. Trade unions are very supportive of that. It is about ensuring that only police officers are deployed to do work that only a police officer can do.

The Convener: We have a wee bit of time left, so I will come in with a couple of questions. The first is about overtime, which has been raised with other witnesses. It is fair to say that overtime is a not just a significant financial cost for Police Scotland, there is a wellbeing cost for police officers, with rest days being cancelled and overtime being required. We know that that is part of the nature of the role. Has the SPA been monitoring or looking at the impact of overtime?

Lynn Brown: I can speak to the finance aspect, and the committee has been looking at the wellbeing impact. Recently, a figure of about £30 million was quoted in the press for police overtime for 2023-24. The figure was roughly £28.7 million, so it is near enough to £30 million. We have a budget of around £25 million every year for overtime. It is required and it is recognised as a way of working for the police. Around this time last year, the financial challenge for 2023-24 became very apparent and there was a need to look at it. Police Scotland pulled back on the overtime—the spend would have been much more otherwise.

We have a standard budget every year for overtime, which includes core overtime, which is operational, and non-core overtime, which is for events. The need for overtime is recognised. I know that the SPA's people committee is looking at the impact of overtime on operational levels and wellbeing. I will pass over to Ms McQueen.

The Convener: Before Ms McQueen comes in, one of the earlier witnesses—I am not sure whether it was the chief constable—spoke about some of the work that has been done to pull the commitment arising from major events, such as football matches, parades, and so on, away from Police Scotland, to take a more risk-positive approach. I think that that was said in response to

a question from Ben Macpherson. Purely from a budget perspective, could more be done in and around that?

Lynn Brown: As background, the charges for football matches and so on are approved every year. The budget is set in March. Those charges are based on a formula that is used across the UK. Under the financial framework, charges for an event must be made on the basis of cost recovery; there cannot be a profit. We cannot get any surplus from events that need policing. Earlier in the meeting, the superintendent was saying that, where they are confident that the promoters or organisers of an event can deliver a safe event, police will pull back. The range of rates for events is based on cost recovery.

The Convener: Before I bring in Fiona McQueen, a couple of members have supplementary questions on the budgetary side of overtime.

Russell Findlay: On the basis of the financial situation that we are in, can Glasgow or Scottish policing afford the Commonwealth games?

Lynn Brown: I have no knowledge of what the policing costs for that would be. We have not been involved in the detail. My assumption is that a marginal cost or an additional cost would be refunded by the Commonwealth Games Federation.

The Convener: We could pick that up in our pre-budget scrutiny, if it would be helpful.

Ben Macpherson: How much engagement is there on scheduling? For example, in Edinburgh, when we have the August festivals, the additional pressure on the police service is obvious. If there are home games at Tynecastle or Easter Road against one of the big Glasgow clubs at the start of the football season, that has an added impact, and there will be a very big concert at Murrayfield during the festivals next year. Police Scotland have never said to me, an MSP who represents part of this city, that it has difficulties and is not able to meet that demand. It seems that there needs to be a logical approach to scheduling and considering the demands on the force.

Fiona McQueen: I do not know whether anything happens on that at the Scottish Police Authority's policing performance committee.

Alasdair Hay: Those are known knowns. The vast majority of those events happen in Edinburgh and other Scottish cities, although events such as festivals also happen in rural Scotland. Police Scotland knows in advance about the majority of those things and my understanding is that it can schedule its shift patterns and the number of officers who are on duty within certain margins to accommodate those issues. That highlights the

importance of effective strategic workforce planning and of having a co-ordinated approach to resourcing and making the best use of the resources that are available.

We certainly challenge Police Scotland on those issues and ask it to provide evidence that that is being done efficiently and effectively. It also ties in with the question of overtime. Police Scotland has to breathe in and breathe out, because although it can anticipate much of that demand, it also has a level of unanticipated demand by the very nature of being an emergency service. A reasonable amount of overtime helps—or deflects—the ability to breathe in and out in such situations.

I know that such conversations take place in Police Scotland, and those types of questions have been asked by our committees.

Ben Macpherson: Do those conversations take place with the other parties that are involved?

Lynn Brown: My understanding is that there is a Scottish Government events group. For example, the Scottish Government would have co-ordinated last year's road races in the cycling world championships with local authorities and policing.

Ben Macpherson: I have no doubt that that happens at that level with central Government, but I am asking more about private sector organisations with private interests.

Fiona McQueen: Could we come back to the committee to give a bit more information on that, convener?

I will bring in the chief executive in a moment on mental health and wellbeing in forensics. There are two sides to the overtime coin. To have the right number of people on duty, you might need to deploy overtime, which in itself might be exhausting. There are a number of factors. We have already heard from the chief constable about some of the inefficiencies in the justice system. Streamlining those could help to reduce the need for overtime. Having the right number of people in the workforce and getting probationers through so that we have enough police officers in post is part of it. That helps to reduce sickness absence and the need for overtime.

To answer the question, we look at that issue on the people committee. It is about balance. It is not about saying that we cannot have overtime because it is too expensive. As we have just heard, the police service needs surge capacity so that it has more people available for a particular weekend or week. That often involves overtime and rostering. Ideally, overtime should be as minimal as possible so that police officers can get their rostered break, refresh and come back to do the job that they are so passionate about.

I ask Lynn Brown to say something on that.

Lynn Brown: We have just talked about police officers and police staff. I know that the SPA would like the committee to understand forensics. Because of the nature of their work, scene examiners are regularly exposed to traumatic scenes. There used to be substantial levels of sickness in that area, and I would like to explain how forensic services have tackled that and continue to do so.

A comment was made earlier about the number of initiatives on wellbeing. There are a number of corporate initiatives that forensics can take part in and benefit from, and we have heard about them today. There is the employee assistance programme, the occupational health programme, TRiM and wellbeing champions, and there are particular initiatives for scene examiners. David Malcolm from Unison touched on that earlier. He mentioned the tasking unit, which he said helped with the wellbeing of forensics. Out of the 600 staff, around 100 are scene examiners. The unit also looks at shift patterns, and capability team managers have been put in place. They are now able to use the Police Scotland facility in Auchterarder for recovery. Forensic services are trying to understand short and long-term sickness much better and to act on that.

In addition, they are doing a psychological supervision project looking at the psychological impact of being a scene examiner to normalise support and reduce the stigma of asking for support. Ninety-three per cent of scene examiners have gone through a one-to-one meeting with an independent counsellor, which will be evaluated.

We want the committee to be aware of the actions that are being taken in that area.

The Convener: Thank you for that update on the very important body of experts that is deployed on a regular basis. We appreciate that helpful update.

That takes us slightly over time, so I thank you all for coming along and providing very helpful evidence.

12:43

Meeting continued in private until 13:18.

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