



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Tuesday, 26th May, 2026

PRESS RELEASE

Assurance review of conduct and discipline

A new report has raised concerns over the length of time it takes for conduct and disciplinary investigations involving Police Scotland officers and staff to conclude.

Inspectors from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland carried out a review to examine the 'fairness, transparency and effectiveness' of the conduct and discipline systems of Police Scotland and its governance body, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

The report said the multiple stages of assessment, investigation, reporting and review could see police officers remain under investigation for 'relatively minor matters' for a substantial duration.

In more complex cases, including those where an officer may be charged with a criminal offence, the conduct and disciplinary process had seen some officers remain suspended for several years.

It said the impact of these delays on both wellbeing and reduced operational capacity were considerable.

The report recommended Police Scotland should review the structure of its Professional Standards Department (PSD) to prevent delays in conduct investigations caused by excessive workloads.

It also recommended a system-wide review be undertaken to identify opportunities to fast-track any on-and-off duty criminal cases where the accused person is a police officer or member of police staff.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Craig Naylor, said: "Every day in Scotland, police officers and staff face unpredictable and often dangerous situations that test their judgement and patience.

"The vast majority perform their duties professionally and conduct themselves appropriately both on and off duty.

"These public servants deserve to have confidence in conduct and discipline processes that are fair, proportionate and prompt."

The HMICS report noted that at the end of September 2025, 92 police officers were suspended and a further 109 were subject to duty restrictions as a result of ongoing conduct and disciplinary investigations.

Wellbeing support for police officers and staff who were the subject of conduct and discipline processes was found to be inconsistent and perceived as inadequate, with some reporting severe mental health challenges including feeling suicidal.

Inspectors heard from a number of those subject to conduct or discipline processes that it had a significant impact on their mental health.

The HMICS report calls for Police Scotland to review its approach to wellbeing support for any officers and staff involved in conduct and disciplinary processes, and to ensure that support given is tailored to their individual needs.

It also recommended that in cases where an officer or member of police staff dies by suicide while under an ongoing investigation or had recently been under investigation, that this information is explicitly included in Police Scotland's report about the death to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

HMICS inspectors carrying out the detailed assurance review looked at areas ranging from leadership and training to officer and staff performance, police officer conduct, police staff discipline, wellbeing and whistleblowing.

While the review report praised the 'thorough and proportionate' investigations carried out by staff within Police Scotland's PSD, it expressed concerns about how policing in Scotland deals with allegations of wrongdoing involving its most senior officers.

Allegations of misconduct concerning senior officers – defined as those holding the rank of Assistant Chief Constable or above - must be referred to the SPA to carry out an initial assessment of any potential misconduct or other unsatisfactory behaviour.

However, the HMICS review found Police Scotland had failed to report all allegations of senior officer wrongdoing to the SPA, including particularly complaints that were made anonymously through the 'Integrity Line' reporting mechanism.

The report has called for Police Scotland to share all complaints of alleged wrongdoing involving senior officers to the SPA without exception, including complaints made anonymously.

The inspectors heard that when reports of senior officers' alleged wrongdoing were received by the SPA, they may bypass the complaints team – and that on occasion the SPA had sought advice from other senior officers within Police Scotland about how to progress concerns involving their peers.

It has advised the SPA to maintain clear records, detailing the receipt of every such complaint report it receives, and of the decisions it makes as a result.

The HMICS report also noted, as a key finding, that some officers and staff reported occasions where Police Scotland's senior leaders did not consistently demonstrate the expected standards of professional behaviour.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Craig Naylor, said: “Senior officers are entrusted with significant leadership responsibilities and are expected to act as role models for the organisation.

“They are required to maintain the Standard of Professional Behaviour at all times, demonstrating integrity, impartiality, professionalism and accountability in all aspects of their conduct.

“It is concerning that there is a belief in some of the workforce that some senior officers do not behave in line with these standards.”

The HMICS report made a total of 24 recommendations for improvement.

It praised the appointment of dedicated civilian investigators and Fair Play Advisors in discipline procedures, both of which add to improved impartiality and challenge in decision making.

However, it found that new officers and staff receive inconsistent training on key ethical and conduct expectations, and current performance appraisal processes are viewed as ineffective and not fit for purpose.

HMICS observed that when it came to whistleblowing there was a general lack of awareness within Police Scotland, with staff responsible for assessing potential whistleblowing disclosures receiving little or inadequate training.

The report said the absence of an independent prescribed body with investigative capability in Scotland for whistleblowing disclosures was “a critical gap”, and made a recommendation to the Scottish Government that they make it possible for the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) to take on that role.

Mr Naylor said: “Public interest in police conduct remains high, influenced in large parts by recent cases of serious misconduct within UK policing.

“The recommendations set out in our report provide a clear pathway to enhance professional standards and restore confidence in conduct and disciplinary arrangements.”

Ends

Notes

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) is established under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and has wide ranging powers to look into the ‘state, effectiveness and efficiency’ of both the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

It has a statutory duty to inquire into the arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA to meet their obligations in terms of best value and continuous improvement. If necessary, it can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SPA or Police Scotland as they consider appropriate. They also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on policing in Scotland.

Their approach is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.

Ends notes

NOTES TO EDITORS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland took the decision to temporarily pause the publication of its 'assurance review of police conduct and discipline' after requests from both the Chief Constable of Police Scotland and the Chief Executive of the Scottish Police Authority – who had asked for time to consider any potential implications for proceedings that are currently ongoing.

No changes were made to the review during this period while publication was paused – and the content remains exactly as it would have had it been published in March 2026.

The 'HMICS Assurance review of Conduct and Discipline' will be available to download at the HMICS website from 00.01hrs, Tuesday, 26th May 2026.

For any media enquiries please contact:

Jenny Morrison

HMICS Communications and Media

hmic@hmic.gov.scot

X: [@hmics](https://twitter.com/hmics)

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