



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26





HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

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).¹

We have 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, we can be directed by Scottish Ministers to look into anything relating to the SPA or Police Scotland as they consider appropriate. We also have an established role in providing professional advice and guidance on policing in Scotland.

Our approach is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.²

This annual report is produced under section 82(3) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and presented to Scottish Ministers for laying before the Scottish Parliament.

¹ Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, Chapter 11.

² HMICS, [Corporate plan 2025-28](#), 12 March 2025.



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Introduction by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland



State of policing 2025-26

Public service reform: from aspiration to action

The appointment of a Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform is a significant and welcome recognition that Scotland now requires an accelerated and sustained programme of reform across the public sector. The challenges facing public services are not new. More than a decade ago, the Christie Commission concluded that rising demand, fiscal constraint and persistent inequalities required a fundamental shift in how services are designed and delivered. Its central message remains as relevant today as it was in 2011: public services must focus relentlessly on prevention, partnership, empowerment and performance if they are

to remain sustainable. Christie argued that public bodies must work more closely together, reduce duplication, prioritise prevention and reform structures that drive inefficiency and demand rather than simply managing their consequences.

Scotland's public sector must move beyond discussing reform and into a period of decisive implementation. This is not solely a matter of reducing expenditure; it is about improving outcomes for citizens whilst ensuring that finite public resources are targeted where they can have the greatest impact. The prevention of harm should be the organising principle of public service delivery, whether addressing vulnerability, health inequalities, community safety, poor educational outcomes or social exclusion. Every pound invested in prevention reduces future demand for increasingly costly crisis intervention. This was the central proposition of the Christie Commission and remains perhaps the most important lesson for public service leaders today.



The reform of policing (and fire) in Scotland provides valuable lessons for the wider public sector. The creation of a single police service was one of the most significant public service reforms undertaken in Scotland in recent decades. While reform remains an ongoing journey, the publication of the [Best Value in policing - Joint Best Value audit of policing in Scotland](#) has highlighted a number of important benefits that have emerged from a national operating model. These include national leadership, improved governance, greater consistency of service provision, enhanced partnership working, and better access to specialist resources which would be difficult or impossible for individual local organisations to sustain independently. The audit found that policing in Scotland benefits from effective leadership and governance, demonstrates strong financial management and continues to show considerable strength in partnership working.

There are wider opportunities for learning here for Scottish Government, public bodies and local partners. Future reform should actively examine opportunities to reduce organisational duplication, streamline senior management structures, consolidate corporate functions where appropriate and ensure citizens have equitable access to specialist expertise regardless of geography. Public sector

structures should be designed around outcomes rather than institutional or geographic boundaries. The challenge is not whether organisations retain their individual identities but whether the citizen receives a seamless service - the notion of no wrong door is prevalent here and needs further exploration, especially around mental health, anti-social behaviour and community concerns.

The strongest evidence from policing reform suggests that shared leadership, common standards, integrated planning and collective accountability can improve resilience and enhance public value when implemented effectively.

At the same time, policing's experience demonstrates the importance of robust strategic workforce planning, medium-term financial planning and a clear long-term vision for service delivery. The Best Value audit recognised the need for greater alignment between strategic priorities, financial planning and workforce reform - a point that HMICS has been making for a number of years. These are challenges shared across the public sector. Public bodies must develop sustainable operating models that recognise demographic pressures, workforce constraints and changing public expectations. Reform cannot be an annual budgeting exercise; it must be anchored in



long-term strategic planning supported by credible investment decisions and measurable outcomes.

Technology will also play a pivotal role in the next phase of reform. Artificial intelligence, automation and emerging robotic technologies offer significant opportunities to improve productivity, enhance decision-making, reduce administrative burdens and strengthen preventative approaches. Police and law enforcement partners must also seek to exploit, with appropriate safeguards in place, advancements in operational technology such as remotely piloted aircraft systems (more commonly known as drones) and facial recognition, that help reduce the threats posed to the public from high risk sex offenders, organised crime groups, violent offenders and others whose activities cause significant harm to communities.

Used responsibly and with clear public messaging regarding safeguards and benefits to be achieved, these technologies can release skilled professionals from repetitive tasks, improve forecasting and risk assessment, and support earlier intervention with vulnerable individuals and communities. The challenge for public sector leaders is not whether to adopt these technologies, but how quickly they can do so safely,

ethically and effectively. The public sector should be ambitious in harnessing innovation to improve services whilst preserving public trust and accountability by explaining the use case for these new capabilities.

Policing's experience in managing major events provides a further example of the benefits that can arise from national capability and integrated service delivery. HMICS's recent review of preparations for the 2026 Commonwealth Games highlighted mature leadership structures, effective governance, strong partnership arrangements and the ability to deploy specialist resources across Scotland in support of a major international event. That capability reflects the advantages of a national service able to flex resources where required whilst maintaining local service delivery.



This is not a new capability. Scotland has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to deliver complex international policing operations, including Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, multiple visits by Presidents of the United States and other globally significant events. The ability to mobilise specialist assets, intelligence capabilities, public order resources and command structures at pace provides strong evidence of what can be achieved through coordinated national arrangements combined with effective local partnerships. The Commonwealth Games review reinforces those lessons and shows how reform can strengthen resilience whilst improving operational effectiveness.

The challenge now is to apply these lessons across the wider public sector. Scotland has no shortage of ambition, innovation or public service commitment. What is required is a collective determination to reform at greater pace and scale. The Christie Commission provided the blueprint. The current fiscal climate provides the imperative. The emergence of new technologies provides the opportunity. The task for public sector leaders is to seize that opportunity, find the funding and deliver services that are preventative, efficient, integrated and sustainable for future generations.

Modernising witness citations: a practical example of public service reform

During the year, HMICS worked jointly with HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the process used to cite prosecution witnesses to attend sheriff courts. While ostensibly a focused examination of a specific criminal justice process, the review identified issues that extend well beyond policing and prosecution, and which speak directly to the wider public service reform agenda or indeed failings in this regard. The inspection found a process that remains largely reliant on paper-based systems, second-class post and the personal service of citations by police officers - despite the trauma that this might cause. In a modern digital age, this approach is increasingly difficult to justify from either a service-user or value-for-money perspective. Approximately 398,000 witness citations were issued annually, with Police Scotland serving around 154,000 citations in a single year, creating a substantial and recurrent demand on frontline policing resources.



The inspection highlighted a significant opportunity to modernise service delivery through greater use of digital technology. The ability to cite witnesses electronically has existed in law for many years, yet, with limited exceptions, Scotland continues to rely on processes that have changed little over decades. We concluded that wider use of email and other digital communication methods would improve the experience of witnesses, reduce administrative burden, lower costs and release police officers to focus on core operational duties. In an environment where every public body faces financial constraints and increasing demand, such opportunities should be pursued with urgency. Modernisation of the citations process represents exactly the type of practical reform envisaged by the Christie Commission: reducing duplication, improving efficiency and redesigning services around the needs of the citizen rather than the convenience of institutions.

Importantly, this review also demonstrated the value of whole-system scrutiny. The inefficiencies identified were not the responsibility of any single organisation but arose from long-standing arrangements operating across policing, prosecution and the courts. Public services do not operate in isolation, and neither should reform. One of the

recurring lessons from HMICS inspections is that many of the greatest opportunities for improvement exist at organisational boundaries where responsibilities overlap, duplication occurs and accountability becomes fragmented. The citations review provides a compelling example of how independent scrutiny can identify opportunities to improve outcomes across an entire public service system rather than within one organisation alone.

The review also raises a broader point about scrutiny and accountability across the justice sector. While policing and prosecution are subject to established independent inspection arrangements, there remains no equivalent inspectorate providing routine independent scrutiny of the courts and tribunals system in Scotland. Given the interdependent nature of the justice system, there is merit in considering whether stronger arrangements for whole-system oversight could help identify barriers to reform, support more effective strategic planning and accelerate modernisation across organisational boundaries. The challenges identified in relation to witness citation cannot be viewed solely through the lens of policing or prosecution; they require collective ownership with collective solutions designed to put the citizen first in a trauma-informed manner.



More broadly, the inspection reinforces a central theme emerging from HMICS scrutiny during the year. Sustainable public service reform will not be achieved simply through budget reductions or organisational restructuring. It requires public bodies to challenge longstanding practices, embrace digital transformation, redesign services around users and make better use of technology to reduce avoidable demand. The findings from the citations review demonstrate that relatively small changes in process can produce significant gains in efficiency, improve the experience of citizens and release scarce resources to focus on activities that most directly contribute to public safety and the effective administration of justice. In that regard, the review serves as a practical example of how independent scrutiny does contribute to the wider reform of Scotland's public services.

Football violence and community impact

The publication of the Scottish FA's independent review into the disorder surrounding the Rangers v Celtic Scottish Cup quarter-final at Ibrox on 8 March 2026 should serve as a watershed moment for Scottish football. The report's conclusion that the events were a "near miss", arising from significant failures in planning, communication and matchday safety, is deeply concerning. While responsibility for

violent and disorderly behaviour rests unequivocally with those individuals who chose to engage in it, the findings also demonstrate that the risks associated with this fixture were not fully recognised, planned for or mitigated by all stakeholders involved. The scenes witnessed, including pitch incursions, assaults, the use of pyrotechnics and threats to public safety, were unacceptable and caused injuries to those involved. A situation that cannot continue to be tolerated.

There is a clear need for a more joined-up and intelligence-led approach to the management of high-risk football fixtures. Policing alone cannot be expected to shoulder the burden of controlling behaviour that originates from a small but persistent minority of supporters. In excess of 550 officers were deployed to police the game in March depriving communities of those police officers and increasing the cost of policing through overtime or other deferred costs. The increasing threat of violence and disorder, especially outside the ground, is likely to increase these numbers in future games, much of those will not be covered in the costs paid by the clubs to Police Scotland.



Clubs, governing bodies, local authorities and supporter groups must share responsibility with policing in creating a safer environment. This should include enhanced risk assessment processes, mandatory multi-agency planning exercises for high-risk matches, stronger stewarding arrangements, improved segregation and egress planning, and the consistent use of evidence-led sanctions against those involved in violence or disorder.

There must also be greater accountability for supporter groups whose actions create significant operational risks and costs. Consideration of a stronger sanctions' regime against individuals and the clubs they support by the game's governing bodies should be developed and implemented. If these are not pursued, then I would call on government to take action to mandate a regime that puts the safe enjoyment of football (or any other sporting event) at the forefront of the planning and delivery of such events. Elements such as restricting the number of fans allowed to attend matches, banning orders with more rigour, requirements to use modern technologies such as facial recognition to prevent the attendance of banned individuals should all be explored and enacted to ensure that this behaviour is stopped.

Safety certificates for sporting events have been subject to review by His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Police, Fire and Rescue. I am aware that this review will be published shortly and was delighted to welcome inspectors from that organisation to speak with colleagues across policing and event management in Scotland. We should listen closely to their recommendations to understand how they can be applied in Scotland.

Success should ultimately be measured by reducing the demand placed on policing, allowing officers to focus on wider community priorities rather than repeatedly responding to preventable disorder at football matches. The vast majority of supporters attend games responsibly and peacefully; they deserve a football culture that is safe, welcoming to all and free from the actions of those who continue to tarnish the reputation of Scotland's national game



Supervision and leadership

Effective supervision and leadership underpin all aspects of policing performance and our inspections bear this out, showing that where supervision is consistent, informed and visible, outcomes improve across the board – for victims and communities, and for officers and staff.

Conversely, any weaknesses in supervision and adherence to processes reduce the ability to identify risk and address poor practice early, diminishing the likelihood of ethical decision making. If policing is to improve and not repeat its mistakes, it is essential that all learning from incidents, complaints and near-misses is systematically captured and translated into practice.

Over the past six years, HMICS has consistently highlighted the importance of effective staff supervision, appraisal and performance management to the health of policing in Scotland. Across annual and inspection reports and thematic reviews, we have repeatedly found that weaknesses in first line supervision reduce Police Scotland's ability to manage risk, assure decision making and support officers operating in high-pressure environments. Our inspection evidence shows that where appraisal is inconsistent, infrequent or lacking, this limits meaningful feedback, leaving officers unclear about expectations and undermining individual

development and accountability.

Conversely, where supervision is active and performance discussions are regular and constructive, we have observed stronger ethical awareness, better compliance with policy and improved service delivery.

Our reports highlight how effective performance management supports workforce wellbeing – supported and well managed staff are more confident in raising concerns, learning from errors and sustaining professional standards – and how clear performance frameworks help align individual objectives with organisational priorities, reinforcing legitimacy and public confidence. Robust supervision also enables early identification of training needs and underperformance, reducing the likelihood of more serious failures developing. Our many years of inspection evidence demonstrates that effective performance management is not merely an administrative function, but a vital mechanism for supporting individuals, strengthening leadership and ensuring continuous improvement across policing in Scotland.



Professional standards

This year's report also reflects on the findings of the Information Commissioner's Office regarding failings in Police Scotland's professional standards investigation processes. The issues identified – relating to information handling, timeliness and transparency – have implications beyond compliance with data protection law, since they speak directly to organisational culture, accountability and public confidence. ([Police Scotland fined £66k and reprimanded following serious data mishandling](#)).

Professional standards investigations must be fair, lawful and efficient if they are to protect both the rights of individuals and maintain trust in the system's ability to police itself. Recent reporting to Scottish Police Authority committees has highlighted concerns regarding performance in a number of important areas, including backlogs in complaints handling, crime recording administration, subject access requests and responses to freedom of information requests. These functions provide important indicators of the overall health, capacity and effectiveness of the organisation. Although steps are being taken to address these challenges, there is a risk that existing pressures will continue to grow at a time of significant financial constraint.

Such functions are important in understanding the general health of the policing system and although steps are being taken to address them, the concern is that pressure is growing at a time of budget challenges, with high numbers of officers unable to be deployed and short-term contracted staff being let go to balance the budget. A sustainable strategic workforce plan is essential to address the operational aspects and supporting functions that allow for effective responses and performance reporting on issues that matter to the public.

Our work does not seek simply to identify shortcomings, but to support improvement. Effective policing depends on learning – within Police Scotland and across the wider justice system – and the themes above highlight the interconnected nature of policing reform. The lessons currently emerging from the Police Reform White Paper in England and Wales, as well as the findings from the Baroness Casey Review, are a useful external lens for Scotland to test its own approach to governance, accountability and public engagement. Policing structures may differ, but principles of legitimacy, ethical leadership and victim-centred justice are universal and must be positively promoted.



The work we have undertaken in the last year is not intended simply to identify shortcomings, but to support improvement. Effective policing depends on a culture of learning and continuous development, both within Police Scotland and across the wider justice system. Our reports continue to inform both policy and legislative development with recommendations and impartial advice to Scottish Government shaping and informing drafting of legislation including the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025 and the Police Service of Scotland (Vetting) Regulations 2026.

The themes highlighted throughout this report demonstrate the interconnected nature of policing reform and the importance of addressing challenges in a coherent and joined-up manner.

I remain committed to providing independent and evidence-based scrutiny that supports improvement, strengthens accountability and helps ensure that policing in Scotland continues to meet the needs and expectations of the communities it serves while delivering best value.

Craig Naylor

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Constabulary
August 2026

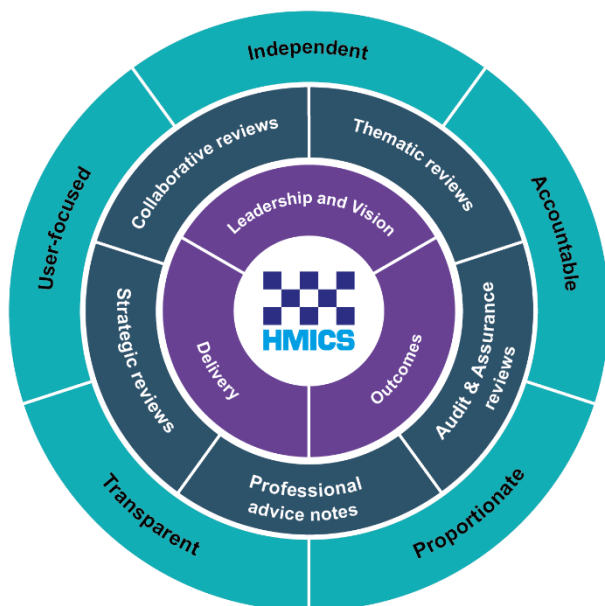


HMICS vision, purpose, objectives and values





Approach to scrutiny



We conduct our business in accordance with our values, acting independently and proportionately, focusing on how the needs of the public are served by Police Scotland, its stakeholders and the partners with whom it works. We work in an open and transparent way, and are fully accountable for what we do. We make efforts to work with cross-sector scrutiny partners and take account of the Crerar report from 2007.

Our inspection framework

Our inspection framework is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model and Best Value Characteristics. The purpose of the framework is to support lead and associate inspectors to take a common and objective approach to assessing policing in Scotland. The framework can be used in its entirety, or adapted so that the key themes and sub-elements reflect the purpose of the inspection to be undertaken.

In 2024 we reviewed our corporate plan and inspection frameworks, together with our methodologies, governance and joint working with other public and scrutiny bodies.

We also review our frameworks after each inspection, at the meeting we have to evaluate the inspection. This allows for continuous improvement of our methodology, and any lessons to be learned from those we inspect and work alongside. Our corporate plan, inspection framework and custody inspection framework covering the period 2025-28 were published in March 2025.



Scrutiny plan 2025-28

Our scrutiny plan sets out how HMICS aims to meet its statutory purpose to inquire into the state, efficiency and effectiveness of both Police Scotland and the SPA. It was published in terms of Section 75 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and sets out our scrutiny priorities from April 2025 to March 2028.

This plan looks at the work we have scheduled for the period in question, and is kept under review to ensure that any new and emerging issues can be addressed appropriately. Our objective is to support Police Scotland and the SPA to deliver high-quality, effective services that are continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs, while providing best value.

In April 2026, we published an update to the plan, articulating new work commissioned by Scottish Ministers and the small changes that will take place during the next two years. This report is available at [Scrutiny plan review 2025-28](#).

Partnership working

We work closely with our partners in the Strategic Public Sector Scrutiny Network (SPSSN). The SPSSN aims to support improvement in the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of public services for the people of Scotland, holding those public bodies to account. It promotes collaboration among Scotland's main public sector scrutiny bodies by identifying shared risks, priorities and learning. Scrutiny bodies involved include the Accounts Commission; Audit Scotland; HM Inspectorate of Education in Scotland; the Care Inspectorate; Healthcare Improvement Scotland; HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland; HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland; HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland; and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

We are also a member of the UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), contributing to the UK response to its international obligations under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).



Scrutiny activity during 2025-26

Inspection reports

HMICS reports:

Frontline focus review of tools of the trade

The aim of this frontline focus review was to assess how well equipped frontline operational officers and staff are to perform their roles – with an emphasis on uniform and equipment. It was also to assess whether frontline officers and staff have ready access to appropriate data to help them perform their duties. In it, we outlined key findings and made six recommendations. We also highlighted further areas for development intended to help Police Scotland ensure that officers and staff have access to uniform and equipment that is high-quality, comfortable and effective (key to this is officer and staff involvement in the design and procurement of uniform and other equipment).

Thematic inspection of police response to drug harm reduction

The aim of this thematic inspection was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of Police Scotland's strategic and operational approach to the reduction of drug-related harms in Scotland, and the outcomes achieved. The resulting report is based on a comprehensive review of available information and data, and involved engaging widely with police and partners through interviews and onsite visits. Our report outlined key findings highlighting positive police practice found during our inspection, including strong partnership working arrangements (for example, police working effectively with partners in the divisions we visited to tackle the issues associated with near-fatal overdose). We made seven recommendations for improvement that are intended to support Police Scotland to progress and develop its role in this important area.



HMICS assurance review of conduct and discipline

The aim of this assurance review was to assess the state, efficiency and effectiveness of officer and staff conduct and discipline processes within Police Scotland and the SPA. To deliver the review, we adopted a comprehensive, evidence-based approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. We conducted interviews with a broad range of stakeholders including those involved in or with experience of conduct or discipline processes, as well as representatives from staff associations and trade unions. We also examined concluded police officer conduct case files and concluded police staff disciplinary cases. The resultant report highlights strengths, identifies areas requiring improvement and proposes 24 recommendations aimed at strengthening professional standards, organisational learning, leadership behaviours, wellbeing support and accountability across policing in Scotland. We were ready to publish the findings of our review in March 2026, but temporarily paused publication following requests from the Chief Constable of Police Scotland and the Chief Executive of the SPA, who asked for time to consider any potential implications for proceedings that were ongoing. No changes were made to the review report during the period while publication was paused.

A key element of this report is the recognition of the impact that disciplinary and conduct investigations have on officers and staff, and the toll taken on mental and physical health. While it is clear that the public expect that misconduct is dealt with robustly (and officers and staff understand this), the speed of processes and the length of time taken, alongside anxiety about the potential for a career-ending outcome, are significant and traumatic. Police Scotland and the SPA must therefore ensure that the systems and processes in place are focused on speedier resolution, procedural fairness and adherence to the regulations.



Joint scrutiny activity:

Joint inspections of adult support and protection services

During 2024-25 (and the early months of 2025-26), we worked collaboratively with Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) and the Care Inspectorate to make recommendations to Scottish Government on an improvement framework for adult support and protection services. All work on scrutiny of service provision has now ceased and we and our partners are no longer funded to undertake this joint work. Consideration is being given to proposals in respect of the expectation of scrutiny going forward.

Joint inspection of services for children and young people at risk of harm

We have continued to work with the Care Inspectorate, HIS and Education Scotland, completing three inspections over the past year.

The remit of these joint inspections is to consider the effectiveness of services for children and young people up to the age of 18 who are at risk of harm. The inspections look at the difference that community planning partnerships (statutory partnerships including local authorities, health, policing and other

service delivery bodies) are making to the lives of children and young people at risk of harm, and their families.

As per previous years, the inspections cover specific geographical areas and perform a key role in supporting services for children and young people. The partnership areas inspected in the current reporting period are published on the Care Inspectorate website.

Joint inspection of police custody centres in Scotland

We worked with HIS to produce a baseline assessment of healthcare in custody in 2022-23. Following the publication of this report, agreement to fund and implement a scrutiny programme delivered by both agencies was sought and agreed.

We have since published nine reports covering geographic areas, providing recommendations for policing, healthcare providers and, on occasion, wider commentary on the service for those who are in custody. We have also undertaken a review with HIS of the recommendations made so far and the impact achieved. This will be published during the 2026–27 financial year and will update the baseline from the previous report, while also improving understanding of national and thematic issues on how custody centres manages those deprived of their liberty.



During 2025-26, we published inspection reports on custody in Forth Valley, Highland and Islands, and a progress report on the previously-published report regarding the Argyll and West Dunbartonshire division.

We have continuing concerns about the difference between the observation levels agreed for those in custody who are at risk, and the actual risk assessments undertaken. Having two levels of risk (high or low), but four observation levels, can contribute to inconsistent decision-making, especially when resources are stretched. Police Scotland has started to consider this, but we are concerned that this is not being addressed with sufficient urgency (this is also aligned to decision making on referrals of those in custody to a healthcare practitioner).

We also found instances where persons detained in custody have completed the process required for the criminal justice system and yet are held for considerable periods beyond that time. This occurs too frequently, with little recorded rationale for the delays.

Citing witnesses in the sheriff court

The aim of this inspection was to assess how effectively and efficiently prosecution witnesses are cited to give evidence in the sheriff court. This included members of the public who had been the victim of a crime or who had witnessed a crime, as well as police and professional witnesses. A key element of the inspection was understanding the impact that the process of becoming a witness and providing evidence in court has on victims and witnesses, and whether a trauma-informed approach is evident. The inspection was carried out jointly with HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland (IPS), and allowed us to consider the citation process from both a prosecution and policing perspective. The report made 50 recommendations, covering individual organisations, collaborative actions and system-wide improvements across the whole criminal justice system.

We look forward to seeing the impact of these recommendations (which included modernisation of the citations process) on the experience of victims and public, professional and police witnesses. The potential for significant savings was an additional benefit to this work and should allow better use of resources across policing, prosecution, and witnesses.



Best Value in policing – joint Best Value audit of policing in Scotland

In this joint audit we worked with Audit Scotland to assess how effectively the Best Value arrangements in policing are demonstrating continuous improvement in delivering the current strategic outcomes, overall vision and transformation of policing services. This included examining whether policing has a clear strategic direction, the effective use of resources, and how well policing is performing. Our report found that policing in Scotland is well managed and led, but that more needs to be done to reform the service and make the best use of its resources: we made seven recommendations designed to support further improvement.



Assessing the outcomes from our activities

During 2025-26, we undertook a number of inspections. Some of these were scheduled in our Scrutiny Plan 2025-26, others were a continuation of programmes of inspections with partner bodies, and one was directed by Scottish Ministers.

As a result of the inspections that were completed by the end of the scrutiny year (March 2026), we made recommendations to Police Scotland, the SPA, Scottish

Government, and joint recommendations to other agencies. In addition, following submissions by inspected bodies, we closed a number of recommendations. The details of recommendations made, closed, and to whom, are noted on the table below. This shows the position as at 31 March 2026.

Body	New recommendations	Closed recommendations
Police Scotland	27	32
Scottish Police Authority	1	1
Scottish Police Authority Forensic Services	1	0
Scottish Government	0	0
Joint ³	20	4

Impact of HMICS recommendations

We make recommendations to inspected bodies to identify opportunities for improvement and the promotion of good practice. Several recommendations closed during the year have resulted in tangible improvements to policing in specific areas. Good progress has been made in six key areas:

- Frontline focus – wellbeing
- Thematic reviews of domestic abuse, phase 1
- Thematic inspection of road policing
- Thematic review of policing mental health in Scotland
- Assurance review of vetting policy and procedures within Police Scotland
- Thematic inspection of police response to missing persons in Scotland

³ Joint recommendations made to the following: Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, NHS Highland NHS Shetland and Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service.



Examples of improvements are highlighted below.

Frontline focus

This report, published in September 2025, was intended to be a short, sharp focus on the direct voice of the frontline. During our inspection, it became clear from conversations with officers and staff that a light touch approach was not sufficient, and that we needed to do more to reflect their views.

The recommendations from this review that were closed during 2025/26, together with their impact, are outlined below.

Recommendation	Impact
Police Scotland should ensure that its Estates Strategy promotes parity and ensures an appropriate standard of facilities are provided across its estate	Police Scotland identified estate transformation as a priority for the next phase of reform, with a focus on developing a more effective and sustainable estate to support current and future policing needs. We noted that there has been considerable investment and a significant amount of work undertaken.
Police Scotland should develop a wellbeing plan that has appropriate governance, structure and activity, reflecting the People Strategy, and delivered equitably across the organisation	The Police Scotland Health and Wellbeing Plan provides a consistent framework for wellbeing initiatives across the organisation. It has incorporated our recommendations, ensuring that arrangements are in place to regularly monitor and report on actions, performance measures and progress.
Police Scotland should implement effective actions to understand and address organisational stressors, including those caused by perceived unfairness in the application of process/procedures	Police Scotland has aligned the World Health Organization (WHO) psychosocial risk factors for workplace mental health with the Your Voice Matters themes, establishing a baseline against which progress and improvements can be measured and reviewed. HM Chief Inspector noted, in particular, progress towards a more engaged and informed approach to wellbeing.

Domestic abuse phase 1

This report was published in January 2023. The aim of phase 1 of the domestic abuse inspection was to assess the state, efficiency and effectiveness of Police Scotland's response to domestic abuse, with a focus on the experience of victims who reported to the police.

The recommendations from this review that were closed during 2025/26, together with their impact, are outlined below.



Recommendation	Impact
Police Scotland should streamline the policing response to diary appointments through promoting and embedding a 'getting it right first time' approach and defining parameters of acceptable performance. It should also put systems in place to obtain data and management information on the use and compliance of diary appointments	The Policing for Our Communities Programme (launched May 2025) has demonstrated measurable early benefits. A community hub – introduced as part of the programme – has also contributed to improved service delivery and better outcomes for local communities within its first month of operation. HM Chief Inspector stated that there had been significant improvements in the appointments process and that this, together with improved training, enabled the closure of the recommendation.
Police Scotland should review the role of officers involved in risk assessment and safety planning for domestic abuse incidents to provide national consistency, based on the optimum model, and ensure they are given the appropriate training and support.	The sharing of knowledge and best practice is taking place in the correct forum, and a bespoke safeguarding training course will be incorporated into work being undertaken within a public protection programme.
Police Scotland and the SPA need to ensure that investigative opportunities for digital evidence capture are improved and maximised for domestic abuse offences.	The introduction of body-worn video has had a significant impact on digital evidence capture, with over 100,000 recordings and tens of thousands clips of footage uploaded. HM Chief Inspector stated that both the progress made and future plans are impressive, and should enhance the service provided to victims and the quality of evidence available at court.

Road policing

This report was published in November 2024. The inspection report was based on a comprehensive review, which involved engaging with specialist road policing officers and local policing officers across Scotland. We also met with partners and other key stakeholders. We were particularly grateful to have the assistance of charitable organisations who support vulnerable road users, and people who had been affected by serious road collisions.

The recommendations from this review that were closed during 2025/26, together with their impact, are outlined below.



Recommendation	Impact
Police Scotland should engage with its criminal justice partners to explore options (including virtual appearances) to reduce the time requirement for officers attending court.	HMICS noted that progress within a short space of time was 'remarkable' and coincided with a joint review (with HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland) of citations in the sheriff court. Ongoing engagement between the road policing team and criminal justice partners has demonstrated a drive to change and improve the experience of officers at court, and will be managed as part of a continuous improvement plan.
Police Scotland should engage with Scottish Government to progress a legislative change that will allow the escorting of abnormal loads in Scotland to be carried out by another agency	Raised profile to highlight that Scotland does not benefit from facilities available to forces in the rest of the UK. Under the Road Traffic Act 1988, any abnormal load movement on a public road in Scotland must be escorted by a specially trained police officer. A change in legislation has been discussed in the relevant quarters and, while not imminent, HMICS is keen that Police Scotland continues to progress through the legislative process.
Police Scotland should progress the implementation of a road policing performance framework that provides an indication of progress towards achieving the targets set out in Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030	A performance framework has been developed (aligned to Scotland's Road Safety Framework 2030) with a focus on improving outcomes for road users in Scotland.
Police Scotland should implement a process to ensure vehicles are equipped in a consistent manner. The views of officers who will be using the vehicles should be taken into account when considering the type of equipment to be fitted, and how and where it is fitted	Improved governance arrangements for vehicle and operational equipment have been established through a working group, providing greater oversight of equipment requirements, procurement processes and the monitoring of effectiveness. HMICS notes it is encouraging that officers' views will be taken into account by the working group, providing an opportunity for them to express views on any decisions being taken.
Police Scotland should identify and adopt best practice in the deployment and use of ANPR	Significant progress has been made, as evidenced at the improvement governance board.
Police Scotland should review its policy on the deployment of family liaison officers, to ensure a consistent level of service to people who have been bereaved following a fatal collision	The review undertaken, together with the development and delivery of training for all road policing officers, is welcomed. The involvement of Lifeline Scotland and Brake has been particularly positive and this, combined with the introduction of the Trauma Z Card and the continued rollout of trauma-informed practice training for all police officers, should help to deliver a more consistent and effective service to those bereaved following a fatal road collision.



Thematic review of policing mental health in Scotland

Earlier this year, we participated in a mental health collaboration event, sharing learning from our 2023 review of policing mental health. This event was held on the first anniversary of the launch of the Mental Health Distress – Framework for Collaboration, a multi-agency collaborative approach to supporting individuals experiencing distress or crisis. We continue to work with, and support, colleagues across the whole system, to help improve outcomes for people experiencing poor mental health.

Published in October 2023, our review considered five objectives:

- How well prepared Police Scotland is to meet the needs of people who are experiencing poor mental health
- Whether the police response to mental health-related demand affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the force in delivering other policing services
- Whether the force understands the demand associated with the provision of mental health-related policing services
- The effectiveness of the force's collaborative working arrangements on the provision of mental health-related policing services
- The impact that the involvement of the police has on the person who is experiencing poor mental health

The recommendations from this review that were closed during 2025/26, together with their impact, are outlined below.

Recommendation	Impact
With the support and engagement of the advisory panel, Police Scotland should develop and publish a mental health strategy (and delivery plan) that clearly articulates its purpose and vision in dealing with mental health-related incidents and allows the recommendations and areas for development highlighted in this review to be progressed	HMICS had found that Police Scotland was operating without a formal mental health strategy, oversight or governance. In closing this recommendation, we noted that a framework and strategy had been developed, clearly setting out the expectations of police officers and staff in respect of mental health-related incidents.
Police Scotland should establish and implement internal governance arrangements to achieve its mental health strategy and delivery plan, once published	Satisfactory governance arrangements in place and strategy published.
Police Scotland should take steps to provide ready access to, and encourage the use of, its interim Vulnerable Persons Database (iVPD) by British Transport Police colleagues in Scotland	Benefits and positive impact of partnership working were highlighted in the report. In closing, HM Chief Inspector said that the availability of iVPD data being extended to British Transport Police should be commended.



Assurance review of vetting policy and procedures within Police Scotland

HMICS published its Assurance review of vetting policy and procedures within Police Scotland in October 2023. This was undertaken as a standalone assurance exercise following publication of the Terms of Reference for the Thematic Inspection of Organisational Culture in Police Scotland, which stated:

"We will assure the quality of vetting and renewals and whether these effectively identified potential misconduct."

Given the significance and scale of this objective, HMICS and Police Scotland agreed that a separate review would be undertaken to provide the necessary assurance.

The recommendations from this review that were closed during 2025-26, together with their impact, are outlined below.

Recommendation	Impact
The Scottish Government should place into legislation the requirement for all Police Scotland officers and staff to obtain and maintain a minimum standard of vetting clearance and the provision for the Chief Constable to dispense with the service of an officer or staff member who cannot maintain suitable vetting	The Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025 placed police vetting on a statutory footing and established a legislative basis for dismissal where an individual is unable to maintain the required vetting clearance. In support of this, the Police Service of Scotland (Vetting) Regulations 2026 , which came into force on 1 April 2026 , introduced requirements for the periodic re-vetting of constables, and established procedures enabling the Chief Constable to dismiss a constable where there is evidence that they are unable to maintain vetting clearance.
Police Scotland's policies should allow all levels of vetting clearance to be refused, suspended or withdrawn	The vetting provisions of the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025 came into force on 1 April 2026 and provide a legislative framework allowing all levels of vetting clearance to be refused, suspended or withdrawn. In addition, Police Scotland introduced a new Vetting and Supplier Vetting Standard Operating Procedure , which sets out the processes for the refusal, suspension and withdrawal of all levels of vetting clearance.
Where the Force Executive becomes involved in the decision making of any vetting case (out with the processes described within the Vetting Manual of Guidance) it should report these cases to the SPA Complaints and Conduct Committee for oversight	Police Scotland's Vetting Standard Operating Procedure was updated, stating that any deviation from guidance for an individual by a Chief Officer will be reported to the SPA Complaints and Conduct Committee by way of a briefing paper for oversight.



Thematic inspection of police response to missing persons in Scotland

The HMICS thematic inspection of police response to missing persons in Scotland was published in October 2024. The inspection assessed the effectiveness, efficiency and overall delivery of Police Scotland's response to missing persons.

The inspection made 11 recommendations, six of which have since been fully implemented and closed between January 2025 and July 2026. The impact of the work undertaken against these recommendations is summarised below. Significant reductions in missing reports and repeated missing reports are now being reported by Police Scotland. This is a major improvement to the lives of those who are regularly reported missing, with a corresponding reduction in demands on policing.

Recommendation	Impact
Police Scotland should promote the National Missing Persons Framework's aims, objectives and commitments to officers and staff across divisions, and emphasise that this underpins its strategic direction.	There has been significant activity promoting the National Missing Persons Framework across Police Scotland, including an event at Tulliallan, updated guidance, communications activity and leadership engagement. This has strengthened organisational awareness of, and commitment to, the Framework's aims and objectives. HMICS acknowledged early indications of a reduction in repeat missing persons and a more trauma-informed approach to service delivery.
Police Scotland should ensure that there is consistent national leadership in place to direct missing persons policy, establish outcome targets and support effective operational delivery.	The reinstatement of the Missing Persons Oversight Board and the inclusion of missing persons as a standing item on the Partnerships and Prevention Oversight Group has strengthened national oversight and governance. Strategic direction, operational practice and the Missing Persons Framework are now communicated more consistently across divisions, supported by governance forums, co-ordinator networks and engagement from the Missing Person Unit, helping to promote a more co-ordinated and consistent approach across Police Scotland.
Police Scotland should re-establish the missing person strategic governance forum to provide scrutiny, oversight and governance for matters relating to the police and partner response to missing persons.	The re-establishment of the Missing Persons Strategic Governance Group has strengthened strategic oversight, scrutiny and governance of missing persons at a national level. Through regular review of performance, trends and operational activity, the group has improved organisational focus on missing persons and enhanced engagement with key partners, supporting a more consistent and co-ordinated approach across Police Scotland.
Police Scotland should bring together all operational practice guidance relevant to missing persons in one place on the police intranet – including protocols and	Police Scotland's managers and staff now have easier access to missing persons guidance, protocols, procedures, shared learning and the National Missing Persons Framework through a



procedures, shared learning, and the national missing persons toolkit – to enable easy access for managers and staff.	single microsite prominently featured on the Police Scotland intranet. This has improved access to relevant information and helped promote greater clarity and consistency in the application of missing persons policy and practice.
Police Scotland should develop a role profile and operational guidance for divisional co-ordinators and ensure that the role is supported and enabled to fulfil tasks and responsibilities effectively.	Police Scotland has strengthened the divisional missing person co-ordinator role through the introduction of a nationally agreed role profile, supporting guidance and quality assurance arrangements. This has increased consistency, raised the profile and importance of the role across the organisation, and provided greater support for co-ordinators to improve standards and oversight of missing person investigations.
Police Scotland should develop a version of the National Missing Persons Application that has full functionality on mobile devices, and respond swiftly to any technical problems and potential improvements identified by users.	Enhancements to the National Missing Persons Application have improved mobile functionality and usability, enabling officers to record and access information more effectively in the field. This has supported earlier risk assessment and investigative activity, strengthened data quality and consistency, and increased efficiency in the management of missing person enquiries. While further development of the application is ongoing, the sustained programme of improvements is already making a positive difference to those reporting and investigating missing persons.

The examples above demonstrate the significant impact that HMICS recommendations have had on policing across a range of areas in Scotland. While these examples highlight notable achievements, they are not exhaustive, and work continues to implement and complete remaining and newly-issued recommendations.

HMICS website

In 2025-26, we developed our website to include publication of all Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 requests received and the replies provided. This went live in April 2026.



Facts and figures

HMICS staffing model 2026-26

The position of HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland (HMCIC) is held by Craig Naylor who leads the following team:

Mark Hargreaves (until April 2025) Brian McNulty QPM	Assistant Inspector of Constabulary
Ray Jones Dr Annie Crowley Maggie Pettigrew John Paterson	Lead Inspectors
Rhona Ford	Head of Business Management and Inspection Support
Pamela Colvin Dr Debbie Kyle	Inspection Co-ordinators
Joanna Gardner Ioanna Kiriklidou	Design Managers and Inspection Support
Keri-Anne Balfour	Business Support Manager
Rebecca Duncan	Executive Support Officer
Carly Bryce Craig Nicholson	Support Inspectors

Further details about the team can be found on the '[Our Team](#)' section of our website.

We continue to strengthen our capacity for inspection and to engage the services of associate inspectors from a range of backgrounds including policing, audit, local government and academia. These inspectors provide specialist skills and experience to augment our inspection teams as required.

HMICS budget 2025-26

HMICS is funded entirely by the Scottish Government in respect of staff, accommodation, equipment and other expenses. Our budget for 2025-26 was £1,620,000. In addition, we received a credit of £14,000 for national insurance contributions, together with £26,000 (reimbursed by the Care Inspectorate) for



our contribution to the joint inspections of adult support and protection services programme. Therefore, our available budget for 2025-26 was £1,660,000. Our spend for the year was £1,714,081 which represents an overspend of £54,081. In November 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills instructed the Care Inspectorate and HMICS to undertake a national review of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. This work was in addition to existing work plans and

resulted in the dedication of staff beyond budgeted head count. The cost of this from November 2025-31 March 2026 was £90,419. HMICS was not given any additional funding for this work.

HMCIC's expenses 2025-26

The total expenses incurred and claimed by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland in the financial year 2025-26 was £1,131.03

Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 31 reporting – expenditure incurred during the year

Public relations (includes staffing costs)	£68,075
Overseas travel	0
Hospitality and entertainment	£766
External consultancy	£3,795

HMICS's public duty under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 is reported fully on our website at [annual statements of compliance](#).



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About His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland

HMICS operates independently of Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government. Under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, our role is to review the state, effectiveness and efficiency of Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. We support improvement in policing by carrying out inspections, making recommendations and highlighting effective practice.

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