



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Thursday, 11th December 2025

PRESS RELEASE

Review of Police Scotland's Response to Drug Harm Reduction

A new report has called on Police Scotland to make clear its policy on drug harm reduction.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland has carried out a detailed review to assess how effectively Police Scotland help minimise drug related harm.

It found while Police Scotland has made a valuable contribution to drug harm reduction – including equipping more than 12,500 officers with the overdose reversing drug naloxone – significant gaps remain.

The report recommends Police Scotland define its role and purpose in supporting the public health approach to drug harm reduction.

It also urged the national force to provide guidance to police officers on how to balance this with their crime enforcement responsibilities.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Craig Naylor, said: "Scotland continues to face one of the most severe drug-related public health crises in the developed world.

"In 2024 alone, 1017 drug use deaths were registered – the highest rate in Europe and a stark reminder of the scale of the challenge.

“Police Scotland has demonstrated a willingness to adapt and contribute meaningfully to the national effort to reduce drug-related harm.

“However, to improve its response, Police Scotland should take decisive steps to strengthen its strategic and operational approach.

“This includes making clear its policy on drug harm reduction – defining the policing purpose within a public health approach and providing frontline officers with practical guidance on how to balance enforcement with harm reduction.”

The HMICS report praised Police Scotland for its work with the Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADP) and the development of local initiatives supporting prevention, intervention and recovery.

It said that since the rollout of naloxone to Police Scotland officers more than 900 administrations had been recorded to date – which showed the initiative had saved lives.

The report said specialist policing units provided critical intelligence on emerging threats, supporting public health surveillance and disrupting high-harm supply chains.

This work complemented the efforts of local policing teams and contributed to a more co-ordinated and intelligence-led response to synthetic opioids, polydrug use and organised criminal activity.

The report said Police Scotland worked closely with partner organisations in local police divisions to examine and swiftly share information relevant to drug-related harm, drug deaths and near-fatal overdoses.

They also found evidence of a positive shift in policing culture – improved empathy, engagement and trauma-informed practice among officers.

However, the inspectors also found a ‘lack of clarity’ on how Police Scotland intended to strike a balance between a public health approach to reducing drug related harm and traditional criminal justice methods.

The HMICS report said Police Scotland continued to be guided by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which centred on enforcement-led practices and was taught as such at the Scottish Police College.

The report said this legislation can conflict with public health principles and lead to confusion about what a public health approach entails in practice.

It said that beyond the overarching goal of 'reducing drug deaths and drug-related harm', HMICS could find no published guidance from Police Scotland to support officers in their operational delivery on this issue.

The report also said the term 'public health approach' was not well understood across the frontline, nor how it connected to officers' day-to-day duties.

The HMICS report made seven recommendations for improvement including that Police Scotland publish a clear policy on drug harm reduction.

Police Scotland were also advised to establish targets for drug harm reduction, monitor performance against these targets, demonstrate impact and share learning across divisions.

Mr Naylor added: "We recognise that while Police Scotland is a key partner in drug harm reduction, it does not have lead responsibility for national strategy, funding and resources, nor the wide range of intervention and support services delivered by partner organisations to address this issue.

"Scotland must continue to focus on a whole-system approach to drug harm reduction. This should include sustained investment from Scottish Government, strategic leadership from statutory and third sector partners, and collaboration with key stakeholders.

"The scale of the challenge demands a unified and sustained response – one that is rooted in evidence of what works, shared accountability and an ongoing commitment to saving and improving lives."

The HMICS report noted the safer drug consumption facility in Glasgow, the Thistle, played a 'small but significant' role in reducing drug-related harm in Scotland.

It said the centre had only been operational for around seven months at the time of the evidence gathering stage of the HMICS inspection, and that its effectiveness was yet to be evaluated.

It noted Police Scotland had collaborated in the development and policing arrangements for the centre.

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).

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.

It committed to undertaking a thematic inspection of the police response to drug harm reduction as part of our scrutiny plan for 2022-25, with the aim of assessing 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.

Ends notes

NOTES TO EDITORS

The 'HMICS Thematic inspection of police response to drug harm reduction' will be available to download at the [HMICS website](#) from 00.01hrs, 11th December 2025.

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