



Improving
Policing
Across
Scotland

POLICE

Frontline Focus Tools of the Trade

September 2025



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
Keeping people safe



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 review was undertaken by HMICS in terms of Section 74(2)(a) of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and is laid before the Scottish Parliament in terms of Section 79(3) of the Act.

¹ [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012, Chapter 11.](#)

² HMICS, [Corporate Plan 2025-28](#) (March 2025)



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Our review



The Chief Constable's stated intention to make local policing an attractive place to work, and to boost the morale of frontline officers and staff, is very welcome.

Frontline officers and staff are operating in remarkably challenging environments; they are the face of the service, and the quality of service they provide affects the overall trust and confidence the public have in the police service.

Ensuring that officers and staff have access to uniform and equipment that is high-quality, comfortable and effective is of critical importance. This frontline focus review shows that more work is required in engaging frontline officers and staff about their uniform and equipment requirements. While we heard of some very positive recent developments - notably, improvements to officer safety

equipment and training, as well as the rollout of body worn video - we also heard that the overall quality and fit of uniform clothing needs to improve.

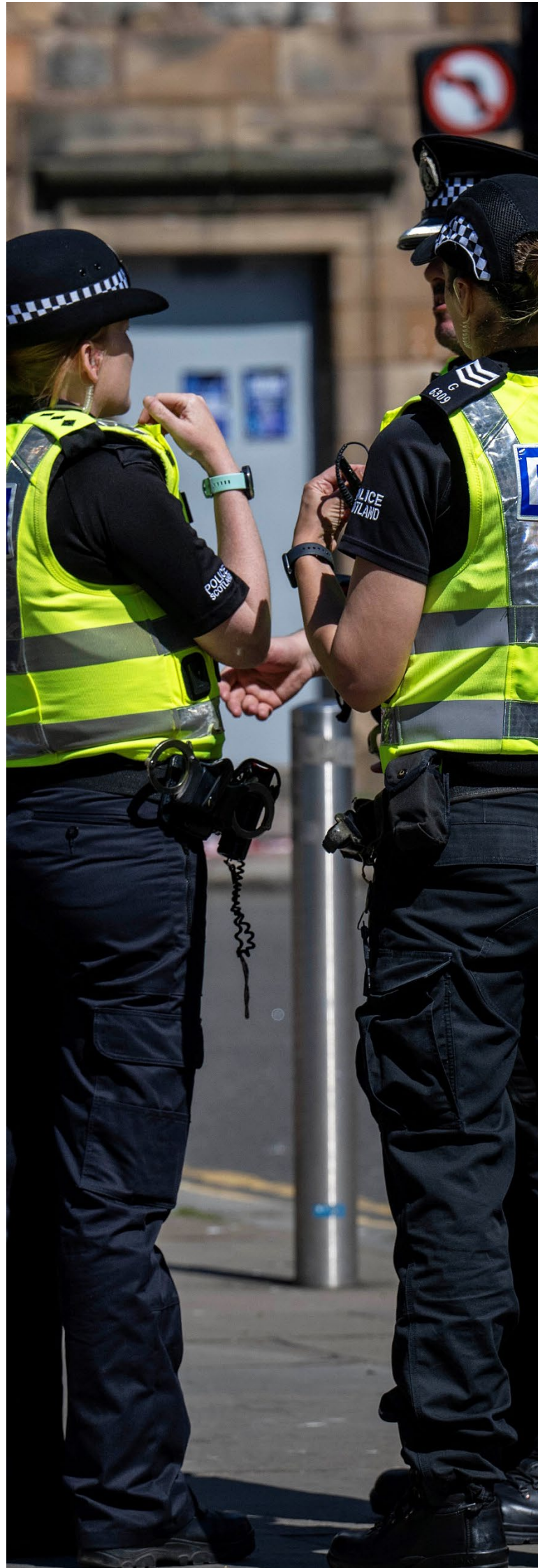
Many officers and staff are purchasing their own items of uniform. This leads to a lack of uniformity across the service and it is, quite frankly, unacceptable that officers and staff find themselves in this position. Similarly, we heard about (and saw evidence of) a drop in the overall standards of uniform appearance. The identification of police officers when wearing uniform provides reassurance to the public. The wearing of police hats is a key aspect of this and we believe that Police Scotland should consider the different types of hats available and be clear about the circumstances in which they should be worn.

We want this review to be of practical relevance to frontline officers and staff, so have aimed to be as concise and focused as possible. In their engagements, our inspectors found a real strength of feeling from officers and staff about the standard of their uniform and equipment. In response, we have made 6 recommendations and highlighted a further 16 areas for development.

We conducted benchmarking with British Transport Police and with The Metropolitan Police Service and have highlighted specific examples of best practice we found during these visits (particularly the way frontline officers and staff are engaged by these organisations). The support we received from Police Scotland has been exceptional and I am very grateful to all officers and staff who contributed to this review. I would also like to thank colleagues from British Transport Police and The Metropolitan Police Service for their support and assistance.

Craig Naylor

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Constabulary
September 2025



Key findings

Leadership and vision

- It is vitally important that frontline officers and staff are properly equipped to perform their roles to the best of their abilities.
- Engagement with frontline officers and staff about their uniform and equipment requirements could be improved.
- The chair of the clothing and equipment working group was delegated from a member of force executive, usually to a chief superintendent.
- There is a need to improve and maintain standards of uniform appearance.
- Once officers have completed their initial probationary training, there should be better supervision of standards of uniform appearance.
- There is a strong perception that more could be done to recycle uniform and equipment, in line with Police Scotland's stated commitment to the environment.

Delivery

- Frontline officers and staff did not have access to uniforms that meet the same standards of quality as those provided to specialist or senior roles.
- There was insufficient awareness and access to suitable uniform alternatives for officers and staff with specific requirements.
- The introduction of an online portal has been seen as positive, but the way that officers and staff access and obtain uniform and equipment still needs greater modernisation.
- The quality fit and longevity of standard issue uniform clothing needs to improve - specifically trousers, jackets, fleece tops, baseball caps and footwear.
- Officers are buying their own items of uniform and equipment.
- People we spoke to were very positive about the new mobile devices and were enthusiastic about the introduction of body worn video (BWV).
- Officers were very positive about their officer safety equipment, training, and the introduction of Taser.

Outcomes

- Police Scotland does not evaluate the effectiveness of uniform issued to officers and staff.

What we heard



What's working well



BWV: Enthusiastic about introduction



Taser: Deployment should be expanded



PPE: Generally effective and fit for purpose



OST: Best it has been in years



Mobile device: Broad approval and support



What's not working well



Trousers: Poor quality, fade, lack stretch, ill-fitting



Footwear: Looks unprofessional



PPE: Inadequate for police staff



Mobile printers: Insufficient supply



Torches: Lack durability, brightness, battery life, usability



Body armour: Bulky, ill-fitting, excludes diverse body types



Micro fleece: Too thin, poor quality, not warm



Jackets: Inadequate quality, fit, durability and functionality

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should improve the effectiveness of the clothing and equipment working group as a decision making body.

Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should improve its engagement with frontline officers and staff about their uniform and equipment requirements and ensure their opinions are represented at the clothing and equipment working group.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should ensure compliance with policy on standards of uniform and appearance, reasserting the training and guidance provided to supervisors, empowering them to effectively uphold those standards.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should ensure frontline officers are provided with the same quality of core uniform options available to senior leadership and specialist roles to meet their operational needs.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should implement a modern, user-friendly online ordering system tailored to officer and staff needs.

Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should improve the quality and fit of trousers, jackets, microfleece and footwear to address concerns regarding standards of professional appearance.

Areas for development

We have identified several areas for development across key processes. These are designed to improve policing services in Scotland.

Reference	Areas for development
1	More should be done to explore the potential for re-using items of uniform and equipment. Police Scotland should monitor how much uniform is being returned, and why, to ensure that best value is being delivered.
2	Police Scotland should consider whether the cost associated with having the embroidered 'Police Scotland and Poileas Alba' logo on its tops represents value for money.
3	Police Scotland stores department should enhance the customer service it provides to frontline officers and staff.
4	Police Scotland should improve awareness of and access to suitable uniform alternatives for officers and staff with specific requirements.
5	Police Scotland should consider issuing uniform and equipment tailored to specific frontline operational needs.
6	Police Scotland should revisit and define its position on headgear to provide clarity to frontline officers.
7	Police Scotland should consider a transition to a tactical vest offering both high-visibility and non-high-visibility options, to ensure operational effectiveness.
8	Police Scotland should consider a review and redesign of body armour, reducing weight and improving comfort so that it is a better fit for all officers.
9	Police Scotland should consider making Taser an available option for all operational officers.
10	Police Scotland should upgrade personal protective equipment (PPE) holders to more durable models.
11	Police Scotland should issue appropriate safety and communication equipment to all front counter staff.
12	Police Scotland should issue an appropriate PPE carriage facility to all plain clothes officers.
13	Police Scotland should continue to develop and expand mobile device access to key forms and systems, to match desktop capabilities, thus reducing repetition and improving efficiency for officers.
14	Police Scotland should procure and issue torches that better fulfil operational requirements.
15	Police Scotland should ensure that all frontline response officers have access to mobile printers. It should also improve the provision of colour printing facilities at police stations.
16	Police Scotland should implement a structured evaluation process for uniform and equipment.

Background and context

1. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) committed to conduct a frontline focus review to help improve the delivery of frontline policing services across Scotland.
2. It is anticipated that this review will have particular relevance for officers and staff in frontline roles, focusing on the tools of the trade for officers and staff working in the operational environment.
3. The term frontline can mean different things to different people. We chose the commonly used and accepted definition used in the [Police visibility: Demanding times - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#) report:
4. 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).
 - Whether frontline officers and staff have ready access to appropriate data to help them perform their roles.
5. For the purposes of this review, we focused on officers in local policing divisions who carry out response, community policing and criminal investigation department (CID) roles. We also included staff who engage directly with members of the public in front counter and custody roles.

“The police front line comprises those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law.”

6. We considered the uniform and equipment issued to police officers and staff. We did not specifically consider uniform and equipment issued to specialist officers and staff, for example, firearms officers and mountain rescue teams. That said, uniform issued to specialist officers was regularly mentioned by frontline officers during our review and, as such, it is referenced in our report.
7. We also considered whether the uniform and equipment provided to frontline officers is meeting the needs of officers and staff who have protected characteristics. To assist our review, we engaged with trade unions and staff associations, including diversity staff associations.
8. The intended outcomes from this review, and its publication, are to help improve the overall effectiveness of the uniform and equipment issued to frontline officers and staff.



Methodology

9. We used the latest HMICS Inspection Framework, which is based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model and Best Value characteristics.
10. The Inspection Framework, which provided a structure to our review, focuses on improving the delivery of policing in Scotland. We structured our review around our objectives and three themes.



LEADERSHIP AND VISION

We assessed the organisational vision for the uniform and equipment provided to frontline officers, how those choices are made, and the strategy to achieve those aims. We looked at how well the organisation identifies and understands the uniform and equipment needs of frontline officers and staff, and how it implements effective governance.



DELIVERY

We examined how well the various stakeholders within Police Scotland work together across the areas of uniform, PPE, mobile devices and data, creating best value, environmental sustainability, performance, transformation and innovation, to improve working conditions for frontline officers and staff.

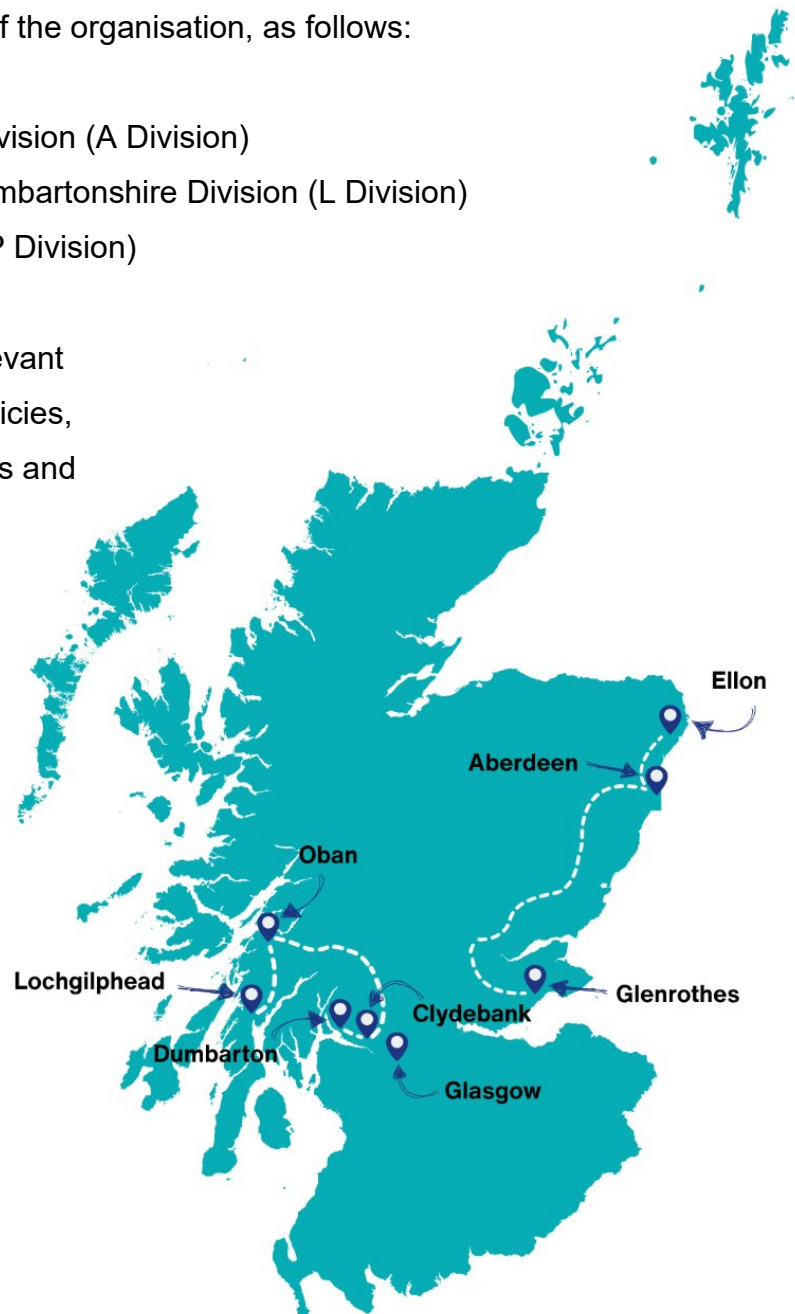


OUTCOMES

We gathered evidence from various sources, including interviews, focus groups, benchmarking and documentation, to examine how well Police Scotland is meeting the needs of frontline officers and staff, and find out what measures are being taken to evaluate and improve its performance.

11. During our review, we visited The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and British Transport Police (BTP). We also engaged with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), to identify best practice in other parts of the UK.

12. We interviewed officers and staff from across Police Scotland, as well as representatives from staff associations, trade unions, partner organisations, and other key stakeholders. To gain insight into the challenges faced in different areas, we conducted focus groups and interviews across the north, west, and east command areas.
13. To ensure a diverse perspective, we selected one division from each command area, representing a mix of urban, rural, island and remote communities. We also visited a Police Scotland stores site in Glasgow. This approach allowed us to assess how well officers are equipped to meet the needs of these varied environments:
14. One division from each command area was identified to gain an appreciation of the issues in contrasting parts of the organisation, as follows:
- North - North East Division (A Division)
 - West - Argyll and Dumbartonshire Division (L Division)
 - East - Fife Division (P Division)
15. We reviewed a range of relevant documentation including policies, procedures, strategies, plans and training course materials.



Benchmarking

16. As part of the review, we undertook benchmarking with the MPS and BTP to gain valuable insights into their uniform services operations, examining how services support frontline officers and staff, and contribute to operational effectiveness.
17. Within the MPS, uniform services form part of the operational support services portfolio. We were shown a short video, hosted on the intranet, which is designed to promote a greater awareness of the role of operational support services within the MPS.

Key sites visited

18. We visited Belvedere Storage Centre, which is the main storage facility for uniform services within the MPS. The site is a fitting centre only - all bulk stock is held by DHL, which is the outsourced provider of the National Uniform Managed Service (NUMS).
19. We met with senior stakeholders within Enabling Services, Uniform Services, and the NPCC and received a comprehensive overview of strategy and operations within the

MPS. We also visited Islington Police Station, part of the Central North Borough Command Unit (BCU) where we engaged with the local superintendent, CID and uniformed officers, to understand the impact of uniform services at the frontline level.

20. We also carried out interviews with national uniform leads and uniformed officers from BTP and undertook a visit to its divisional headquarters in Glasgow.

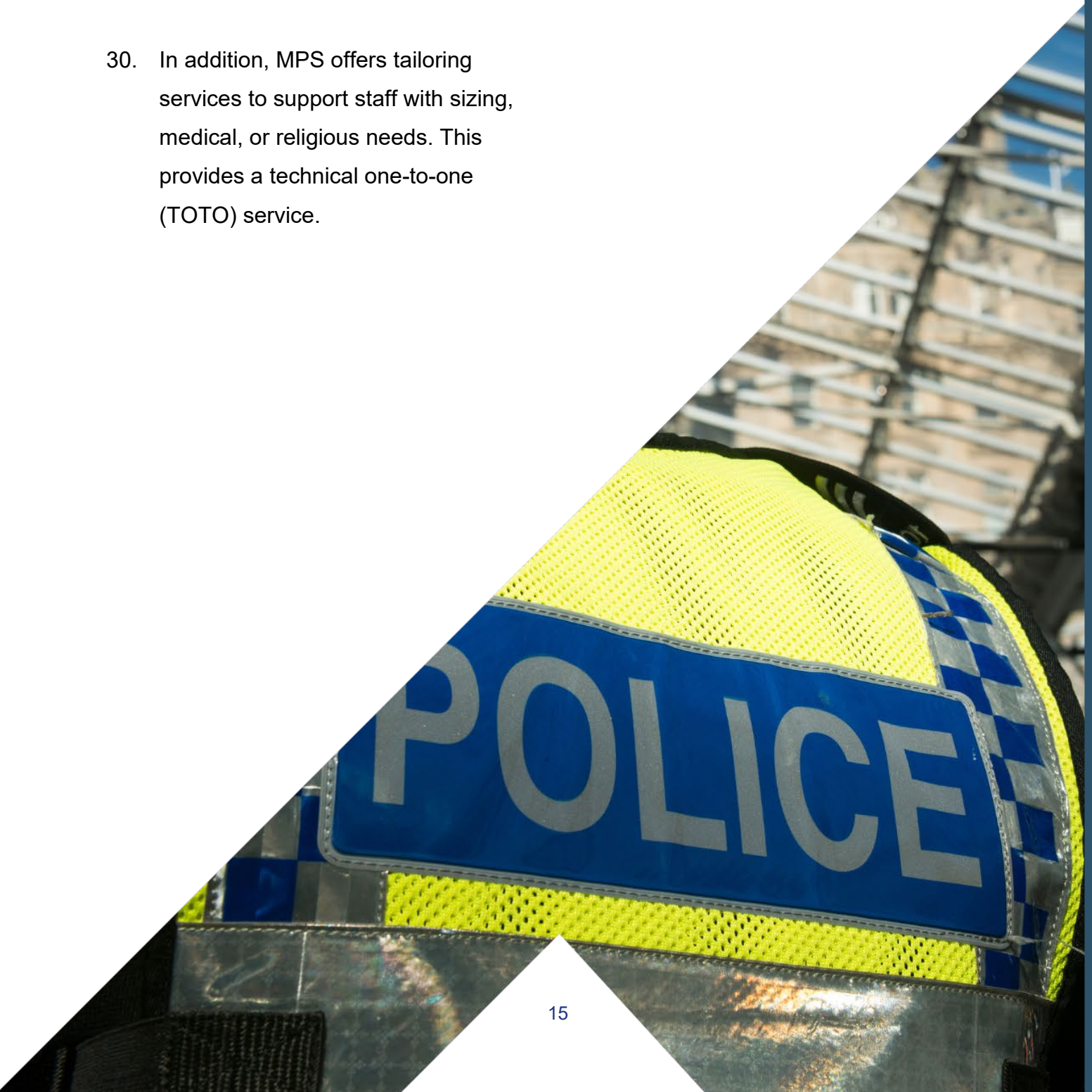
National Uniform Managed Service

21. Uniform services are outsourced to DHL through NUMS. NUMS is a Home Office and MPS-led contract for the supply of uniform and equipment to police forces within the UK.
22. MPS and BTP are two of only a few UK forces who are fully signed up to NUMS. We were told that the NUMS had helped realise benefits such as cost savings on logistics and distribution, enhanced buying power, greater sustainability and consolidated customer service.

Identified good practice

23. The MPS and BTP place a strong emphasis on customer service and increasing officer and staff awareness of uniform services. Both forces have clear pathways for officers to engage with senior leaders.
24. Notable initiatives include the use of internal communication and engagement tools, particularly the intranet and dedicated Viva Engage social networking platform. We found these to be modern, user-centric platforms designed to enhance operational efficiency and service delivery, allowing quick access to policy documents, uniform ordering, uniform standards and the latest news and events.
25. Kit lists in the MPS are accompanied by visual aids (including pictures and videos) to reinforce standards. Officers and staff can suggest ideas and provide feedback, which encourages creative thinking and continuous improvement, placing the operational experience and needs of those on the frontline at the heart of decision making.
26. We heard that the MPS has a frontline user working group (FLUWG) where representatives from across frontline policing are encouraged to come together to discuss all matters affecting the uniform that they wear. Each BCU has a lead who seeks and gathers feedback from colleagues. Uniform Services also has members in the group, to consider and action any relevant feedback.
27. MPS run a uniform points-based system, whereby each officer receives an annual allocation to procure uniform and equipment. Items are individually valued, helping to manage stock and costs effectively.
28. Officers and staff are encouraged to take ownership over what they require and when they require it. The MPS is planning to transition from the points system to a 'scales of allocation' approach, allowing more structured provisioning.

29. We learned that the MPS operates a mobile fitting service, where uniform teams regularly visit sites across the service, to ensure proper fit and collect feedback. MPS and BTP also host roadshows to showcase new uniform options and gather input from officers and staff. This improves service accessibility and visibility.
30. In addition, MPS offers tailoring services to support staff with sizing, medical, or religious needs. This provides a technical one-to-one (TOTO) service.



Leadership and vision

31. Police Scotland's clothing and equipment working group (CEWG) meets bi-monthly and is the primary forum for discussing uniform and PPE.
32. Most officers and staff interviewed as part of this review had never heard of the CEWG.
33. We heard that Police Scotland was characterised as not having a clear and consistent vision for frontline officers. A lack of governance, corporate communication and ownership has led to inconsistency in how frontline officers look, with a perceived decline in uniform standards and professional appearance.
34. Our review established that the CEWG lacked ownership, cohesion and direction, and that it was failing to address many of the issues concerning uniform and PPE.
35. It was recognised that the group had previously been chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) but the role now sits with the Chief Superintendent of OSD, Specialist Services, and has done for a while but there have been a number of postholders over the years. The group was viewed as being unable to deliver positive outcomes proficiently, with no budgetary responsibility and timescales for change described as drawn out and inefficient. The working group appeared not to record minutes of its meetings.
36. The composition and structure of the working group should ensure that the views and experiences of frontline officers are regularly represented and that a consistent approach is taken on which ranks are in attendance. We heard that a significant breakdown in communication, co-ordination, and accountability endured across departments responsible for uniform and equipment decisions.
37. Any decisions taken by the group on uniform and equipment changes should only occur after proper consultation, co-ordination and planning, to reduce obsolete stock and waste.



- 38. We engaged with enthusiastic and committed staff working in roles across procurement and stores. We heard of an absence of strategic direction, resulting in accidental or reactive uniform changes, rather than deliberate, well-informed decision making.
- 39. We heard that disbanded feedback mechanisms (Chief Constable's Forum), lack of leadership follow-through, and ineffective working groups have led to stalled progress on key initiatives such as uniform trials and body armour fitting guidance (video).

Recommendation 1

Police Scotland should improve the effectiveness of the clothing and equipment working group as a decision making body.

- 40. During our review visits it was clear that this had been the only occasion many officers and staff could recall being asked to comment on their uniform or equipment.
- 41. A prevalent opinion expressed to us was that the leadership in Police Scotland had limited, if any, exposure to the common issues concerning uniform.
- 42. We found no established platforms or processes within Police Scotland to encourage feedback or understand the views of its officers and staff on uniform and equipment.

43. Officers reported escalating concerns about uniform and equipment to their supervisors, yet received no acknowledgment or feedback from the broader organisation. This apparent indifference leads to a sense that challenge and feedback is generally not encouraged or welcomed.

44. Many of those officers and staff interviewed advised that there appeared to be no tangible consultation process for the procurement of any new items of uniform or equipment. Decision makers are viewed as being too far removed from the realities of the frontline to consider the practicalities of uniform issues. Our benchmarking showed us that other police forces have embraced various engagement methods to connect with their workforce. Frontline officers and staff regularly use these pathways to engage with working groups and senior management, sharing perspectives, contributing to discussions, and shaping decisions.

45. We also heard from staff working across stores and procurement that it is easier to engage with specialist departments regarding their requirements. Views and feedback expressed by specialist units - through a nominated single point of contact - seem to be communicated more easily than those working in frontline roles.



Recommendation 2

Police Scotland should improve its engagement with frontline officers and staff about their uniform and equipment requirements and ensure their opinions are represented at the clothing and equipment working group.



46. Officers and staff associations noted that, on completion of their initial probationary training, there was a need for better supervision of the standards of uniform and appearance exhibited by many probationary officers.
47. Officers reported that standards to maintain the values of the police service - instilled at recruitment, at police college, by tutor constables and supervisors, has declined over time when faced with practicalities on the frontline.
48. We heard that there are conflicting messages and differences in the way that Police Scotland's standards of appearance are upheld and applied against Police Scotland's Uniform and Appearance Standards (police officers) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).
49. Working groups established to improve standards often disbanded without follow-through, resulting in a lack of lasting governance or support. Additionally, a redrafted procedure on current uniform and appearance standards has been awaiting decisions for some time.
50. We spoke with many officers and staff who recognise the police uniform as a vital symbol of professionalism and standards, reinforcing its importance within the service. A tidy, well-maintained uniform was perceived as crucial for maintaining the force's reputation and public image, and upholding its vision and values.

51. We found officers to dress more casually, with less conformity (e.g., wearing too much jewellery and make-up). This cultural shift was regularly mentioned as having an impact on the force's public image.
52. This absence of conformity, with officers choosing to wear alternative items of police uniform, was regularly commented upon as being unacceptable and a significant contributory factor to a general drop in standards.
53. Discussions with frontline officers across various ranks revealed that many supervisory officers lacked confidence in enforcing uniform appearance standards. However, there is still an expectation that supervisors should monitor uniform standards, and that they should address appearance issues to help maintain consistency and professionalism.



54. The uniform and appearance standards (police officers) SOP, provides clear strategic direction for officers of all ranks, but it was clear from those we spoke to that the standards and guidance are not universally observed or applied.
55. The uniform helps in projecting a professional and disciplined appearance appropriate to the role. The uniform standards are also informed by health and safety considerations to ensure that officers can perform their duties safely.
56. Our inspectors observed a frequent lack of consistency in uniform appearance, with standards varying across officers. Supervisors openly admitted they were often unwilling to challenge appearance issues, due to a lack of knowledge, guidance, training - and a fear of negative repercussions.
57. Enforcing standards on appearance and uniform was not viewed as a priority, given the operational challenges faced by supervisors in some areas.

Recommendation 3

Police Scotland should ensure compliance with policy on standards of uniform and appearance, reasserting the training and guidance provided to supervisors, empowering them to effectively uphold those standards.

58. There is a strong perception that senior officers and those in specialist roles are provided with a better range and quality of uniform clothing. We heard repeated comments from frontline officers, staff and supervisors that the choice and quality of uniform was poor - and we saw this first hand, with officers showing us faded trousers and torn microfleece. There was a notion that all decisions on the uniform and equipment provided to frontline officers were predicated on cost, ahead of quality.
59. These views contrasted starkly with how officers interpreted the uniform supplied to specialist officers, teams and senior officers across Police Scotland, with a generally-held view that there was more investment in the range and quality of uniform available to these groups.

60. We heard examples of crime scene managers wearing jackets that are widely regarded as a superior, longer-lasting garment, while frontline officers - on a cordon for an entire shift - had to make do with an inferior-quality jacket. There was resentment that a perceived system exists in Police Scotland, whereby frontline officers are prevented from accessing the best uniform and equipment available.

61. It was noted that officers in specialist posts, along with members of the force executive, presented themselves with greater

conformity, resulting in a professional appearance.

Conversely, frontline officers often had significant variations in dress code, projecting an unprofessional image. Officers spoke openly of feeling undervalued and that no one appeared interested in addressing this imbalance.

62. The general feeling is that the current system is unfair, and frontline officers should be equally, if not better, provisioned, for the roles they perform.

Recommendation 4

Police Scotland should ensure frontline officers are provided with the same quality of core uniform options available to senior leadership and specialist roles to meet their operational needs.



Sustainable uniform practices

63. There is a strong perception that more could be done to recycle uniform and equipment, in line with Police Scotland's stated commitment to the environment.
64. We found the opinion among those interviewed was that sustainability regarding uniforms was not high on the agenda for Police Scotland. This was reflected in the commonly-held view that certain items of uniform were of such poor quality that they were regularly disposed of and replaced.
65. Officers and staff we met had little or no understanding of what happened to discarded items of uniform, which are often left in locker rooms, makeshift clothing bins or black bin bags in stations. We heard from frontline officers that they would actively look to re-use and repurpose items that had otherwise been discarded by colleagues.
66. Officers interviewed had no awareness of Police Scotland's approach to uniform sustainability and environmental considerations. They did not know if used clothing was ever re-purposed and many of them did not know what formal process was in place for returning clothing to a stores location.
67. Many officers expressed openness to the idea of accessing used uniform items to reduce waste and promote sustainability. There was a strongly-held belief that Police Scotland should spend to save.
68. Officers concluded that more investment in better quality uniforms at the outset would result in fewer items being ordered, reducing waste in the system. The view that 'if you buy cheap, you buy twice' was echoed across those interviewed.
69. The procurement strategy shows Police Scotland considers and promotes environmental concerns in procurement through key commitments, which include environmental sustainability. It does not, however, specifically mention uniform and equipment.

Area for development 1

More should be done to explore the potential for re-using items of uniform and equipment. Police Scotland should monitor how much uniform is being returned, and why, to ensure that best value is being delivered.

Procurement

70. We heard from various sources that inefficiencies and misaligned decision making in uniform and equipment procurement are the cause of delays, wasted resources, and dissatisfaction among frontline officers.
71. Police Scotland and Poileas Alba is embroidered on the sleeves of All Climate Shirts (ACS) at a considerable cost. Corporate identity was raised specifically regarding the ACS worn by Police Scotland officers. It was identified that these uniform items are exactly the same ACS as those worn by the majority of other UK forces now using the Bluelight Commercial (BLC) Framework, except for the bespoke embroidery.
72. The force executive made the decision to have 'Police Scotland' and 'Poileas Alba' embroidered on to the sleeves of the All Climate Shirts (ACS). This adds a cost year on year, but there is no added value to the quality of the garment and the views expressed were that the money could be invested elsewhere, to improve uniform or equipment. It has been advised that of the approx. forty-two Police Forces in the UK

purchasing their ACS through the Bluelight Commercial (BLC) Framework, all but three now purchase the ACS with no embroidery on it.

73. On speaking with officers, we heard repeatedly that they saw no requirement or value in the name of the force being embroidered on tops, which were regularly worn under fleeces or jackets. Police Scotland should reconsider the need for the bespoke embroidered 'Police Scotland and Poileas Alba' logos on tops to provide an ongoing efficiency saving.

Area for development 2

Police Scotland should consider whether the cost associated with having the embroidered 'Police Scotland and Poileas Alba' logo on its tops represents value for money.



Health and safety

74. Health and safety remains a key consideration when issuing uniform and equipment. There is a health and safety action plan detailing the high-level actions needed to reach the overall goal of continuous improvement in the management of health and safety, and compliance with legislation, but police issue uniform is not specifically referenced.
75. Potential health and safety concerns arise when officers purchase personal uniform and equipment (e.g., non-compliant carriers).
76. Officers and staff associations welcomed the introduction of Tasers and BWV, considering both to be long overdue. Their deployment was widely regarded as a positive step toward enhancing officer protection during operational duties.
77. There is evidence within the procurement uniform lists that health and safety is considered, with frontline officers being provided with reusable masks, Covid PPE kit, first aid and spit masks, etc.
78. The wildlife officer (a specialist role), is issued with tick remover, tick and midge repellent and a thermal flask. Motorcyclists are provided with protective ear plugs. Safety goggles are also on the procurement list.
79. Operational officer standard issue lists include provision of ear defenders; these are compatible with airwave radios and are aimed at lowering potentially dangerous noise levels.



Delivery

Uniform ordering and distribution

80. While the introduction of an online stores portal has been seen as positive, the way in which officers and staff access uniform and equipment needs further modernisation.
81. We heard from stores that the digital transformation into an online ordering portal was a success for the department and was well received (although, effective reporting through PowerBi took longer to complete than anticipated).
82. Stores bypassed the standard digital transformation pathway, engaging ICT directly to repurpose an existing Police Scotland system. However, this interim solution lacks a comprehensive warehouse management capability, limiting end-to-end process efficiency. With restricted functionality and limited scope for improvement or evolution, a fully bespoke, modern warehouse management system is required.
83. Officers reported that the online ordering portal is confusing and time-consuming to navigate. The distinction between standard issue items is unclear, and item codes can be difficult to interpret. Introducing videos or images would improve usability. Officers are also unaware of the process for reporting defects.
84. In contrast, our benchmarking showed that the MPS's uniform ordering system (via the NUMS contract), is linked to an officer's HR profile, with intuitive navigation, clear item descriptions, effective filtering and a streamlined defect reporting feature.
85. A fully bespoke, modern system is needed to meet current and future requirements of the service.

Recommendation 5

Police Scotland should implement a modern, user-friendly online ordering system tailored to officer and staff needs.

86. Stores reported that 95 per cent of orders are fulfilled within five days, based on data extracted from the online ordering portal and analysed through the PowerBI dashboard. However, officers and staff have indicated that the customer service provided by the stores department needs improvement.
87. During our interviews, officers shared instances of waiting up to three months for stock deliveries. Stores staff attribute any lengthy delays to the complexity of the supply chain. Routinely, lead times can be 3-6 months across most products. Stores utilise the overnight service from DX and Police Staff Drivers when shipping orders, however there are limitations in this provision to more rural areas, for example mailroom drivers in west command only deliver orders as far as Dumbarton when delivering to Lochgilphead in L Division.
88. We heard from officers in Oban, Lochgilphead and Isle of Mull that, as they no longer had access to a police staff driver, orders could only be collected when operational officers were travelling to Dumbarton (a round-trip approaching four hours). This clearly causes delays for officers accessing replacement uniform and equipment in more remote locations.
89. Stores staff told us that they would like to see the delivery function brought in-house to enhance service quality and operational efficiency. By managing the end-to-end process, they would be able to gain greater control over timelines, customer communication and overall experience.
90. We heard from officers that they do not know if a measuring or fitting service is available, but would welcome such a service (particularly those in rural locations).
91. The MPS's mobile fitting and tailoring service is an excellent example of a customer-focused approach, and MPS intranet videos were shown to improve awareness of Uniform Services, and service delivery and standards.

Area for development 3

Police Scotland stores department should take steps to enhance the customer service it provides to frontline officers and staff.

92. During our review, many officers and police staff told us that - because of the poor quality, fit and durability of clothing and equipment provided - they purchased their own items of uniform clothing and equipment.

93. We found the experience of frontline response officers purchasing replacement items of clothing from online websites has become normalised across the country. This results in a lack of consistency in appearance.

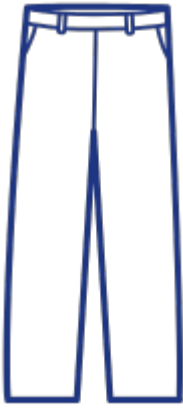
94. Officers considered that the uniform alternatives they found in online stores were better quality, better-looking and more robust. One officer reported that two pairs of trousers he purchased online lasted for seven years.

95. Officers demonstrated a willingness to invest personally in higher-quality clothing for operational duties. The alternatively-sourced uniform was widely perceived as more professional and practical; however, both officers and supervisors acknowledged that this led to inconsistencies in uniformity across teams.

96. Conversations with frontline officers revealed that many continue to wear legacy uniform items issued before the formation of Police Scotland, passed down by retiring colleagues, or simply left unclaimed in police stations.

97. When speaking with officers and staff, we found general dissatisfaction with standard issue trousers, jackets, microfleecees and footwear.





98. Our inspection found widespread agreement among officers that standard issue uniform trousers for frontline response roles are inadequate in terms of quality, fit and appearance.

99. Officers noted that trousers issued to firearms and cycle-trained personnel are of superior quality, yet rarely provided to frontline response teams, reinforcing a sense that their role is undervalued within Police Scotland.

100. Most officers we spoke to raised concerns about poor material quality, rapid colour fading, lack of stretch, and an ill-fitting design (leading many female officers to resort to ordering male sizes). As a result, we heard that many officers now purchase their own alternatives online.

101. Police Scotland should seek alternative standard issue uniform trousers that are made of higher quality, stretchable materials that accommodate diverse body types, including a proper fit for females.

102. It should also consider adopting the higher-standard trousers already provided to specialist units, as the new default.

103. Officers reported that jackets are inadequate in terms of quality, fit, durability and functionality. They noted that the design fails to provide coverage below the waist, leaving them exposed to rain. As a result, many opt to purchase their own softshell jackets.

104. Additionally, while officers in A and N divisions receive long, high-visibility jackets (typically issued to road policing officers), those working in rural areas of L Division do not have access to the same provision.





105. Officers and staff reported that the microfleece doesn't keep them warm as it is too thin and made from poor-quality material. We also heard that it could become misshapen when washed, and that it is often too short in the arms and too long in the body.

106. Officers welcomed Police Scotland's decision to issue boots as standard for all frontline personnel.

107. The original footwear supplied by the previous retailer was well-regarded and praised for its durability and professional appearance. However, many officers expressed dissatisfaction with its replacement from a new supplier, describing as aesthetically unprofessional in appearance. As a result, many have opted to purchase their own footwear, often discarding the standard issue boots entirely.



Recommendation 6

Police Scotland should improve the quality and fit of trousers, jackets, microfleece and footwear to address concerns regarding standards of professional appearance.

Equality and uniform options

108. There is a need to improve awareness and availability of suitable items of uniform for officers and staff with specific requirements; for example, officers and staff with menopausal symptoms, who are pregnant, or medical conditions. We acknowledge the continued efforts of the Scottish Women's Development Forum to raise issues in this area and modernise the uniform.

109. We heard from many officers that they were unaware of any alternatives for women experiencing menopausal symptoms and had therefore purchased their own alternatives.

110. We also heard of officers who had experienced difficulties in obtaining alternatives available in Police Scotland, because of scrutiny at line management and within business support units - this is, again, perceived to be driven by cost and budgets.



111. We heard from stores staff that there has been a lack of clear communication and planning regarding the provision of hypoallergenic tops for officers. For instance, the introduction of cotton menopause tops was not adequately assessed for suitability, resulting in discomfort and hygiene problems. Another issue that came up was the lack of flexibility in the material used for trousers (which didn't address issues such as bloating).

112. Nor has there been any follow-up on the effectiveness (or otherwise) of such initiatives, and their effect on uniform standardisation.

Area for development 4

Police Scotland should improve awareness of and access to suitable uniform alternatives for officers and staff with specific requirements.

113. We found that - regardless of the environment that officers and staff are working in - they are generally issued with the same uniform and equipment, even though their working conditions and the requirements of their roles may be quite different.

114. Our inspectors spoke directly with officers in rural locations, who reported that their issued uniform was often inadequate for keeping them warm and dry while on patrol or carrying out their duties in response and community teams.

115. The officers commented that they were often working in exposed, colder weather conditions and, as such, they had an expectation they should be provided with uniform options that are designed to meet the challenges officers face.

116. Officers working in rural or colder conditions, or on the fast roads network, should be provided with appropriate clothing to ensure safety, comfort and operational effectiveness.

Area for development 5

Police Scotland should consider issuing uniform and equipment tailored to specific frontline operational needs.

Headwear

117. We heard mixed views about police-issue hats. While the traditional police hats were seen as smarter and more professional-looking, baseball caps were seen as more practical (although many officers felt the quality of the baseball caps provided was poor).

118. The uniform and appearance standards (police officers) SOP indicates a general requirement for police headwear; namely, it must be worn at all times while officers are in operational uniform in an external environment, unless it impedes the officer in the execution of their duties.



119. It also provides consideration of protected characteristics. Such provisions ensure that officers can adhere to their cultural, religious and gender identity, while maintaining professional standards and complying with health and safety.
120. BTP takes a pragmatic approach to the wearing of formal hats and officers are given the choice to wear either. BTP chose not to procure a gender-neutral formal hat and do not refer to any of the three hats available in gender-specific terms.
121. The message passed from BTP is that officers can wear whichever they prefer - the flat cap or the bowler. Feedback provided on hats in general, and a gender-neutral hat option, highlighted a trade-off between comfort/practicality and formality/protection.
122. We heard that most officers still preferred to wear the more formal flat (traditionally male) or bowler hat (traditionally female), as it was seen to portray a more professional image. Feedback on the current baseball cap reported that it was poorly fitted and of cheap quality and presented a less-professional look to members of the public.
123. Police Scotland has not made a final decision on a gender-neutral hat, despite the issue being ongoing for years. There remains no agreed alternative to male/female hats. The baseball cap was introduced by the CEWG as a gender-neutral option. Initially for specialists only, it became standard issue due to high demand.

124. It was encouraging to learn that the ACC for Policing Together division is taking responsibility for resolving the gender-neutral hat issue.

Area for development 6

Police Scotland should revisit and define its position on headgear to provide clarity for frontline officers.

Personal protective equipment

125. Our review found that officers were generally very positive about the PPE they are issued and the accompanying officer safety training (OST) provided.

126. The majority of those interviewed believed their PPE was generally effective and fit for purpose. The current iteration of OST was seen as the best it had been in years, in terms of teaching basic skills and techniques and administering practical first aid.

127. Given the increasing demands on officers to carry additional equipment, it was suggested that a tactical vest carriage system be considered as an option. This would be worn over body armour, enhancing practicality and accessibility. The existing utility vest, also worn over body armour, is increasingly unable to accommodate the growing amount of equipment, leading to excessive weight, sagging, and an untidy appearance.

128. Many officers we spoke to stated that the high-visibility vest looks less professional – and is more suited to security staff than to police officers. Others commented that the fluorescent nature of the vests made them stand out too much, making them less effective in catching criminals.



129. High-visibility vests are designed with pockets, whereas the black body armour cover lacks built-in storage. As a result, some officers have resorted to sewing their own pockets on to the body armour cover to accommodate essential equipment.

Area for development 7

Police Scotland should consider a transition to a tactical vest offering both high-visibility and non-high-visibility options, to ensure operational effectiveness.

130. We heard from officers about the weight and bulkiness of the body armour and the fact it is not fitted to meet the requirements of all officers with different body types (in particular, female officers).

131. We heard from both male and female officers, staff and representatives from staff associations that body armour was still too heavy and not fitted properly, (for example, riding up and hitting officers on the chin when sitting in a vehicle).

132. Officers reported feeling excessively bulky when required to wear body armour, the high-visibility cover, and all necessary equipment, with BWV yet to be introduced. This excessive load can contribute to back pain and other health issues.

133. During the onsite visit to the stores team, we heard that different forces across the UK have different protection levels in respect of body armour and that the standard body armour issued in Police Scotland since 2019/20, is to the latest Home Office Body Armour Standards (2017).

Area for development 8

Police Scotland should take cognisance of officer's feedback and consider reducing the weight and improving the comfort of body armour.

134. Officers provided highly positive feedback regarding the introduction of Taser, with a strong consensus that its deployment should be expanded to more, if not all, frontline officers. Officers found it to be an effective deterrent to prevent potentially dangerous situations from escalating.

135. One identified challenge is that not all police stations are equipped to store Taser units, requiring trained officers to travel to another station at both the beginning and end of their shift to collect and return their equipment.

136. This is not an efficient use of officer time and means the Taser is not as readily available as it should be.

Area for development 9

Police Scotland should consider making Taser an available option for all operational officers.

137. There were concerns raised about the durability of the baton clip, Pava incapacitant spray holder and Taser holder, which can compromise the functionality of the officer safety equipment issued to officers.



138. Officers reported concerns about the durability of clips used to secure PPE, noting that they often failed to withstand regular use and were perceived as being of low quality.

139. We heard of instances of officers dropping or having items of PPE removed by suspects while attempting to apprehend them. This is concerning in terms of personal safety.

Area for development 10

Police Scotland should upgrade PPE holders to more durable models.

142. A broader concern was the limited contact from officers and supervisors to check on their welfare, which reinforced feelings of isolation.

143. Despite being required to work outdoors on occasion, police staff we spoke to were not issued with a fleece or jacket to protect them against inclement weather.

Area for development 11

Police Scotland should issue appropriate safety and communication equipment to all front counter staff.

Public enquiry and support assistants

140. Some police staff in front counter roles reported feeling isolated due to a lack of suitable uniform, PPE and communications tools for their safety.

141. Public enquiry and support assistants also raised concerns about personal security, citing the absence of CCTV cameras and panic strips to signal incidents or provide corroboration. Furthermore, there was no indication that BWV would be allocated to police staff in these roles.



Plain clothes officers

144. In addition to frontline response and community officers, we also heard from plain clothes officers who worked in reactive CID roles.

145. We found that not all plain clothes officers have been issued with carriage systems to covertly and safely carry PPE that is compatible with non-uniform dress, when on duty.

146. While those officers performing plain clothes roles had access to operational uniform (as they were often deployed to events), they rarely wore PPE while on standard plain clothes duties.

147. It was seen as rare for a plain clothes officer to have covert body armour, and covert holders for baton, handcuffs and PAVA were not routinely issued to plain clothes officers when taking up a role in CID.

148. We heard that CID officers must request covert holders through local business support units; the level of support provided for these requests varied across the country.

149. The allocation of covert holders for securely storing and accessing PPE was inconsistent. As a result, CID officers often had to rely on pockets or bags, which proved less efficient. Additionally, the absence of these holders on the self-service portal highlights a gap in stores provision.

Area for development 12

Police Scotland should issue an appropriate PPE carriage facility to all plain clothes officers.



IT and communications

150. Although long overdue, officers we spoke to were very positive about the national rollout of BWV, describing it as a deterrent to crime and a positive step forward for Police Scotland in securing better quality evidence. Officers anticipate an increase in safety, a reduction in the number of malicious complaints, and less time spent at court.
151. The introduction of new software, Digital Evidence Sharing Capability (DESC), also received positive comments. This enables police officers, prosecutors, defence lawyers and court staff to access a secure, unified system to collect, store and manage evidence digitally.
152. Officers were extremely positive about their mobile devices and access to information while on patrols. CID officers are issued with a Samsung tablet to assist with statement taking (and other tasks) and these were seen as positive additions, assisting officers in their roles and saving time. The PRONTO application (converging crime and non-crime applications on a mobile device) was seen as a considerable step forward.
153. Officers did state that their mobile devices would be better if they had access to all desktop applications, (for example, commonly used forms and the Scottish Intelligence Database). This would enhance the range of information and intelligence officers have at their disposal while on patrol.
154. Our inspectors heard that IT systems and applications (desktop) have improved considerably; however, the interface between the systems can still be poor and lead to repetition of work.
155. We heard during interviews with officers that a more user-friendly system that reduced duplication would help to minimise time spent re-keying information.

Area for development 13

Police Scotland should continue to develop and expand mobile device access to key forms and systems, to match desktop capabilities, thus reduce repetition and improving efficiency for officers.

Other equipment

156. Frontline officers repeatedly reported that the issued torches are inadequate, citing concerns about durability, brightness, battery life and overall usability. Many also noted their limited functionality, leading most to purchase their own, at personal expense.

Area for development 14

Police Scotland should procure and issue torches that better fulfil operational requirements.

157. Some police stations we visited lacked access to a colour printer, requiring officers to travel long distances to obtain essential colour printouts (such as photo boards) necessary for their duties. This issue was particularly evident in more rural stations.

158. Exploring a secure digital solution for tasks such as photo boards could help reduce reliance on physical colour prints and improve efficiency.

159. We also heard that mobile printers were often unavailable to officers while on duty, affecting their ability to issue paperwork. Officers in A and L divisions told us that this is problematic in terms of providing an efficient and effective service to the public.

Area for development 15

Police Scotland should ensure that all frontline response officers have access to mobile printers. It should also improve the provision of colour printing facilities at police stations.





Outcomes

- 160. Police Scotland does not evaluate the effectiveness of uniform issued to officers and staff.
- 161. Many officers and staff informed our inspectors this review was the first time anyone had asked their opinion or invited feedback about the effectiveness of their uniform.
- 162. We also heard from stores and logistics staff, staff associations and other key stakeholders that they have no awareness of the current methods used by Police Scotland to evaluate the effectiveness of uniform and equipment.
- 164. Commenting platforms, opinion tools and other feedback processes (such as those used by the MPS and BTP) would assist the leadership of Police Scotland and the CEWG in making more informed decisions.

163. Conducting regular, targeted feedback surveys, field testing, and performance reviews to evaluate comfort, durability, practicality, and operational suitability would generate valuable insights to inform continuous improvement.

165. No outcome relevant documents were supplied by Police Scotland as part of the formal document request.

Area for development 16

Police Scotland should implement a structured evaluation process for uniform and equipment.



Improving
Policing
Across
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