



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Thursday, 26 September, 2019

PRESS RELEASE

HMICS publishes Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority

The Scottish model for governance of policing in Scotland by an independent authority is a sound one, states a report published today (26 September 2019).

The report from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) also noted there has been genuine progress at the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) over the past 18-24 months.

However it also found that, six years after it was established, challenges still remain for the SPA in terms of fulfilling its core statutory role.

The aim of the inspection was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the SPA in terms of fulfilling its core role and scrutinise how it was meeting its statutory obligations.

It examined issues relating to the SPA in terms of its role, responsibilities and relationships with Police Scotland, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament, and the separation of politics from policing.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mrs Gill Imery QPM, believes the difficulty arises from the interpretation and implementation of the Act which established the SPA, and reflects that each of the three Chairs of the SPA has had a different view of how the organisation should work.

The report makes 14 recommendations, including one relating to the need for clarity about the overall governance arrangements for policing in Scotland and the implications of any points of difference between the SPA and other statutory boards.

“These variations over the years have caused uncertainty for staff and there is continued confusion about how the SPA should fulfil its governance role as defined in the Act, with few members of the public understanding its role,” she said.

HMICS found that, despite numerous past recommendations to tackle structural issues to address constrained capacity and capability within the SPA corporate function as a matter of urgency, there has been limited progress in this area in the past two years.

Mrs Imery stated, “This lack of pace has had a profound effect on a number of SPA staff in terms of morale and wellbeing.”

“A recurring theme is the limited ability of the SPA Board to recognise issues of significant public interest and effectively to hold Police Scotland to account for decisions that impact on

communities,” added Mrs Imery. The report also recommends that local authorities be formally represented on the SPA Board.

SPA financial reporting shows a definite improvement in the quality of information being produced but concerns remain about the ability to balance its budget. Given the financial challenges facing policing, there are limitations on the ability of the SPA to discharge effectively its maintenance function. Until recently, the SPA has not been overt about making the case in public for increased funding for policing.

In addition to its scrutiny role, the SPA also provides forensic services to Police Scotland, the COPFS and the PIRC, and runs the Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. HMICS believes there is an inherent conflict of interest in the SPA being both a service provider to and scrutiny body of Police Scotland.

Mrs Imery concluded that “Whilst improvements have been made, I consider that the SPA still requires to demonstrate fully the value it adds to policing in Scotland through its statutory role and relationships. I am confident that with the right leadership and supporting resources in place, this can be achieved.”

Ends

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Scottish Police Authority was established under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and its main functions are:

- To maintain the Police Service
- To promote the policing principles
- To promote and support continuous improvement in the policing of Scotland
- To keep under review the policing of Scotland; and
- To hold the Chief Constable to account for the policing of Scotland.

A number of other statutory responsibilities are set out for the SPA within the Act. Whilst the SPA is required to fulfil these functions and responsibilities, the Act does not prescribe how they are to be fulfilled or delivered and does not explicitly state that the SPA as an organisation must have the capacity and capability within its own organisation to directly meet these obligations.

The HMICS Thematic Inspection of the Scottish Police Authority is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.scot from 1300hrs, Thursday, 26 September, 2019.

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