



HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
Improving Policing across Scotland

Friday, 13 August, 2021

PRESS RELEASE

HMICS Annual Report 2020-2021

The report published today (Friday 13 August, 2021) highlights Police Scotland's important role in supporting the national response to the pandemic and the strength and stability of its leadership during the public health emergency.

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mrs Gill Imery QPM, said, "Having one police service for Scotland helped achieve consistency in leadership direction, interpretation and implementation of legislation. Police Scotland's public messages repeatedly emphasised working with the public as fellow citizens, maintaining the principle of policing by consent and building legitimacy, despite the extraordinary additional police powers to restrict people's individual freedoms."

"Police Scotland leaders praised the efforts of the public to comply with these constraints because it was the right thing to do, not because it was the law. At the same time, the Chief Constable has consistently asserted his operational independence, making it clear that he and the police officers under his direction and control, will continue to use discretion to respond appropriately in operational situations. Operational independence does not equate to a lack of accountability."

Mrs Imery commends the commitment and dedication of police officers and staff on the frontline who continue to carry out their duties, largely without the option to work from home.

In April 2020 when the first lockdown began, Police Scotland initiated an Independent Advisory Group, chaired by John Scott QC, which reports regularly to the Scottish Police Authority. Mrs Imery is a member of this group and believes it helps provide the police with an understanding of the impact of coronavirus on communities.

"One of the key themes to emerge from the IAG is the unequal impact of the virus, and associated restrictions, on different sections of society and how the situation amplified existing inequalities," she said.

Another prominent feature of the past year has been the wave of protests around the world against racism, climate change and violence against women. These present challenges for policing in terms of community tensions, especially when taking place during periods of covid restrictions. The report notes the IAG reviewed some of these incidents in Scotland and concluded the overall policing approach was informed by, and consistent with, human rights principles.

In common with other inspection bodies and many organisations, HMICS suspended its planned work programme in April last year and published a revised plan in August. This plan has been largely fulfilled with a few delays and changes to working practices to accommodate Covid limitations.

Police Scotland was allocated £60 million additional core funding earlier this year and HMICS urges the service to develop an overall strategic vision for the shape and size of its future workforce, based on information on the demand for policing, to ensure the most effective use of expensive public resources.

Mrs Imery notes the significant improvements made by Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to progress responses to recommendations made by HMICS in its inspection reports. She also comments positively on the changes at a senior level within the SPA which is providing 'calm and sensible' leadership, and which she expects to assert more rigorous scrutiny of Police Scotland when required.

The Scottish Police Authority has established an oversight group for the forthcoming UN Climate Change conference, known as COP26. During 2020, HMICS carried out an assurance review of three aspects of the planning for COP26: the impact on business as usual; wellbeing arrangements for officers and staff, and resources. The SPA's oversight group receives regular updates from Police Scotland and HMICS, and continues to monitor progress in advance of the event.

It is with a degree of disappointment that HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mrs Gill Imery QPM, comments in her annual report that another year has passed without any joint inspection of the availability and quality of healthcare provided to detainees in police custody, many of whom have pre-existing health challenges.

"Discussions are ongoing with Healthcare Improvement Scotland and it is anticipated the first joint inspections will take place later in 2021. The fact remains that the healthcare for members of the public who come into police custody, often with or as a result of health issues, has not been inspected since 2013 when NHS Scotland took over responsibility for the provision of the service," she said.

HMICS provides independent scrutiny of both Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority. Its approach is to support Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority to deliver services that are high quality, continually improving, effective and responsive to local needs.

The annual report outlines how HMICS carried out its statutory function for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The HMICS Annual Report 2020-2021 is available to download at the HMICS website www.hmics.scot from 1100hrs, Friday, 13 August 2021.

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