I am writing to provide our response to the Audit Scotland report on police reform. We welcome the Auditor General’s focus on the work undertaken in the transition to a single policing service and as with all other reports, we will take careful consideration of the recommendations made.

I would like to welcome the acknowledgement that frontline policing services have been maintained during the transition and that progress has been made towards the benefits of reform, however I feel this does not truly recognise the achievements delivered by colleagues in Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and Scottish Government.

The move to a single policing service for Scotland, merging responsibilities from ten organisations into one, with new legislation and new organisations, has meant the biggest change in Scottish policing in a generation. While much planning was already underway, the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent in the summer of 2012 and was delivered less than a year later. This is a significant achievement and has attracted worldwide interest from the policing community.

The pace of change meant many people put in a great deal of effort to secure a smooth transition and minimise any impact on day to day policing services. This was successfully achieved and we have come a long way since the early days of my appointment just over a year ago.

The first six months of Police Scotland have also seen the early benefits of reform being delivered. Our policing focus is on keeping people safe and all our objectives are targeted towards achieving this and maintaining high levels of public confidence.

Local policing is at the heart of the service. We have introduced local policing and multi member ward plans for the whole of the country which ensures we are tackling the issues that matter most to our local communities.

Scrutiny and engagement boards have been introduced in every local authority area. The Boards are already holding Police Scotland to account on the delivery of policing at a local level ensuring increased responsibility and accountability. There has been an increase in the number of elected members involved in local scrutiny arrangements, with over 90% of local authority areas with increased involvement.

A new single number for non-emergency calls has been introduced for the whole of Scotland making it easy to contact Police Scotland no matter where you are in the country. Already more than 50% of non-emergency calls are coming through 101, contributing to our ability to better deal with emergency calls as they come through.

In addition to the non-emergency number, Police Scotland has more than 350,000 people engaging with the Service through the corporate website and social media channels.

Our local policing teams are now complemented by national specialist units, ensuring police officers can draw on specialist expertise to support them in their...
work. The Operational Support Division delivers a truly national service with legacy force boundaries no longer restricting accessibility to resources including Air Support and Mounted branch. Between 1 April and 24 July 2013, the Air Support Unit attended 1,000 calls across the whole of Scotland contributing to Police Scotland’s commitment to keeping people safe. It has been used in all 14 local policing divisions and has taken part in almost 200 missing person searches.

Specialist units have been introduced across Scotland including units setting national strategy for rape investigation, domestic abuse and human trafficking. The introduction of these functions alongside specialist investigative units contributes to enhanced service delivery and accessibility of specialist resources across the country.

Other examples include a new Fugitives Unit, set up to trace and locate people wanted on European/international arrest warrants – either in Scotland or throughout the world, following escape from Scottish investigations. The unit works closely with authorities in other countries and has already arrested over 50 people wanted on warrant. Several of these people were arrested abroad and have been brought back to Scotland to face justice.

A new National Human Trafficking Unit and divisional champions are helping to ensure a consistent approach to the investigation of human trafficking incidents. This also includes close liaison with partner agencies to ensure increased awareness and ability to identify emerging issues.

The National Rape Task Force is ensuring consistent high standards in all aspects of rape investigation across the country. This unit is dedicated to working with partner agencies to deliver the best possible care to victims.

The new Border Policing Command is helping maintain national security and tackle human and drug trafficking through the deployment of dedicated resources at our aviation and maritime ports.

We want to provide a greater focus than ever before on improving road safety. Divisional Road Policing Units and the Trunk Road Policing Unit now deliver both national and localised roads policing support, helping to reduce road casualties, deter poor driver behaviour, target criminals using the roads and deal with local road safety concerns.

The creation of the Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism Unit has increased our ability to identify emerging threats and risks, ensuring the required response at a local and national level is effective and ensuring resources are used effectively to investigate both types of crime.

Establishing Police Scotland on 1 April 2013 was a significant milestone in the journey to create a national police service for Scotland. However, there is still some way to go before the service is fully transformed. There is an on-going programme of organisational change that covers everything from joining up IT systems to establishing new departmental structures. We have more than halved the size and
costs of our senior command team and executive and we are de-layering our management structures throughout policing as part of this work.

We are looking at every area of our business and service delivery to ensure we are doing things in the most efficient and effective way so we can be confident we are delivering the best possible service for our communities within the available budget. We are working with the Scottish Police Authority to identify savings, and as stated, are confident the budget for our first year will be met.

We face challenges in the future, as with other public services, and we are looking at a range of options that will allow us to contribute towards those required savings. We are working with the SPA to define a financial strategy for our next few years and will continue to engage with our partners and local authorities in determining the focus for our local policing teams in the future.

Sir Stephen House,
Chief Constable