Written submission from the Scottish Police Authority

SPA Written Response to Public Audit Committee on Auditor General for Scotland report Police reform

The Scottish Police Authority welcomes this thoughtful assessment by Audit Scotland on progress to date with the reform of policing, and their acknowledgement of what has been achieved in this initial transition phase. The recommendations made are ones that we acknowledge and recognise. We will work with partners to follow through on those recommendations.

The document notes that SPA and Police Scotland have taken on their full responsibilities within just 18 months of the Scottish Government announcing its reform intentions. The shared commitment from all partners to ensuring a smooth transition allowed policing to be ready legally and organisationally for merger whilst maintaining operational services for the public with minimal disruption.

The report reflects many of the challenges we have faced and, importantly, it acknowledges our achievements to date. It is also, by its nature, a reflection on just the first phase of reform activity.

It is worth briefly highlighting SPA achievements through this initial phase.

We have upheld our governance role by ensuring that there were public meetings for scrutiny and decision-making through the initial transition. We have now held 13 public meetings in the last 12 months – double the frequency of meetings experienced under the former arrangements.

By the end of the year we will have had meetings in 11 different local authority areas, and our meetings can now be viewed live on the internet.

Ahead of each public SPA meeting we invite community councillors, local authority councillors, and local MSPs to ‘meet the board’. We have also forged good working relationships with the 32 local authority scrutiny bodies – with each local authority having a personal lead contact within the SPA board.

Following a consultation process that invited more than 500 organisations to contribute, we developed a strategic police plan in collaboration with the Police Service of Scotland.

We agreed a budget and we have made early investment decisions as set out in an agreed capital investment plan.

We created a voluntary redundancy and early retirement scheme that has been attractive enough to generate interest from around 2,000 staff, whilst adopting a best value approach to releasing staff. The average payback period for voluntary packages for the more than 400 staff released has been just over one year.

We inherited a number of complaints from the previous police authority boards - some of them complex and entrenched - and using SPA-developed processes and
resources we have already brought several of these to a conclusion.

We are also making progress towards ensuring that every custody facility, the length and breadth of the country, is visited on a regular basis to ensure we are upholding people’s human rights.

SPA’s own key processes, policies and people are now moving from an interim to a permanent approach – with a framework for engagement with Scottish Government established, new Committee terms of reference agreed, and scheme of administration and appointments of a permanent Chief Executive and senior staff team at an advanced stage.

We have also faced a number of difficulties and challenges.

Much water has flowed under the bridge around the initial business partnering approach for corporate services that SPA proposed for the maintenance of Police Scotland.

With the benefit of hindsight, the initial approach SPA proposed for maintaining policing was more radical than the timescales and environment would allow - though it is worth noting that going forward as an Authority, we will be taking our day to day HR and Finance services on just such a business partnering basis from Police Scotland.

We have also struggled with the lack of good and reliable data, something that SPA flagged from the very start.

A key challenge in the future will be to ensure that police priorities and performance are aligned, and that we continue to test the quality of policing outcomes against the necessary reductions in cost that must be made.

I want to pay tribute to the co-operation of Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary, and in particular George Graham, who has supported us in our drive to develop the SPA as the performance hub for policing.

Recent performance information released by the Scottish Government is evidence that the work undertaken to get ready for Day 1 of the new service had little impact on the strong performance of policing in Scotland. Crime is still at a 39 year low and remains on a downward trend. Clear up rates remain high.

SPA believe we now have a stronger consensus on respective roles and responsibilities within policing, and mutual understanding and relationships are working and improving.

For example, the board and senior team of the SPA and the Chief Constable and his command team will be coming together for a joint workshop on governance and decision-making on 19 November.

A major challenge going forward remains achieving the necessary financial savings while maintaining the quality of police service to the public. We fully understand the
Scottish Government’s commitments to retain police officer numbers at their current levels, and the policy of no compulsory redundancies. This will make achieving future savings hugely challenging and there remains a lot of hard work and decisions ahead of us.

Step one in balancing next year’s budget is ensuring that we come in on budget or below this year – and we are improving how that position looks every month. As we speak, some four months out from the start of the 2014-15 financial year we have not yet identified where all of these future savings will come from. We are working in close co-operation with Police Scotland on developing a three-year corporate and financial strategy. We are fully aware of our financial accountabilities as an Authority and the Committee should be aware that this is being given the highest priority.

Vic Emery, Chair
John Foley, Interim Chief Executive
Scottish Police Authority, November 2013