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LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL ONLY

Audrey Nicol MSP
Convenor
Criminal Justice Committee
Room T2.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

26 January 2024

Ref: CE/005/2024

Dear Convener

Mental health in policing

I refer to correspondence over the last year regarding mental health in policing, specifically the impact on and support available to police officers and staff.

In March 2023, our Chair, Martyn Evans highlighted that the Authority's People Committee was working with Police Scotland to understand the nature and scale of concerns police officers and staff have about the advice and support available to them when they experience mental health and wellbeing issues. He also confirmed that improved measures are in place to ensure the collection and analysis of relevant data to inform assessment of the effectiveness of any advice and support.

Absence continues to be an informative measure of wellbeing and the impact of wellbeing activity. In 2022-23 overall, there was an average of 12.5 days lost per officer and 14.5 for staff (excluding COVID-related absence). Projections indicate that this will increase to 13-days for

officers and 15.5 days for staff by the end of March 2024. These figures are up compared to five-years earlier when they sat at 9.3 and 13.5 respectively for 2017-18. There has also been a year-on-year increase in absence and working days lost during 2023-24 due to psychological disorders.

This is a concern, however trends in policing are consistent with the increasing absence levels and days lost due to stress and psychological disorders being felt across in the Scottish public sector, and the wider UK.

A number of actions are being taken to improve and reduce absence levels across the workforce. I have summarised these below for the Committee's information and to provide assurance on behalf of the Board.

Health & Wellbeing Programme Review

This review was initiated in February 2023 to better understand the experience of those who access the existing wellbeing support. This has been informed by a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. Insights have highlighted the need and desire for wellbeing to be:

- recognised, promoted, and invested in as a key strategic priority.
- supported by nationally coordinated initiatives that are prioritised and tailored to the needs of an employee in the unique policing environment, and responsive to work-related pressures.

This feedback resulted in actions being identified to promote and reduce the stigma related to mental health, identifying and preventing mental health issues within the workforce, and the enhancement of the capability of line manager and peer support across the policing workforce.

Policing and trauma

In tandem with the above Review, the Authority convened an event bringing together a range of internal and external stakeholders with lived experience and expertise in workforce wellbeing where repeated exposure to trauma is a reality of the job. The event, held in April 2023, was well received by all in attendance who had the opportunity to discuss, learn and explore how this exposure to trauma can be managed and the wellbeing of our people prioritised. The [outputs and next steps from that conference in August 2023](#) are accessible on the Authority's website. These build on the areas identified in the [Health and Wellbeing Review](#) and focus on putting in place a whole system approach to promoting wellbeing and preventing trauma.

Next Steps

While the Authority is assured that significant engagement, discussion and action has been taken to shine a light on mental health, wellbeing, and support to our workforce; we recognise that real and impactful improvement in this space requires sustained effort over time. Further work is planned to maintain this momentum, specifically:

- An independent professional assessment of Police Scotland's approach to wellbeing has been commissioned and is expected to report to the Authority in Spring 2024.
- A [frontline focus wellbeing review being undertaken by HMICS](#). This involves direct engagement with frontline officers and staff to identify the issues they consider support or impact on their wellbeing. This will also assess the work undertaken by Police Scotland to improve wellbeing.

The findings of the Health and Wellbeing Review, the insights and outputs of the workforce trauma conference, and any further views or recommendations from the two additional assurance activities detailed above, will inform a single wellbeing action plan that Police Scotland intend to present to the Authority in early Summer. As previously confirmed - Authority members will continue to seek assurance that Police Scotland is monitoring and measuring action taken to evidence that the workforce is supported when they need to be. In particular Authority members are expecting to see a whole system approach to protecting and supporting mental health and wellbeing of the workforce across the service, with evidence that the new actions have been consistently implemented; and also, evidence that the actions taken are effective and demonstrating improvements in the wellbeing of the workforce.

I will ensure the committee is apprised of any further reporting or improvements in due course.

III Health Retirement (IHR) and Injury on Duty (IoD) Process Review

As was highlighted last year, the Authority initiated a review of the IHR and IoD processes to understand delays and identify areas for improvement. Mr Evans wrote to the Criminal Justice Committee providing an update on this in March 2023 and committed to providing further updates in due course.

Significant improvements have been made to both processes since the last update the Committee 10-months ago. These are summarised below:

- In May 2023, a trial commenced to test the effectiveness of 'fast-tracking' IHR cases to Police Scotland's Director of People and Development for approval. Eligible officers will have been assessed by the Selected Medical Practitioner (SMP) as permanently unfit for both police officer duties and regular employment. These cases were previously subject to delay awaiting a panel to consider redeployment opportunities. Following the success of the trial, the outputs will be reviewed with a view to making this change permanent, alongside a further review of the processes supporting the decision for officers to be put forward for consideration for IHR.
- Interim changes to how SMPs conduct IoD determinations has resulted in a reduced requirement for face-to-face appointments. This has reduced the timelines for these cases to be finalised and removed the requirement for officers to repeatedly describe their circumstances. This was an experience which was described by some as 're-traumatising' in their evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee. The option for a face-to-face appointment is still available if desired.
- Recent agreement has also been reached to allow SMPs to consider applications for IHR and IoD awards simultaneously. This will deliver further improvements to timescales and minimise the need for officers to revisit traumatic situations during separate medical appointments.
- A working group has been established with representation from the Authority, Police Scotland, Scottish Government, Scottish Police Federation, Association of Scottish Police Superintendents and SPPA. This group will consider regulations and guidance, further changes to the process and the potential for an Injury Compensation Scheme for officers.
- An Internal Audit review of the IHR/IOD process commissioned in 2023 reported that the relevant controls of both processes were 'generally sound'. Recommendations made in the report are currently being progressed by the Authority and Police Scotland.

The Authority is assured that the actions above are delivering the initial improvements needed. This is evidenced by a significant reduction in the average wait times for a SMP appointment, which has reduced from 13-months in 2021-22 to 5-months in 2022-23. The number of live IHRs has reduced over the calendar year from 101 to 57. Similarly, the number of IOD cases has reduced over the calendar year from 48 to 39.

The Authority is satisfied that previously reported backlogs and delays have been addressed. We have sought to involve our staff associations throughout this improvement programme, and we are particularly grateful to the Scottish Police Federation for their advice and support in implementing these changes and their valuable ongoing contributions to the Authority's People Committee.

The wellbeing of the policing workforce is a strategic priority for Police Scotland and the Authority. We will continue to review progress and improvement in this area monitoring data and through ongoing engagement with our staff associations, trade unions and workforce.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Brown." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

LYNN BROWN OBE
Chief Executive