

1. How effective is the current model of public inquiries in Scotland, and to what extent does it deliver value for money?

Police Scotland is fully supportive of the public inquiry process in Scotland and remains firmly committed to engaging with inquiries in a transparent, constructive, and accountable manner.

We recognise that each public inquiry is unique and plays a vital role in ensuring public confidence, scrutinising institutional practices, and identifying opportunities for learning and improvement. Our approach is always to engage positively and proactively, providing full cooperation to support the aims of each inquiry and to contribute meaningfully to the process of truth-finding and reform.

From the perspective of Police Scotland, the current model of public inquiries in Scotland is an effective and essential mechanism for ensuring transparency, accountability, and institutional learning. It provides a robust, independent framework for examining complex and often sensitive issues in depth, and it enables public bodies, including policing, to reflect, learn, improve, and strengthen public confidence.

We have found the inquiry process to be thorough, fair, and well-structured, with clear opportunities for all parties to contribute meaningfully. The model allows for comprehensive fact-finding, and the recommendations that arise from inquiries are often instrumental in driving positive change — not only within Police Scotland but across the wider public sector.

Our experience shows that, while inquiries can be challenging, they are a critical part of a healthy and accountable public service. Police Scotland remains committed to supporting the model and acting on its outcomes.

In response to the question *to what extent do public inquiries deliver value for money*, Police Scotland acknowledges that public inquiries represent a significant cost to the public as well as our organisation. However, we recognise that the value of these inquiries must be considered not solely in monetary terms, but in the context of the wider contribution to transparency, public confidence, long term institutional learning and in some cases answers for families and loved ones.

With regard to costs there is no budgetary provision afforded to Police Scotland in supporting Public Inquiries, the associated costs as outlined are considerable specifically as they relate to legal costs. As a consequence, Police Scotland are challenged with absorbing those costs from revenue streams and consistently making tough, prioritised, decisions on budget, often at the expense of policing local communities, as well as tackling a range of crime types.

Most recently, it is matter of public record that the costs associated with the Public Inquiry into the death of Sheku Boyah to date is £25,627,224.

The cost to Police Scotland in supporting this public inquiry to date is £25,409,629, with £18,087,494 of this being directly attributable to legal costs. Meaning the total cost of this particular public inquiry to date being more than £51million.

When considering value for money, it is important to weigh these figures against the broader benefits that public inquiries provide. These include a clearer understanding of events, informed public debate, and the opportunity for meaningful institutional reform. Inquiries often result in recommendations that help to shape policy, strengthen public services, and enhance public confidence in policing and wider governance.

Police Scotland remains committed to supporting the inquiry process in full and recognises the long-term value that can be achieved through this model

2. Is there sufficient transparency around the purpose, remits (including any extensions), timescales, costs and effectiveness of public inquiries and what, if any, improvements are required?

Transparency around the purpose and remits

The terms of reference, set by Scottish Ministers under the Inquiries Act 2005, provide clarity on the purpose and scope of each inquiry. Police Scotland supports this approach, as it ensures early transparency and helps manage public and stakeholder expectations. Where remits are extended, we believe these changes should be clearly explained and published to maintain confidence.

Timescales and Costs

Inquiries can be complex and sensitive, and while flexibility is necessary, the Chair of each inquiry is responsible for setting the framework and approach, which in recent inquiries has included dividing proceedings into distinct phases or chapters to address different aspects of the inquiry's remit in a structured and transparent manner.

While this approach supports clarity and focus, unforeseen issues – such as the emergence of new evidence, legal challenges, or the need for further investigation – can lead to inevitable delays. Police Scotland acknowledges the importance of maintaining public confidence during such periods and supports regular, accessible updates on revised timescales and associated costs, to ensure continued transparency and accountability.

Similarly, costs are regularly reported in a clear and accessible format, helping the public understand the scale of resources involved.

Effectiveness, Implementation and suggested improvements

Public inquiries are valuable not only for uncovering the truth but also for driving improvements. As highlighted by other parties in their published responses, perhaps greater transparency is needed around how recommendations are tracked and implemented. This would ensure inquiries lead to real, measurable change.

3. Are the current legislative framework and decision-making processes for establishing public inquiries adequate, and what, if any improvements are required?

There is a clear statutory framework (UK Inquiries Act 2005) which gives Inquiries powers to compel evidence, hold hearings and produce reports which are essential to achieve confidence in the Public Inquiry. Public Inquiries by their very nature are complicated and are prone to becoming long running and costly which can have an adverse effect on victims interests and public trust and confidence in the system.

4. Are the processes for setting and monitoring costs for public inquiries adequate? What measures should be put in place at the establishment of a public inquiry to ensure value for money and prevent time and cost overruns?

The current processes for setting and monitoring costs are not fully adequate. While there are mechanisms in place in relation to oversight, in practice inquiries are prone to high, escalating and unpredictable costs as well as long durations. Amendments to terms of reference have a knock-on effect on existing budgets. The participants of an Inquiry have no control or influence on the running time of an inquiry making ongoing budgeting difficult. A tight, focussed Terms of Reference along with realistic planning and a realistic budget with strict monitoring should be implemented from the outset of every inquiry.

5. What is the best way to ensure cost effectiveness of public inquiries while maintaining their independence?

There is a delicate balance between cost and maintaining independence. The goal is to maintain public confidence through a fair and impartial process, while managing time and resources responsibly. Setting clear and narrow terms of reference with regular scrutiny from parliamentary committees to ensure the Inquiry stays within the scope and budget without impacting on decisions. Implementation of project management techniques would also assist, including transparent budgeting and cost controls.

6. What, if any, measures should be put in place to ensure recommendations made by public inquiries are implemented in a timely way?

If during an inquiry a clear issue is identified this should be shared/communicated to the relevant organisation timeously. As organisational transformation is an ongoing process, it may be these issues have already been identified and rectified by the time any report is completed.

Police Scotland use an action tracking software system, this system ensures all recommendations and learning are tracked, their performance monitored and provides real time reporting on the progress of implementing recommendations. It is also used to provide regular reporting to Police Scotland's Management boards, SPA Committees and HMICS, this could be adapted to provide reporting to Parliament.

- Deliver interim findings to allow lessons to be implemented early.
- Provide deadlines of implementation with required timed updates on progress.

7. What alternatives to the current model of public inquiries should be considered when particular events have, or could cause, public concern? Are there examples of good practice from other countries that Scotland could learn from?

Scotland could adopt a proportionate toolbox of alternatives taking inspiration from good examples elsewhere including Australia and New Zealand including rapid independent reviews and time-limited statutory inquiries.

Alternatives for consideration could include:

- Rapid independent reviews (6–12 weeks) to deliver urgent lessons where speed matters most.
- Independent panels or expert commissions that focus on systems learning and victim perspectives without the adversarial nature of some full inquiries.
- Hybrid, time-limited statutory inquiries, retaining powers of compulsion but operating under strict timetables and cost controls.
- Citizen panels or deliberative processes to shape terms of reference and enhance legitimacy.
- Implementation trackers and oversight mechanisms to ensure recommendations lead to real change.

Given the worldwide nature of the Covid Pandemic it may be beneficial to consider how other countries have conducted their public inquiries / reviews into the handling of the pandemic.

Whilst deeper research would be required into the full scope of inquiries around the world, basic research suggests that the Scottish and UK inquiries have run for longer than other countries, and at a higher cost.

Some examples of good practice Scotland could learn from include:

Australia — Royal Commissions and time-limited independent reviews

[Key trends and lessons from Australian Royal Commissions and inquiries - Corrs Chambers Westgarth](#)

Australia's Royal Commissions are powerful and thorough; lessons include rigorous public hearings and clear public reporting, but also that they can be slow and costly — leading Australia to also use targeted independent reviews and to emphasise implementation planning in final reports. Scotland can borrow the Australian emphasis on clear Terms of Reference and a focus on implementation planning while avoiding unnecessary scope creep.

New Zealand ([Public inquiry reform in New Zealand | Institute for Government](#))

In summary, the Inquiries Act 2013 was introduced and provided flexible options for statutory inquiries with three tiers available:

- *Government inquiries – typically dealing with narrower and more immediate issues where a relatively quick and authoritative answer is required from an independent inquiry. They are relatively quick, taking an average of 10 months to report.*

- *Public Inquiries – established by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Government ‘to inquire into, and report on, any matter of public importance’. These report to the Governor-General and parliament, and take on average 1.5 years.*
- *Royal Commissions – also established by the Governor-General in Executive Council. These inquiries are typically reserved for the most serious matters of public importance (recent examples include Covid-19, historical abuse in care and the terrorist attack on the Christchurch mosques). Some of the most complex commissions have taken up to seven years, but the average length is still only 20 months – far shorter than the average UK public inquiry.*

An underlying principle is that an inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2013 should only be established when no alternative mechanism exists or when an independent inquiry is the most suitable option.

OECD / general public-engagement practice ([Focus on Citizens | OECD](#))

OECD evidence shows that meaningful public engagement, transparent reporting and follow-up improve acceptance of sometimes uncomfortable recommendations. Techniques such as citizen panels, clear public summaries and staged publication of findings help maintain legitimacy.

To strengthen public confidence, it may be considered that Scotland adopts:

1. A published decision framework for selecting the most appropriate model.
2. Clear, narrow terms of reference and capped timescales for all inquiries or reviews.
3. A permanent system for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommendations.