Police Scotland Submission – Criminal Justice Committee 16th September 2026

1. Introduction

Following the Criminal Justice Committee evidence session on frontline policing and non-criminal demand attended by Police Scotland on 16th September 2026, a request was received from the committee for Police Scotland to provide some further information on the matters discussed.

The request from the committee asked for information on the following:

- Police officer numbers –
  - the number of police officers who are available for front-line policing work in communities across Scotland, after adjusted duties and other work such as mental health crisis response and court attendance are removed from the figures
  - details of any occasions in the past year when policing shifts operated below adequate or safe frontline staffing levels, including:
    - the number of times this occurred
    - for each occasion, the extent to which officer numbers fell below the required staffing level.
- DBI referrals – the number of DBI referrals made through contact with the police to Level 2 providers in the past year
- Right Care Right Person – update on Police Scotland's progress on considering the approach on improving handovers at hospital A&E departments, reviewing missing person protocols in the NHS and dealing with concern for person calls

Police Scotland welcome the opportunity to provide this clarification and assist the Committee's consideration of the issues raised and it is important to set out the broader operational context, without which the nature of mental health-related demand and the realities of policing capacity and resource deployment cannot be fully understood.

It is important to convey from the outset that police resources remain finite and are increasingly challenged by growing volumes and complexity of demand. There is no doubt that policing would benefit from additional resources to improve our ability to meet this demand in the way both we and the public would want. The Chief Constable has laid out in her budget submission the evidence of our need for additional investment to maximise our effectiveness in priority areas of work, not least in support of VAWG.

Whilst additional resources have been sought, we, like other public services need to support the broader whole system change that is needed to move from a reactive to preventative approach, which not only reduces demand but provides better service provision. It is also important to note at this juncture that the issue is not simply the number of officers available to Police Scotland, but the extent to which available policing capacity is required to respond to demand that is not primarily police-led in nature.

It is, therefore, important that the comments made during the evidence session on resourcing are understood within the broader context of how policing capacity is currently utilised and what is, in practice, a highly complex and dynamic resource management framework.

2. Mental Health

Before answering the specific points detailed above as raised by the committee, it may be helpful to re-iterate as outlined during the evidence session, a significant proportion of officer and staff time continues to be devoted to responding to individuals experiencing mental health distress and wider welfare concerns, and / or remaining with individuals when there is no longer a policing purpose.

Both types of scenarios reduce the capacity available to undertake core policing functions. As articulated during the evidence session, policing is often the service called upon by public and partners due to availability rather than being the appropriate service to respond to the need presented.

Police Scotland recorded over 230,000 mental health related incidents during the year 2025-26, around 18 per cent of all incidents recorded by police. Approximately 85 per cent of mental health incidents do not involve a crime.

There were 173,377 mental health-related deployments, this totals 775,326 policing hours with the average time taken to deal with a mental health-related concern for a person incident being 5.34 hours which equates to 481 FT officers per year costing over £34 million.

Mental health-related deployments represent 22.5% of all policing deployments. Of these, 146,863 were non-crime deployments, accounting for 25.1% of all non-crime deployments. Police Scotland continues to have a role in addressing vulnerability whether associated with criminality, or where there is an immediate threat to life or risk of serious harm, or involvement of a person under 18 years of age where safeguarding concerns exist. However, in the absence of other factors, such as those described above mental ill health or distress is not a policing matter. In such cases police attendance is an inappropriate response and risks stigmatising or criminalising those who need other professional care and diverts police staff from responding to matters uniquely requiring the skills and expertise of policing.

3. Police Officer numbers

As of 28th October 2026, Police Scotland has a current establishment of 16,498 Police officers.

Policing capacity cannot be accurately represented through a single static figure, nor can apparent shortfalls in staffing levels be understood without significant operational context.

Police Scotland manages operational resourcing through a combination of central oversight, local command decision-making, and continual risk assessment, ensuring resources are deployed to meet fluctuating demands across all our communities.

Resource levels are monitored through Operational Base Levels (OBLs) which are an assessment of the level of resource required to meet demand at any given time throughout a day in a specifically defined area. OBLs vary across the day as demand does and are generally, but not exclusively, applied to response policing teams across the country.

Whilst Police Scotland holds detailed OBL information, producing the figures requested by the committee at point one regarding officer numbers would require a substantial manual exercise. OBL data is recorded for every hour of the week, generating 168 data points per

station or sub-divisional area each week. Assessing a 5-year period would require analysis of 260 weekly reports, equating to 43,680 data points for each individual location. If the 13-territorial divisional-level reports were considered in isolation, this would necessitate the generation of more than 3,380 reports and the examination of approximately 567,840 individual data points. In essence, a comprehensive assessment across all stations and sub-divisions would require the review of many millions of data points.

In relation to the second point, this data is not readily available as resource levels are constantly reviewed and monitored, allowing divisions to implement mitigating measures such as redeployment, overtime and mutual support arrangements. Resource availability is influenced by a wide range of factors, including but not limited to, major incidents, court commitments, events, protests, and sickness.

Local Policing Supervisors have the autonomy to re-allocate finite resources across stations, sub-divisions and divisional boundaries to respond to spontaneous increase in localised demand however this reallocation does not increase the total number of on duty resources.

OBL data does not always reflect the full operational picture and shortfalls require operational context. Officers assigned to events or other planned activity may sit outside response resourcing figures while remaining in the area and able to assist with urgent incidents. Resources elsewhere in a division may also provide support. A shortfall therefore does not, by itself, establish that a shift was inadequately or unsafely staffed; equally, the presence of other resources does not demonstrate that the risk was fully mitigated. A meaningful assessment must consider actual availability, concurrent demand and the support deployed.

The Force Mobilisation Model (FMM) strengthens weekend and event capacity by moving designated officers in national and specialist areas onto seven-day deployment patterns. Around 1,450 officers are already operating in this model, with approximately 1,800 anticipated over the next six months. The proportion undertaking some weekend working has increased from 54.2% to 84.6%. Where event demand is lower, these officers can reinforce frontline response. During phased implementation in June 2025–May 2026, FMM provided 7,647 additional weekend officer deployments, including 2,016 directly to events. For June 2026–May 2027, approximately 14,500 additional weekend deployments are forecast, including more than 4,500 to events. These are deployments, not additional officer headcount. Direct event support reduces reliance on local policing officers and the cancellation of rest days, supporting community policing capacity and officer welfare. The weekend cadre also provides resilience for mass mobilisation.

Through the ‘Policing for Our Communities’ (PFoC) project, work is underway to replace OBLs with a Resource Tolerance Index (RTI). This is intended to provide a clearer assessment of available resources and the ability to meet demand.

The Committee can therefore take assurance that Police Scotland is actively managing frontline pressures through continuous resource review, flexible deployment and additional national support. FMM has delivered additional weekend deployments, helping protect community policing capacity and reduce rest-day cancellations; further deployments are forecast, and RTI is intended to strengthen resource assessment. Together, these measures provide a clear basis for assurance about the management response and practical support for officers—not a guarantee that every shift was adequately staffed. Demand remains considerable and the challenge in meeting this, remains material; nevertheless, active oversight, flexible deployment and national reinforcement provide a clear basis for assurance that these pressures are being managed, with support for officers and staff remaining central to serving communities and keeping them safe.

4. DBI Referrals

In 2025/26, Police Scotland made 2,063 Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) referrals to Level 2 providers, with a further 819 referrals recorded in the first quarter of 2026/27 (April to June 2026).

Since the introduction of DBI in 2017, more than 7,200 referrals have been made by Police Scotland, supported by approximately 2,800 officers trained as Level 1 DBI referrers. While Police Scotland has the capacity to train additional officers, the number of Level 1 referrers is restricted to the availability of Level 2 providers, which are delivered by third sector partners and funded locally through Health and Social Care Partnerships. This approach ensures referral volumes remain manageable and that the established service standard of contact within 24 hours and up to 14 days of support, can be maintained.

Expanding the number of officers trained as Level 1 referrers would, therefore, be dependent on additional investment in Level 2 provision.

Work is also underway with the DBI central team and partner agencies to better understand the outcomes for vulnerable individuals who access support through the DBI pathway, including the potential impact on demand for Police Scotland services and any effect on repeat callers or referrals.

5. Right Care Right Person

Police Scotland continues to monitor the implementation and impact of the Right Care Right Person (RCRP) approach in England and Wales, using available evidence, data and reviews to inform consideration of how the principles may be applied within a Scottish context.

In response to recommendations arising from the HMICS review of policing mental health in Scotland, work is currently focused on developing a new Transfer of Care process, which is undergoing formal consultation with key partners and is being progressed through the Police Scotland and NHS Joint Commission. The proposed approach is designed to support more effective and consistent handovers within places of safety, helping to clarify responsibilities and ensure individuals receive the right care from the right service at the right time. Subject to completion of consultation and partner agreement, it is anticipated that the new process, supported by accompanying training, will be implemented from January 2027.

Additionally, the introduction of the National Missing Person Framework and the National Missing Person Co-ordinator role profile, alongside a number of initiatives such as the Philomena and Herbert protocols has recorded an 11.7% reduction in this YTD compared with 2025/26 in respect of the number of persons missing from NHS locations and 27.7% reduction in the 5-year average.