



SCOTTISH POLICE FEDERATION

Established by Act of Parliament

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Criminal Justice Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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By email: justicecommittee@parliament.scot

Dear Convenor

Can I thank you for your correspondence following the Criminal Justice Committee held on the 16th September 2026, and for your request to provide information to enable ongoing scrutiny.

By way of introduction, the Scottish Police Federation represents police officers up to and including the rank of Chief Inspector, accounting for almost 98% of officers within Police Scotland.

Our elected committee structure is such that I consider it to be the greatest strength of the organisation. The ability to 'reach into' the muster rooms of Scotland and provide evidence-based views on any subject is an extremely useful resource, and one which I am sure you will make use of as the parliamentary session progresses.

One of my main areas of focus since taking up this post in February 2023 has been the impact on Police Scotland and its ability to fulfil its statutory obligations in Scotland due to non-police related health demand. I have extended my use of language in this context as the impact goes beyond people suffering from mental health crisis and extends into wider care provision.

The evidence provided by operational supervisors across Scotland is that between 50% and 80% of operational capacity is being lost due to this type of non-police related demand.

I was involved in the recent 'Framework for Collaboration' (FFC) work undertaken by partners across the public and 3rd sectors in Scotland. The success of this collaboration has been, at best, extremely limited.

In the simplest of terms, Police Scotland became the de-facto leaders of this work. My view is that health board CEOs never fully engaged with the principles of the FFC as to do so would have created more demand at a time of extreme pressure in their areas of business. Whilst perhaps understandable when viewed through that lens, it did absolutely nothing to address the issues within policing.

For context, none of the elected representatives at the last SPF Joint Central Committee meeting (August 2026) could provide evidence of any decrease in non-police related demand as a result of any measure undertaken by the FFC.

The opportunity costs to Police Scotland in dealing with this health care crisis are unsustainable.

Without immediate change to the 'operating model' within policing, with or without buy-in and collaboration with the rest of public sector, the risk is that policing, and police officers become even more invisible, irrelevant and removed from the communities we try and serve.

There is also a significant risk that we perpetuate the ever more present view that policing has become a reactive service that only responds when 'something has gone wrong'.

Police officer numbers, job satisfaction, retention and increasing sickness as fewer officers remain to deal with increased demand are all, in my opinion, worthy of consideration.

Specifically in relation to the evidence session on the 16th September 2026, I felt the representatives from Police Scotland missed an opportunity to demonstrate the true scale of the issue facing the service.

There is an inordinate amount of evidence that demonstrates the operational, tactical and strategic impact on policing due to non-police demand. I do not believe this was articulated to an almost brand-new committee and see this as an opportunity missed.

If a defensive wall is immediately placed in front of the committee when a question is posed, the flow of information can never be effective. My view is that some of the responses were evasive to the point of confusing or inadvertently misleading committee members, and whilst I'm positive this was never the intention, it was the outcome.

The pretence that 'all is well' should not be maintained at all costs and admitting that there is an issue should not necessarily be seen as a weakness or failure on behalf of the organisation or any individual within it.

To try and maintain this position, can in my view lead to the quality of evidence being diminished, and I know from my working with the representatives who appeared that day, that their knowledge and passion for the subject is unquestionable.

I think this was particularly relevant in Stephen Kerr's line of questioning directed to ACC Paton about safe staffing levels. Her response created a huge amount of online reaction as it is felt by operational officers to be so far from the truth.

References to an 'hour by hour' assessment of resource availability may technically be correct, but this 'flex' does not play out in 'real life' operational policing and to suggest that the presence of a national force can somehow adapt to cope with local staffing shortages is, in my view far from being an operational reality.

There were some incredibly insightful questions posed by other members of the panel in respect of the demand, the wider impact on policing in Scotland from non-police related demand and the 'successes of the previous years' work, but again I felt that opportunities were missed to illustrate the scale of the issue and the impact on police officers in Scotland.

I appreciate that Police Scotland is part of a wider public sector, and that to be overtly and publicly critical of another partner is, perhaps sub-optimal, but the current situation is un-sustainable from a police perspective and the approach taken in this type of environment, in my view, must change.

We simply cannot have a situation where members of the Criminal Justice Committee feel that the quality of evidence is not good enough, evasive or that the default is to 'corporate speak' which both fails to answer the question and dilutes the opportunity presented by attending.

Having evidenced based testimony which does not blindly stick to a pre-prepared script must be the approach for the benefit of the service, the officers within it regardless of rank, and the communities we serve.

For four years now I have heard about 'this initiative and that' and how they will reduce demand, generate capacity to allow policing to deliver on its role within the public sector, but I have to say that almost nothing has changed.

In my view, this area of business is the single biggest factor in the challenges facing policing in Scotland today. I cannot think of a single police related issue that cannot somehow be tied back to the loss of capability due to dealing with non-police related demand.

I am acutely aware of the challenges, both political and operational, in changing the police response to non-police related demand. If the ambition, as articulated in the 2030 vision, is to deliver effective and efficient policing services with a thriving workforce, then the status quo cannot remain.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to you, and can I close by offering the continued support and co-operation of the Scottish Police Federation in any aspect of business you may deem relevant.

Yours sincerely

DAVID THREADGOLD

Chair