OPERATION SANDWOOD

I refer to your letter of 12th April, 2018 seeking clarification on the current status of Operation Sandwood, along with a request for the number of staff hours and any other information that may assist the Justice Committee in any future consideration of Lockerbie Air Disaster petition PE1370.

Mr Livingstone wrote to the Convenor of the Justice Committee on 9th April, 2018 to advise that the investigation has been completed and the final report, drawing together the findings of the 4 years of extensive enquiry under Operation Sandwood, has been submitted.

The next stage of the submission process will involve scrutiny and assessment of the findings and conclusions by the QC independently appointed by Police Scotland, followed by the sharing of the findings of the investigation with Crown Office. Whilst we await the QC’s advice and guidance, following his consideration of the report and note of instruction to Mr Livingstone, it is anticipated that we will be in a position to share the findings with the Crown by late May/early June this year.

The request for information on costs and detail of staff hours has previously been subject to a request under the Freedom Of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, the response to which provided that;

“Police Scotland does not record the total costs involved for any specific operation or investigation. The nature of policing means that officers are deployed to wherever their services are most required. The number of officers required throughout an investigation will fluctuate throughout an enquiry and officers involved in a particular investigation, or multiple investigations, can be redeployed to other duties at any time. To explain further, officers are drawn from different areas of the Service, based on their skillsets, with the appropriate Division meeting the cost of their core time. As such detailed records are not
held in relation to the number of officers deployed, or to detail the specific costs of any particular piece of work undertaken by them during the time period specified.

Notwithstanding the above, Police Scotland acknowledge that the staffing commitment to Operation Sandwood has been significant.”

Notwithstanding the FOI response, I can provide an assurance to the Committee that the staffing levels throughout the duration of the enquiry have been appropriate and fully commensurate with the specific demands and requirements necessary to deliver on the individual investigative strategies set by me during each phase. By way of further explanation and the methodology adopted, the 9 individual allegations presented by JFM were grouped into 5 categories, each examining key individual aspects of the original investigation and trial. The investigation into each of these respective areas was detailed and complex and drew on scientific and technical specialisms, alongside expert legal advice. A number of other external factors also influenced the pace of the enquiry.

The investigation was at an advanced stage by 2016, as intimated, but in view of the serious nature of the allegations and complexities involved some elements of the enquiry became more protracted and necessitated further consideration, as befitting of an enquiry of this magnitude.

The final report, itself, is a comprehensive document structured to detail, appropriately, the complexities of the respective phases of the enquiry. I was at pains to compile and present a professional document that accurately articulates the workings across the enquiry, along with the findings, rationale and conclusions, to withstand the utmost scrutiny.

The Justice for Megrahi liaison group have been fully apprised as the enquiry has evolved and remain assured of the processes, ongoing progress and level of rigour applied throughout.

I trust that you find this update to be useful and informative. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely

Stuart Johnstone
Detective Superintendent