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Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday 4 November 2026
10th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Pre-budget Scrutiny 2027-28
Call for Views – Policing

Introduction

It is expected that the Scottish Government will publish its spending plans for 2027-28 in early December 2026.

In advance of this being available, the Scottish Spending Review 2026 (published by the Scottish Government in January 2026) provides an indication of planned funding in the next few years. It notes that "plans should be viewed as indicative and subject to substantial change".

On 22 September 2026, the Criminal Justice Committee issued a call for views to help inform its pre-budget scrutiny. This closed on 22 October 2026, with 23 submissions published on the Scottish Parliament's website.

This paper provides an analysis of submissions focused on policing from the following organisations:

- Association of Scottish Police Superintendents
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS)
- Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC)
- Police Scotland
- Scottish Police Authority (SPA)
- Scottish Police Federation
- UNISON Police Staff Scotland.

Background information on policing in Scotland is provided in a SPICe police subject profile (2026). It includes data on police officer and police staff numbers since 2007.

Relevant funding

Most of the Scottish Government funding for current policing needs is provided via the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). The SPA's responsibilities include securing the

necessary funding for policing and ensuring that those funds are used efficiently. In addition to providing funding for Police Scotland, the SPA budget covers the SPA's own costs and forensic services.

A separate Police Central Government budget provides funding for a range of policing-related activities, including the UK led Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme, and the detection of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. It also provides funding for HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland and the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner.

The Scottish Spending Review provides the following figures for combined resource and capital funding under the above-mentioned budget lines.[1]

Police funding cash terms figures – resource plus capital	2026-27 £m	2027-28 £m	2028-29 £m
Police Central Government	85.7	95.1	98.5
SPA	1,652.4	1,651.1	1,644.1

The figures for 2026-27 are the same as those set out in the Scottish Budget 2026-27 (published January 2026), although it also provided separate figures for resource and capital in 2026-27.

It should be noted that the figures in the budget are subject to revision during the year. For example, the 2026-27 resource funding in the SPA budget line was increased by £12m at the autumn budget revision (ABR), taking it from £1,566.1m to £1,578.1m. Thus, increasing the combined figure for resource plus capital to £1,664.4m. The revised figures are used below when comparing the funding being sought by Police Scotland for 2027-28 with current funding.

Scottish Police Authority budget line

In its response to the call for views, Police Scotland argues for the following funding in 2027-28 under the SPA budget line:

- resource – £1,688.7m (an increase of £110.6m compared to the 2026-27 figure after the change made in the ABR)
- capital – £114.4m (an increase of £28.1m compared to the 2026-27 figure).

Combining these, it is seeking an increase from £1,664.4m in 2026-27 to £1,803.1m in 2027-28 (an additional £138.7m). This would represent an increase of 8.3% in cash terms (i.e. without considering the impact of inflation).

The response from the SPA seeks a similar level of increase in funding, to provide for what is refers to as 'strategic investment'.

[1] A further budget line, covering the pension costs of retired police officers, is not included.

By way of contrast, the Scottish Spending Review sets out planned funding of £1,651.1m under the SPA budget line in 2027-28 (resource plus capital). This is less than that being provided in 2026-27.

In making the case for increased funding, the submissions from Police Scotland and the SPA highlight a range of issues. Points emphasised by the two organisations include:

- savings already made within policing since the creation in 2013 of Police Scotland as a police service for the whole of Scotland
- increased and changing demands on policing
- the level of police officer deployments to non-crime incidents (in particular, responding to mental health incidents which do not involve a crime)
- evidence that police officers and staff feel under-resourced to carry out their duties, as well as rising sickness absence
- the impact of pay awards and National Insurance changes on available funding
- previous underinvestment in buildings and technology (e.g. the response from the SPA refers to an estimated £250m backlog in maintenance)
- the benefits which could be delivered with more funding.

In relation to increased and changing demands on policing, Police Scotland's response states:

> "Demand on policing is increasing in volume and complexity, driven by world events, the cost-of-living crisis and poverty, and the expansion of technology and AI which enables online radicalisation and criminality. These factors, and others, manifest in a violence against women and girls emergency, growing online harms, and the intensification of civil unrest and polarisation illustrated by protest, disorder, and hate crime."

And, on the benefits of increased funding, the SPA's submission states that strategic investment:

> "will provide officers and staff to tackle priority areas such as VAWG [violence against women and girls] and deliver significant benefits to the public through the new strengthened community policing model, delivering the ambition of Vision 2030".[2]

Regarding the implications of funding for 2027-28 being restricted to that set out in the Scottish Spending Review, the responses from Police Scotland and the SPA set out significant concerns. For example, the SPA states:

> "A flat cash settlement would make setting a balanced budget impossible. As the majority of costs are people-related, and given the ongoing commitment to no

[2] Police Scotland's website provides information on Vision 2030.

> compulsory redundancies, cost reduction could only be achieved by natural attrition and ceasing all recruitment.
>
> Stopping all recruitment to achieve flat cash would result in officer numbers of less than 15,600, the lowest level since 2003-04. Even if such extreme measures were taken, it would not be possible to achieve the level of cuts required, with further reductions in officer numbers of over 400 required in 2028-29 to achieve a balanced budget.
>
> Given the extreme nature of the actions required to deliver these savings, a flat cash funding scenario is not achievable in year and would devastate the service."

In addition, the responses seek changes to allow the use of borrowing powers, the carrying of resource and capital reserves across financial years, and multi-year funding settlements.

Submissions from organisations representing police officers, the Scottish Police Federation and the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, raise many of the same issues highlighted by Police Scotland and the SPA.

The response from the Scottish Police Federation includes a focus on police officer numbers. This is considered below under the heading of 'Police workforce'. The submission from UNISON, relating to the role of police staff, is also considered under that heading.

The response from HMICS also highlights challenges faced by the police:

> "Police Scotland continues to face significant pressure from the combination of increasing demand, workforce affordability challenges and the growing complexity of policing. The service faces sustained budgetary pressures resulting from pay costs, inflation, national insurance, technology requirements and estate maintenance."

In addition, HMICS emphasises a need to look at what is happening across the justice system:

> "Police Scotland's primary challenge is not simply one of police funding, but of increasing demand across a justice system and demand from communities where pressures in one agency inevitably impact all others. Continued emphasis on workforce wellbeing, digital modernisation, prevention and whole-system collaboration offers the greatest opportunity to improve outcomes for the public while preserving frontline capacity."

Police workforce

The submission to the call for views from the Scottish Police Federation emphasises the case for more police officers:

> "In June 2026, Scotland had approximately 16,402 full-time equivalent police officers, compared with approximately 17,242 a decade earlier: a reduction of around 840 officers despite rising demand. Headline establishment figures do not

> show how many officers are available for operational deployment. In August 2026, approximately 2,915 officers were on modified duties, including more than 1,600 identified as non-deployable. Those officers continue to make a valuable contribution, but their circumstances highlight the difference between total strength and frontline availability. Sickness absence, annual leave, training, rest days and other legitimate abstractions further reduce the number available at any given time.
>
> The Federation believes staffing requirements must be determined by operational demand rather than by the number of posts that can be afforded within a predetermined budget. Restoring the establishment to at least 17,234 officers would be a reasonable initial recovery objective, requiring approximately 832 additional officers from the June 2026 position. This is a starting benchmark, not a ceiling. A comprehensive independent assessment should establish whether current demands require an even larger workforce."

The response from UNISON focuses on police staff (rather than police officers). It notes that police staff "answer 999 and 101 calls, run custody suites, carry out vetting, forensic, analytical and administrative work, and keep the service running". It raises concerns about police staff budgets being squeezed, leading to insufficient staff to carry out important work and the possibility of having to backfill their posts with police officers. It comments that:

> "The Committee is likely to hear calls for more police officers. Any increase in officer numbers, of any size, is arbitrary without a workforce plan that shows what the service needs officers and staff to do. Within a fixed budget, more officers cost more to recruit, train and employ, and that money is likely to come from the digital investment the service says it needs or from the staff budget. It could also undo the work done to balance the workforce."

Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC)

As noted above, the PIRC gets its funding through the Police Central Government budget. It received £8.3m of resource funding in the Scottish Budget 2026-27.

The submission from the PIRC outlines its role:

> "PIRC investigates incidents involving the police and reviews the way the police handle complaints from the public. PIRC's work is key to holding policing bodies to account, supporting learning and improvement in the service provided to the public, and building and maintaining public confidence in policing and the justice system more generally."

Its submission acknowledges a £1m uplift in funding received in 2026-27 but argues that more is needed to meet the demand for its services. In this context, the submission highlights:

- an expanded role of the PIRC under the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025

- increases in Crown-directed investigations into deaths following police contact, and in applications for complaint handling reviews by members of the public.

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