

Criminal Justice Committee

**21st Meeting, 2022 (Session 6),
Wednesday, 22 June 2022**

Police numbers and the potential impact of new pension arrangements

Introduction

1. This paper sets out correspondence that the Committee has received on the subject of police staffing numbers and the potential impact of new pension arrangements (**Annex**). This followed a request from the Committee to the Chief Constable asking for an update on the matter after consideration of an SSI.¹

Action

2. Members are invited to discuss the correspondence and decide what, if any, follow-up action they wish to take.

**Clerks to the Committee
June 2022**

¹ [The Police Pensions \(Commutation\) Amendment \(Scotland\) Regulations 2022.](#)

Letters on police numbers and the new pension arrangements

At previous meetings of the Committee, Members have explored the issue of the potential impact on staffing levels in Police Scotland as a result of changes to pension arrangements brought about by a recent court ruling.

Responses to correspondence from the Committee to the Chief Constable have now been received from David Page (Deputy Chief Officer, Police Scotland) on behalf of the Chief Constable and also from the Scottish Police Federation (see below).

Letter from David Page

I write in reference to your letter dated 22 April 2022 to the Chief Constable, where you ask for an assessment on the impact of the recent Police Pension changes. I have been asked to reply on his behalf.

Police Scotland sees on average 812 officers leave the organisation annually. Already during quarter 1 of this calendar year we have seen 321 officers leave the organisation, an increase of 69% on the normal 190 officers, which is the 5 year average for this period. This increase is directly related to retirements. A total of 735 officers to date, (this includes the 321) have informed Police Scotland they are going to retire or have in fact already retired, which effects mainly quarters 1 & 2 only.

With the changes to the pension commutation calculation there are currently 1386 officers either eligible to take advantage of the change and leave now or will be eligible to take advantage of the change and leave the organisation within the next 12 months.

Therefore it is likely that quarters 3 & 4 will see similar numbers retiring to the above figures.

440 of the 735 officers who are or have retired have police service of between 25-29 years' service and therefore can be directly attributed to the pension changes.

The number of officers across each rank eligible to leave within the next 12 months from this quarter, if they chose to, is made up of the following ranks:

| CS | Supt | Ch. Insp | Insp | Sgt | PC | Total |
|-----------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| 21 | 63 | 78 | 221 | 324 | 670 | 1377 |

As the above figures evidence, the recent changes to the Police Pensions Scheme has directly increased the number of retirements than we would normally expect to see.

While the loss of this number of officers, across all ranks, will undoubtedly present challenges for Police Scotland through the remainder of 2022 and 2023, at this time there is no impact to service delivery and the following measures will ensure we continue to maintain effective service delivery to the communities across Scotland:

Executive Leadership:

I will lead our response and will coordinate and communicate the up to date challenges and our response to mitigate those challenges across Police Scotland. I will also lead on recently developed critical vacancy escalation process to ensure critical posts are filled and will continue to prioritise posts within Local Policing and across our specialist functions.

Promotion:

The promotion calendar has been reviewed and the processes expedited in both time and efficiency, ensuring that the proper governance, transparency and quality of candidates are retained.

Promotion Parades Dates:

Normally promotion parades are held quarterly, however to expedite substantive promotions to ensure stability across promoted ranks, these will be conducted immediately after the promotion processes for all senior ranks. Junior rank promotion parades will also be held more frequently based on organisational need, not set dates.

Police Officer Recruitment:

Police Scotland will endeavour to recruit 300+ probationers per quarter. We will also maximise transferee opportunities from police forces across the United Kingdom.

Work Force Planning:

A review is ongoing on all non-critical, temporary ranks and secondments, to lessen the impact on front line resources. That review will look at police officers currently working within corporate services roles who could be redeployed into Local Policing.

Training and Specialist Resilience:

A review of resilience, capability and specialist availability is ongoing, as are the current on-call specialist cadre requirements. Once organisational training requirement are fully understood, a redesigned training schedule, to train and upskill will be devised.

This will undoubtedly be a challenging period for Police Scotland, however I am assured that the mechanisms now implemented will meet those challenges head on and align to our Strategic Workforce Plan.

Letter from Calum Steele, Scottish Police Federation

I refer to the above and to the correspondence dated 18th May on this subject, sent to you by Mr David Page on behalf of the Police Service of Scotland (PSoS).

I very much regret that I have to write to you in these terms, but the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) simply cannot allow such a fundamentally inaccurate articulation of the realities this correspondence represents, to remain unchallenged.

It is factually untrue that the changes to the pension commutation calculation have created a new cohort of officers eligible to retire from the police service in the next 12 months. As you are aware, the ability for police officers in the 1987 pension scheme to retire from age 50 with at least 25 years of service has been a provision of that scheme since its inception.

The only change that has been applied to that provision is one that now ensures lump sum payments are determined by an actuarial calculation, and not an arbitrary fixed multiplier. This change is welcomed as it removes almost certain discrimination from the scheme on that particular issue and avoids the inevitability of expensive and lengthy legal action.

Whilst it is true that this change now represents a more advantageous financial option for officers to consider retirement, it is not true that the retirement of officers between 25-29 years of service can be directly attributed to the pension changes.

It is a matter of considerable regret that the PSoS seems incapable of acknowledging there are a myriad of internal, as well as some external, factors driving officers into retirement.

The SPF has been raising through internal mechanisms that whilst the changes to commutation opens the door, it is a combination of internal and external circumstances, demands, and events that are causing officers to step through it into retirement.

Our members are telling us that they are overworked and undervalued. They tell us they have their rest constantly disrupted; they tell us they are being made physically and mentally unwell by the tolls of a job that simply heaps more and more work on those who have literally nothing left to give. Not only do our members tell us this, independent academic research does the same, and the service's own surveys do likewise.

In addition, our members tell us they feel unsafe at their work as so few officers are available to respond to calls. They tell us they feel they are failing victims, and the wider public as inquiries take so long to complete due to an overwhelming volume of workload. They tell us they are carrying more and more risk, and that training is close to non-existent once probation ends. They tell us the PSoS seems deaf to these concerns, and they have long since

given up any hope that the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) or Scottish Government are interested as all they see are self-congratulatory narratives that disguise these realities.

Whilst I could narrate at length a whole host of other relevant factors it is demonstrably true that over the past decade and a half, the Government, the Service itself, and (since 2013) the SPA, have presided over a systematic degradation to the value of police pay that stands apart from the pay of other public sector workers.

It is also noteworthy that palpable anger remains across the PSoS as to how police officers were treated by Government, the Service, and the SPA during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Quite simply the reason police officers are choosing to retire is because they have had enough.

Mr Page states "... at this time there is no impact to service delivery ..." This is demonstrably untrue and verging on the deliberately disingenuous.

The PSoS has the issue of mass retirements on its risk register. Concern is being raised at all ranks as to the exceptional risks the loss of so many officers and with so many skills has on the ability to deliver policing at all levels. The ability to police safely is a real concern and yet the corporate response from the service, as so ably demonstrated in Mr Page's letter, is one of denial.

Police Officer Recruitment - The PSoS already has the lowest number of police officers since 2008. Retirements are happening almost daily, and numbers continue to fall. The true scale of the shortfall in police numbers will be obvious in June with the publication of officer numbers taking place before the accounting chicanery of mass recruitment before each quarterly publication, is able to be achieved.

"Maximising transferee opportunities" is simply meaningless corporate language.

Leadership and Promotion - Whilst leadership and promotion are clearly critical in the police service, the impact of promotion ultimately leaves fewer constables.

Leadership however is about more than rank insignia. The skills required, and demands faced by officers in promoted posts require to be nurtured and developed with training.

As I have previously articulated, training is almost non-existent and its absence simply compounds risks for those newly promoted.

Workforce Planning – The sad reality is that all of these issues have been foreseen. They have been highlighted; options for amelioration have been presented, and simply ignored. Frankly there has been a corporate disconnect

between the needs of policing, and of police officers when set against the almost all-consuming focus on balancing a budget.

The PSoS is undoubtedly at a critical point in its history. It cannot properly respond to the challenges it faces here and now if it is not honest about them to itself, whilst simultaneously seeking to present a highly partial narrative about them to our parliamentarians.

I am more than happy to address your Committee in person on the issues this letter covers should you so wish.