

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION RELATING TO ARMED POLICING IN FALKIRK COUNCIL AREA.

On Friday 18 July 2014, Deputy Chief Constable Iain Livingstone released some detail around the value of armed police officers on our streets. It can be found on the Police Scotland website and a copy is outlined below.

Subsequently on Friday 25 July 2014, the DCC recorded a video message and published a further series of Q&A's re Armed Policing in Scotland – Facts not Myths on the Police Scotland website. A copy of the Q&A is outlined below.

Following a request by Police Scotland, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary (Scotland) (HMICS) announced on 14 August 2014 a joint HMICS/SPA independent assessment of the standing authority decision process which will be conducted during September 2014. A copy of the detail is outlined below.

In respect of how this impacts on Forth Valley Division and Falkirk Council area I would add the following:

Local Police Officers within Forth Valley and Falkirk Area Command do not carry firearms as a matter of routine. The vast majority of officers involved in the police use of firearms are part of the Service's Operational Support Division (OSD) and are therefore not part of the Local Policing team covering Forth Valley and Falkirk Area Command. The OSD has a base in Stirling from which an Armed Response Vehicle is deployed on a 24/7 basis. The officers respond to incidents that may require their skills, equipment and training as directed through the firearms command arrangements which ensure that appropriate consideration and approvals are given before the officers deploy to provide an armed response. This mirrors the arrangements that were in place for Central Scotland Police with the enhancement of the Stirling based crew being able readily to draw in, or support, colleagues from adjoining areas as the nature of incidents direct.

To provide additional capacity OSD maintains a specialist cadre of Firearms Officers who are trained to address the most serious incidents and they can be assigned to support the Armed Response Vehicle crews as appropriate. Forth Valley Division also has a small contingent of officers who are qualified to carry firearms however they are only utilised in a firearms role when an ongoing or pre-planned incident requires support beyond the dedicated Firearms Officers mentioned above.

Overall therefore it would be appropriate to state that the police carriage of firearms is at a very low level, however this core expert capacity allows Police Scotland to maintain its local policing profile as an unarmed service. I would be happy to answer any questions from members in relation to this.

Davie Flynn, Chief Superintendent, Local Police Commander.

Armed Policing - Statement from DCC Livingstone

Published 18 July 2014

There's been a lot of debate about the benefits of having armed police officers on our streets. We have more than 17,234 police officers working across Scotland to keep people safe. Our armed officers play a critically important role in that, from responding to a robbery at gunpoint at bookmakers in Inverness in March to tackling a knife-wielding criminal who recently threatened the public and attacked our officers on Edinburgh's busiest street.

Armed officers have long been a feature of policing in Scotland. Standing authorities for the deployment of armed officers have been in place across more than half the country for many years. Since early 2008 in former Strathclyde Police, 2009 in Tayside Police and from March 2013 in the former Northern Constabulary.

With the creation of Police Scotland, the Chief Constable was for the first time, able to make a decision informed by all the intelligence and evidence for Scotland as a whole in front of him, to deploy a small number of high trained, specialist armed officers to be available right across the country 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

There are currently 275 dedicated armed officers who are deployed on a shift basis across Scotland which means only a small number will be on duty at any one time. Put another way, for every 1000 officers there will be less than 10 officers armed and on shift. These officers are highly trained specialists, available to respond to incidents at a moment's notice where the deployment of armed officers is considered appropriate. Officers volunteer for these roles to keep us all safe. They're armed so that the other 17,000 officers don't need to be.

It is true that some parts of the country experience lower levels of crime than others. But criminal behaviour does not respect borders or local authority boundaries. As events have shown us – in Cumbria, in Northumberland, in Hungerford and Dunblane, threat does not discriminate between the city or the town and the rural community. Police Scotland's single unified service ended the previous post code lottery of services so all communities now have equal access to all the specialist services available at any time, including armed policing.

The Chief Constable's duty of operational independence requires him to make decisions on policing free of political interference and to assess what is best to keep local communities safe. Nevertheless, we take on board some of the concerns that have been raised. It is for that reason that the Chief Constable has already given an undertaking to take into account Highland Council's motion calling for a review of the policy when the standing firearms authority is next reviewed alongside the intelligence, threat and risk assessments that will be considered at that time. The Chief Constable also provided explanation and reassurance to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), the national oversight body responsible for policing, at their last public Board meeting in Selkirk.

When armed officers are needed they are immediately available. When they are not carrying out their specialist duties they are there to support their colleagues in local policing divisions through regular patrols and routine tasks. This includes keeping people safe on our roads or saving lives

such as the time a 79 year old woman was sighted in Caledonian Canal in Inverness and armed officers were the closest unit on hand to assist. Our armed officers are highly trained and have strong connections with the local communities they serve. They are dedicated to protect and support the people of Scotland.

Deputy Chief Constable Crime and Operational Support, Iain Livingstone

DCC LIVINGSTONE – Armed Policing in Scotland – Facts Not Myths

25 July 2014

Are all Scotland's police officers now routinely armed?

Absolutely not. There are only 275 highly trained specialist armed response officers, fewer than two per cent of our entire police service. They work on a shift system so that means there will only be a very small number on duty at any one time. For every 1,000 officers there will be 10 officers armed and on shift. We have a small number of officers readily armed so the rest of our 17,000 plus officers don't need to be.

But Scotland's a safe place to live - surely we don't need armed officers?

Scotland is a safe place to live and the first year of Police Scotland has seen a continued reduction in the levels of violent crime. However, it is the Chief Constable's duty to take a proportionate decision, based on all the evidence that assesses the level of risk and threat to the public and keeps our communities safe. The current assessment is that there is a need for a small number of armed officers to help keep people safe.

By having a small number of specialist armed officers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, this means that if the need does arise, we are ready.

Shouldn't armed officers be deployed on firearms-related duties only?

Armed officers are police officers first and foremost. When not deployed in their specialist roles, armed officers support their local policing colleagues and can be deployed on regular patrols and operational tasks to keep people safe. It would be a waste of valuable resource if they didn't continue with core duties. This can include keeping our roads safe or helping people in distress.

Just this week HMICS acknowledged that the availability of armed officers to appropriately support front line colleagues when not deployed on specialist duties is an efficient use of skills and experience.

Isn't it more dangerous having armed officers deployed on the street with weapons?

No. The standing authority means our communities are in fact better protected. Officers are now able at the start of each shift to attach their weapons so that if an incident does require their support, they are already equipped and not working against time to arm themselves in a high-pressure situation. This reduces the risk of accidents and keeps themselves, their unarmed colleagues and the public safe.

Since the inception of Police Scotland there have been no accidental discharges of officers' weapons in public nor any instances where weapons were drawn in circumstances in which the actions taken did not accord with the guidance within the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice document.

Does this policy not make Scotland out of step with the rest of Britain?

No, quite the reverse. All police forces have armed policing and a standing authority which allows trained armed officers to openly carry weapons applies in 42 out of 43 forces across Britain - the huge majority of police officers across the UK are unarmed.

Police Scotland's policy does not represent a new policy for Scotland: equivalent arrangements applied in the former Strathclyde, Tayside and Northern police forces prior to April 2013. This is a decision based on all the evidence and intelligence required that informs the level of risk and threat to public safety and the safety of unarmed police officers.

So there are more armed police now since Police Scotland was created?

There has been no increase in the number of armed officers in Scotland since the start of Police Scotland.

How is the Chief Constable's decision on a standing authority reached?

The standing authority on armed policing is reviewed quarterly. The Chief Constable considers intelligence and evidence from Scotland as whole and makes a proportionate decision on the need for armed officers based on this information.

The decision is informed by a range of factors which includes the need to deliver equal access to specialist resource across the country and a range of intelligence and threat assessments which includes Police Scotland's Strategic Assessment and the Firearms Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment.

The postcode lottery of previous policing arrangements prior to Police Scotland where different parts of the country would have different levels of service across the country was not acceptable. As we have seen in tragic events of the past, violent crime does not respect geographical differences.

HMICS will also participate in the next review quarterly review in September.

Is this a sign of things to come - does this not open up the opportunity for even more armed officers on our streets?

No. The Chief Constable's role requires him to make operational policy decisions, free from political interference, to determine what is the best way to keep people safe. The decision on a standing authority is based on a range of factors, including the Strategic Threat Assessment, which assesses the level of risk to the public and other police officers. Any decision must be proportionate to the evidence presented. Immediate access to a small number of specialist armed officers ensures that the rest of the 17,000 plus officers can remain unarmed.

There are a number of standards against which the Chief Constable ensures his decision is proportionate. The training of our armed officers accords with the UK National Police Firearms Training Curriculum and our practice and policy accords with the guidance contained within the

Armed Policing Authorised Professional Practice document, both of which are maintained by the UK College of Policing. The College of Policing provides independent oversight of Armed Policing training, with scheduled formal inspection from this body due to next take place in 2015. In addition to this, Police Scotland sits on the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Armed Policing Sub Group which ensures that issues of UK significance are fully considered within the Scottish context.

Why has there been no public or Parliamentary consultation on arming Scotland's police?

Armed policing has been a long standing feature of policing in Scotland – this is not a new policy. What is new is that all parts of Scotland now have access to a small number of specialist officers. It was unacceptable that different parts of the country had different levels of access to a specialist service that is there to keep our communities safe.

Legislation ensures that the Chief Constable is operationally independent to enable him to make decisions on policing free from political interference. He is required to make operational policy decisions that will most effectively keep communities safe. Both the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Scottish Police Authority to which the Chief Constable is accountable share this view. The next quarterly review in September will take account of the views raised so far, alongside the range of evidence and intelligence that inform the decision.

How are officers selected and trained for these roles?

Police officers volunteer for these specialist roles and undergo a minimum of 9 weeks initial training to meet stringent nationally recognised standards for the Armed Response Vehicle role. This is supported by ongoing refresher and requalification training to maintain the required tactical and technical skills for the role. These individuals are volunteers and are highly trained dedicated professionals who play a vital role in keeping people safe.

Police Scotland welcomes review into firearms standing authority

Published 14 August 2014

Police Scotland today welcomed an announcement by HMICS and the Scottish Police Authority detailing the terms of their reviews regarding the operational deployment of armed response vehicle officers under a standing authority. The standing authority allows these trained firearms officers to carry a sidearm and taser.

Deputy Chief Constable Iain Livingstone said:

"We welcome confirmation of the review by HMICS and the Scottish Police Authority following our request to the Inspectorate for an independent assessment of the standing authority decision process. As part of this, HMICS will attend the next Firearms Monitoring Group in September where the standing firearms authority will be reviewed.

"Following this review and if a decision is made that the authority should remain in place, we will commission further work to consider alternative options for the carrying of weapons by armed officers. Police Scotland will also review the operational guidance provided to officers regarding the functions they perform when not engaged in firearms duties and consider how we may improve our engagement with communities.

"Our policing purpose is to keep people safe against all potential threats. The differences in specialist firearms protection to communities and unarmed officers prior to Police Scotland was unacceptable and inequitable. By having a small number of specially trained firearms officers available 24/7, we can ensure that all communities have equal access to this specialist police capability. We look forward to considering any recommendations that come from the reviews announced today."