

## **Justice Sub-Committee on Policing**

### **Armed police officers**

#### **Letter from the Scottish Police Authority to the Convener**

Thank you for your letter of 26 June seeking an update on the Scottish Police Authority's (SPA) consideration of the Standing Firearms Authority issue, on which the Sub Committee has previously sought SPA views.

This letter follows therefore updates my earlier response to the Sub Committee of 11 June.

At the SPA board on 25 June, the Chief Constable updated the public meeting on the Standing Firearms Authority within his Chief Constable's report. SPA members subsequently took the opportunity to question the Chief Constable, focussing principally on safety and security, benefits and risks, perceptions of local impact, and the engagement and communication with communities and their elected representatives.

The discussion can be viewed by Sub-Committee members on our archived coverage of the meeting at the following link:

<http://new.livestream.com/accounts/5307060/SPAWed25JuneSelkirk>

In those exchanges, the Chief Constable provided members with assurances that the standing firearms authority for trained firearms officers is common practice in the vast majority of constabularies within the UK, reduces the risks of weapons being accessed illegally, and improves the response of the service to potentially very serious firearms incidents. He stressed that these kinds of firearms incidents, while extremely rare, do take place throughout Scotland.

In our public consideration of the issue, SPA members stressed that public concerns, particularly in the north of Scotland, were real and that an ongoing process of information and engagement was required to address them. We believe that the information provided to the Authority on 25 June on how the standing authority works, and what it means in practice, was helpful. As I indicated in my earlier letter, and as reinforced by SPA members on 25 June, we do believe it would have provided greater confidence and reassurance for communities and their elected representatives if they had received similar information and briefing on this issue at an earlier stage, and in a more proactive and visible way.

I believe Police Scotland has acknowledged that and we are aware that, for example, the service has undertaken further information and engagement work with stakeholders in the Highlands on this issue. I have also written to Highland Council and invited them to respond to the SPA on the extent to which this further engagement provides them with necessary reassurances about public safety.

As I indicated in my previous correspondence, SPA will continue to monitor the implications of this national approach to firearms through the arrangements we have in place to consider risk, safety and complaints.

Vic Emery OBE  
Chair, Scottish Police Authority  
18 July 2014