

1 October 2014

Ms. Christine Grahame MSP
Convenor
Justice Sub-Committee on Policing
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE
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Dear Ms. Grahame,

I am writing to you following recent correspondence with Police Scotland's Force Executive about the deployment of armed policing officers

Police Scotland reviews, on a quarterly basis, the national standing firearms authority which provides the basis for the deployment of a small number of armed officers to help keep people safe. These reviews allow us to take full account of updated intelligence and evidence from across Scotland and beyond in order to arrive at a proportionate, evidence-based decision.

On 16 September the Armed Policing Monitoring Group (APMG) met to review the standing firearms authority. I chaired the meeting, which was attended by the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents; the Scottish Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers' lead on armed policing, Deputy Chief Constable Simon Chesterman, who contributed to the review. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICS) was also in attendance as an observer following Police Scotland's request to the Inspectorate for an independent assessment of the standing authority decision process.

The APMG considered Police Scotland's Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment as well as updated evidence on legally and illegally held firearms in Scotland; classified details of serious organised crime groups which operate across the country; and the number of operational firearms deployments (2,805) between 1 April and 31 August 2014. The group also received an assessment of the terrorist threat following the recently raised UK security threat level. Following the Chief Constable's commitment to take on board external representations, a range of views were fully considered.

At the end of the APMG meeting, I concluded that Police Scotland's national standing firearms authority was proportionate and necessary and should

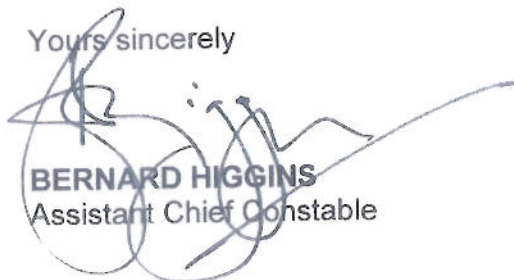
continue, and that view was unanimously supported by the APMG. The Chief Constable, Sir Stephen House, has now approved that recommendation. In addition, having listened to concerns expressed by politicians and some members of the public and having assessed the current operational challenges faced by Police Scotland, the Chief Constable has directed that firearms officers attached to Armed Response Vehicles will now only be deployed to firearms incidents or where there is a threat to life. A further recommendation arising from the APMG, also approved by the Chief Constable, is that a working group has been established to review the types of carriage for both sidearms and Tasers and the deployment of Armed Response Vehicle Officers when not deployed to firearm incidents. This group will submit a preliminary report to the next meeting of the APMG in January 2015.

Police Scotland is committed to ensuring that all communities have the same access to specialist policing support, no matter where or when the need. The threat from firearms and other serious criminality does not discriminate between the city or the town and the rural community or indeed the Highlands and the Borders. Just last week our armed officers were deployed to a number of high-profile incidents that occurred in 10 out of our 14 Policing Divisions, including those believed to be the most remote and the safest across Scotland. In this case I believe we have balanced that commitment with our overriding duty to keep people safe as well as consideration of the views expressed in communities about the perception of armed officers supporting local policing.

Police Scotland is committed to ensuring that the service we provide is as effective as possible in keeping people safe, contributing to high levels of public confidence and trust. We will therefore continue to take into consideration the views of all interested stakeholders as we take forward our recommendations to review our wider policy for armed policing in Scotland. In this context we will also consider carefully the forthcoming findings of the reviews by HMICS and the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), which we recently welcomed.

Finally, as the Cabinet Secretary announced in his statement to Parliament on 5 August, the Chief Constable has agreed to provide quarterly reports – to both the Scottish Parliament's Justice Sub-Committee on Policing and the SPA – on the number of officers deployed on firearms duties. The first such report will be submitted before the end of this month.

Yours sincerely



BERNARD HIGGINS
Assistant Chief Constable