

LETTER SENT BY E-MAIL

Michael Matheson
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG

Our Ref: JF/LW

28 October 2015

Dear Cabinet Secretary

**POLICE SCOTLAND PROPOSALS ON STRENGTHENING LOCAL POLICING –
SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY OVERSIGHT**

I write to provide you with an update on the oversight and assurance the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) has carried out on Police Scotland's consultation on proposed changes to its divisional structures in the north east and west coast of Scotland.

You will recall that this was a subject raised with you in the evidence session held in June by the Scottish Parliament's Justice Sub Committee on Policing and you set clear expectations then of SPA oversight of the process and outcomes of consultation.

In planning for the SPA board meeting held yesterday (27 October 2015) Police Scotland indicated that it was now in a position to provide an update to the Authority on its consideration of the engagement work and next steps on the proposed merger of A and B divisions, and separately of K and L divisions.

As you will already be aware, there has been considerable engagement between the SPA and Police Scotland on these proposals going back to November 2014 before engagement with local interests began, and since then through a series of discussions at the SPA's monthly business meetings. SPA members with lead relationship responsibilities with the relevant local authorities (Morag McLaughlin, Douglas Yates and Graham Houston) have also had engagement with local commanders and with local elected members, and taken the opportunity to give feedback directly to Police Scotland within their consultation process.

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While acknowledging that it is for the Chief Constable to decide the divisional structure within which the direction and control of police officers is carried out, SPA welcomed the opportunity to provide more formal oversight of that engagement and consultation process, given the clear public interest in the outcomes.

In advance of yesterday's board meeting, I wrote to Police Scotland setting out SPA members' expectations of the key areas where assurance was sought. These included:

- Evidence on the approach taken by Police Scotland to engagement and consultation with local interests in each areas, what feedback was received and how it was considered by Police Scotland, and how issues raised during the engagement phase has shaped and informed Police Scotland decisions on whether to proceed, or not, with divisional structure changes;
- Evidence on how Police Scotland propose to ensure that local authorities continue to enjoy appropriate access, and responsiveness, to senior decision-makers from Police Scotland where changes are proposed;
- How senior officer resilience and work-life balance across the service will be supported within any change or rationalisation – locally and nationally - and especially within the superintending ranks;
- Assurance on how any proposed changes have been considered alongside existing community planning structures and will contribute to partnership working and the successful delivery of shared outcomes;
- How work to assess and quantify potential efficiencies has progressed, and what a timeline for realisation may look like;
- How any proposed structural changes will read across to decisions about the police estate, given the strong prominence stakeholders in both the north-east and west coast have given to the status of local headquarters buildings, and;
- What preparations for further planned communications have been made to inform and engage internally and externally with interested parties.

As a result of the evidence considered, I can report that SPA members were satisfied that Police Scotland had demonstrated an effective approach to engagement and that the proposals now being taken forward have been developed to take account of concerns and issues raised. This includes the decision not to proceed at this time with one of the two proposed changes.

As a result, from today (28 October 2015) Police Scotland will begin communications internally and externally to confirm that the divisions currently aligned to Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray areas will from the beginning of 2016 operate as a single division. They will also confirm that the proposed merger of K and L divisions will not be taken forward, but will be reviewed again not earlier than the third quarter of 2016-17. SPA sought and received assurance that when such a review is in due course carried out, there will be further and comprehensive engagement with local interests across the various local authority areas involved.

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While consideration of the paper from Police Scotland took place yesterday in a closed session of the board to allow for subsequent considered communication to officers and staff, SPA members have requested that the paper considered by the board and, once available, the minute of the discussion are added to the public record via the SPA website. SPA will also publish this letter of assurance to you as part of SPA's complementary communication with local stakeholders.

Yours sincerely



JOHN FOLEY
Chief Executive Officer