

**Item 11 - Question Time**Response to Mr M Reiss

The assertion of an ebbing in public confidence in the leadership of Police Scotland is not based on the evidence. The number of crimes is reducing across the Highlands and detection rates are increasing.

Every three months the Divisional Commander reports to our Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee on police performance. The latest report from the December Committee covering the period April to September 2014 states overall crime continues to fall in Highland with a 20.2% reduction in Class 1-4 crimes (3107 crimes compared to 3895 crimes over the same period in 2013).

This figure was broken down as follows:

Class 1- Crimes of Violence: 29% reduction from the previous year (131 last year compared to 93 this year to date).

Class 2- Sexual Crimes: 28% reduction from the previous year (252 last year compared to 182 this year to date).

Class 3- Crimes of Dishonesty: 19% reduction from the previous year (2289 last year compared to 1846 this year to date).

Class 4- Fire-raising, Malicious Mischief etc: 19% reduction from the previous year (1223 last year compared to 986 this year to date).

Members of that Committee recently received an up-date on police statistics for April to September 2014 reported to the Scottish Police Authority. This provided information on crimes and detection across Scotland. In that report overall crime (Groups 1-4) in Scotland has fallen by 6.9% compared to the same period in 2013. Compared to other areas of Scotland, Highland had the greatest reduction in recorded crime at over 20% and the 4<sup>th</sup> best increase in detection rates of all 32 Council areas, at over a 5% increase on the previous year.

In October last year that Committee also heard that feedback from our Citizens' Panel in 2014 showed 96.7% of our Highland residents rated their locality as either "very" or "fairly safe".

Members have far more opportunity to engage with and scrutinise police performance now than they ever had. There are quarterly reports to the CPE committee and now reports twice a year to all Area Committees with local information on community safety issues and how the police and partners are responding to them.

I recognise that members take that scrutiny role seriously. There is no doubt that it has been effective locally and at a national level given the influence of the Council over the review in approach to the standing authority for arming police. This shows

that the current mechanism for local scrutiny is effective locally and has been influential nationally.

Over a year ago we presented a case for retaining police call handling for Highland in Inverness. The Scottish Police Authority (SPA) approved in January 2014 moving incrementally from eleven to five contact centres and control rooms over a two year period. This includes three Area Control Rooms, a National Command Base and a National Virtual Service Centre.

Although the arrangements for handling calls are changing the standards are not: 90% of 999 calls are to continue to be answered within 10 seconds and 90% of non-emergency (101) calls are to continue to be answered within 40 seconds. Calls will be routed to the national virtual service centre based between Govan, Motherwell and Bilston Glen (outside Edinburgh) and supported by new IT systems to improve information. This change is planned for the end of 2015. Actual performance will continue to be reported to Committees for member scrutiny.

Part of the change will involve the creation of a new National Command Base to be located in Inverness. This will provide 24/7 support to front-line policing nationally for the checking of details when people are stopped, or to be stopped, by the police. In addition, there will be an events room/incidents facility to be stood up in Inverness for particular events or incidents which may be planned (e.g. Belladrum or other large festivals) or responsive (serious incident).

Members of the CPE Committee were recently circulated a further report from the SPA Board meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015. This set out a public statement of expectations on how the SPA and Police Scotland are engaging on police policy issues and decisions, in particular those issues likely to raise significant public interest. The importance of engagement locally is included in that public statement where it provides the following commitments:

‘The SPA commits to proactively ensuring that the views of communities, communities of interest, elected representatives and partners are regularly sought and captured to inform its governance role.’

‘Police Scotland commits to being open and flexible to change when entering engagement with communities and their democratic representatives on policies of significant public interest.’

The evidence presented does not make the case for reviewing either the call handling or governance arrangements. Members can continue to scrutinise police performance and be engaged on any new proposals.