

Police Scotland to increase number of armed officers



Police Scotland is to increase the number of officers within armed policing to help maintain the safety and security of our communities.

Assistant Chief Constable Bernard Higgins, Operational Support, said plans were being taken forward to recruit 124 officers from across Police Scotland to enhance the capacity and capability across the country in response to any emerging threat.

The Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government have been fully involved in discussions around the increase, which is an operational decision for the Chief Constable. In April this year National Police Chiefs' Council announced extra officers and training for England and Wales.

The increase is in response to the latest assessments of threat from terrorism and criminal use of firearms. It would mean that fewer than three per cent of officers are deployed in a firearms capacity in Scotland, which is comparable with other forces in the UK. The availability and use of armed officers is a critical factor in the response to a number of incident types including terrorism. Work has been ongoing through exercising and collaboration between agencies to reduce the threat to communities in Scotland.

Assistant Chief Constable Higgins said: "The threat level to the UK remains severe. There is no specific known threat to Scotland and this increase is not a response to any direct intelligence; but we must play our part in ensuring the safety and security of the whole of the UK. It would be dangerously complacent to think that Scotland is any less at risk than the

rest of the UK and this move helps enhance our response.

"The current firearms deployment model in Scotland was developed in 2013. Much has changed, especially around the threat from terrorism, but also our understanding and assessment of criminal access to and use of firearms. Our thinking moving forward is based upon ensuring Scotland is as well protected as anywhere in the UK and that we are a strong contributor to the overall security of communities in the UK.

"Our focus remains absolutely clear: to protect the public; reduce the risk posed by criminals including terrorists; and ensure we respond swiftly, effectively and decisively to any threat.

"We constantly assess and review our resources against current intelligence. Recent terrorist events, including Brussels and Paris incidents in 2015, have continued to shape our planning and preparation alongside colleagues in policing in England and Wales. The increase is proportionate to the uplift announced in England and Wales but also appropriate to the context of policing Scotland's communities."

There are currently 275 officers dedicated to armed response vehicles (ARVs). The increases will take place over the coming months with additional ARVs deployed in key locations, specialist firearms capability enhanced and resources identified to boost training requirements.

For operational security reasons, Police Scotland will not provide further detail about the deployment model.

ACC Higgins said: "Officers volunteer to carry out this duty; it means that the vast majority of the 17,000-plus officers in Police Scotland do not have to carry weapons. Armed officers are trained to an exceptionally high standard as well as being subject to exacting and rigorous exercising and testing.

"We believe in the values of an unarmed police service in

Scotland; but the capability that this small group of officers provides is an essential element in preventing and deterring harm in the world as we experience it, where global threats can impact in local communities. We want the public to support this this cadre of highly-trained officers, working alongside their local policing colleagues, to keep communities free from criminality of the most extreme and violent kind.

The increase in capacity and capability is expected to be complete by the spring/summer 2017.