

Scottish Police Federation respond to damning report by former Lord Advocate

The Scottish Police Federation has responded to a report which claims that Police Scotland has a stubborn problem with racism, sexism and homophobia and requires a “fundamental” review of its culture.

The review was ordered in June 2018 following concerns raised with the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (Pirc) over the case of Sheku Bayoh, who died in police custody in 2015.



The report runs to almost 500 pages and states that part of the problem was a machismo “canteen culture” which contributes to a “racist, misogynistic or emotionally damaging environment”.

Dame Elish Angiolini’s review also heard from various groups who felt the Scottish Police Federation did not represent all its members equally, and did not properly represent Black,

Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) officers well.

SPF general secretary Calum Steele responded: “On initial examination this report contains some good, some bad, and some unclear observations and recommendations.

“We note that the report appears to have strayed into areas outwith its remit, whilst conspicuously avoiding others that might legitimately have fallen within it.

“We welcome the fact that Dame Elish has recognised the bar for misconduct investigations against police officers is too low, the recommended introduction of lay members in misconduct hearings, and the recommendation to examine the workloads and number of supervisors in the police service.

“We are disappointed that the report stops short of recommending a commitment to prosecuting those who make malicious or vexatious complaints against the police, and we are disappointed that there is no meaningful recommendation in respect of the welfare support that so many contributors clearly identified as being deficient.

“It is our considered view that yet again commentators on police complaints processes believe that changing structures and regulations will ‘build public confidence’.

“It is not our experience that there is a widespread lack of public confidence in the processes as they exist now.

“We know through bitter experience that there are those in society (and indeed within the police service itself) who will never be satisfied with any police complaints process, and we cannot be surprised that they would have contributed adverse commentary to this review.

“We note the numerous recommendations in respect of changes to regulations; regulations first developed within the Scottish Government while Dame Elish was Lord Advocate.

“These regulations and processes were designed to move away from blame and sanction, to learning and reflection. We can only assume those approaches were supported by the law officers of the day. They were clearly supported by parliament.

“This report undermines those success and risks recreating a more adversarial blame-based system once more. This will not address the fact that the unsatisfied will always be unsatisfied, but it will make for a rich seam of work for lawyers and the legal profession, and lead to even more drain on the already woefully inadequate police budget.

“Clearly the public can have any form of police complaints system they want but they must recognise that the recommendations laid out in this report, will come at considerable financial cost. The report does not indicate how its recommendations ought to be paid for.

“What is clear however is that cost cutting on training, supervision, and welfare support for police officers has created organisational and reputational risks for the police service.

“It will be telling if this reality is overlooked in pursuit of sensationalist headlines about a police service that I do not recognise in this report, to satisfy the apparent demands of a public that I equally do not recognise, as clamouring for change.”