

Operation Unicorn update from the Chief Constable

Operation Unicorn – the well rehearsed sequence of events which had been planned to be put into action if the monarch died in Scotland, was acted out for real following the death of HM The Queen on 8 September.

At Thursday's meeting of the Scottish Police Authority Board, the Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone QPM, offered an update on what had happened in the week between Her late Majesty's death and her coffin leaving from Edinburgh Airport to be transported to London for the State Funeral. He claimed that: "Across the entire operation, across the whole of Scotland, we recorded just 13 arrests for offences such as low level disorder, violence, abusive and threatening behaviour and the illegal use of drones. One of those arrests has already resulted in a conviction at court."

This refers to a 74-year-old man who pleaded guilty to a breach of the peace charge near the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

Two men were charged over the weekend with an alleged assault on a heckler on the Royal Mile who shouted at Prince Andrew.



HM The Queen, Edinburgh, 12th Sept 2022

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This is a transcript of Sir Iain's update:

My comments today will start with a focus upon Operation Unicorn, the Scottish element relating to the death of Her Majesty The Queen.

However you will see my written report also outlines a number of significant investigations, convictions and arrests in the last number of weeks, which underlines that policing continued to respond to community need across the whole of Scotland during the intense period of Operation Unicorn.

As you reflected Chair, it was with sadness that we learned of the death of Her Majesty The Queen on Thursday, 8 September.

Her Majesty's love for and dedication to Scotland were evident to us all.

The close bond between Her Majesty and communities in Scotland was demonstrated through the memorial events across the

country and through the regard shown by many members of the public paying their respects.

As is so often the case in times of sadness or national challenge, duty requires policing to step forward with compassion and professionalism, individuals within the Police Service of Scotland setting aside personal plans at short notice to give public service.

Police Scotland had an important role to play to ensure significant events relating to Her Majesty's death could be held safely, securely and with dignity.

Operation Unicorn has been planned by many agencies over many years. Through that planning, in recent months and years I had appointed Assistant Chief Constable Kenny MacDonald as Gold Commander for the policing contribution. Deputy Chief Constable Malcolm Graham had strategic overview for Operation Unicorn and both ACC MacDonald and DCC Graham deployed to their Operation Unicorn duties following activation of Operation Unicorn. I appointed Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor to take strategic responsibility for business as usual policing across the country as the service stepped up for the enormous challenge.

In the hours and days after Her Majesty's death, officers and staff from every local policing division and every national department and capability were deployed to support Operation Unicorn.

As Chief Constable, I had a clear and express expectation that officers and staff would respond to this important and solemn occasion with professionalism and high standards and they did.

Everyone in Police Scotland played their part – those who planned our response over many years; those directly deployed to Operation Unicorn; others who provided effective policing

right across the country during this intense period.

Operation Unicorn was activated quickly as this moment in world history – the end of an era – resonated globally. We are all aware that billions across the world followed events in Scotland and subsequently in London.

On Sunday 11 September 4,000 officers were deployed to Operation Unicorn, as over 100,000 people gathered along the 175-mile route of the cortege from Balmoral to the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh.

On the Monday after over 2,500 officers were deployed as His Majesty The King arrived in Edinburgh and He and members of The Royal Family undertook the procession from Holyroodhouse to St Giles' Cathedral with tens of thousands of people lining the street. Around 35,000 mourners thereafter queued over 24 hours to pay their respects as The Queen lay at rest at St Giles'.

On Tuesday 13 September 3,000 officers were deployed on Operation Unicorn as members of the public continued to pay their respects, before the coffin carrying Her Majesty The Queen was taken to Edinburgh Airport, where she left Scotland for the final time.

Now the brief summary I have just given of those three days provide insight into the magnitude, significance and scale of Operation Unicorn. Of course, part of policing's role was highly visible in those officers who lined roads and streets; the motorcyclists and roads policing officers; and the mounted officers who escorted the Royal procession to St Giles' Cathedral.

I have mentioned the intense and highly skilled work of our planners. Many other officers and staff were deployed before, during and after Operation Unicorn was activated, undertaking vital duties crucial to the operation's success – armed officers; close protection officers; community policing

officers and air support among others.

Members of police staff and contractors took part in significant contributions. They established ICT support, arranged accommodation, provided catering and ensured workforce agreements were put in place. As during the pandemic and over the COP26 period, probationary constables undergoing training were deployed under the supervision of experienced colleagues.

I was also grateful for support from wider UK policing by way of mutual aid and some of our own Police Scotland officers continued their duty during events in London as we provided aid to colleagues in England.

It is important to stress the fundamental outcomes of this enormous operation of safety and security. There were no security breaches, no significant violence or disorder, no safety issues and relatively few arrests among countless interactions and engagements between officers and our fellow citizens over the course of the Operation Unicorn period.

The many solemn, historic, constitutional events took place safely and with dignity.

Across the entire operation, across the whole of Scotland, we recorded just 13 arrests for offences such as low level disorder, violence, abusive and threatening behaviour and the illegal use of drones. One of those arrests has already resulted in a conviction at court.

With the eyes of the world upon Scotland, it was clear people would wish to take the opportunity to make their voices heard, whether in relation to their views on Monarchy; the war in Ukraine; the cost of living crisis or other causes. We planned for this and facilitated a number of demonstrations during the Unicorn period, not all of which attracted media attention.

Police Scotland's total commitment to freedom of expression is demonstrated by our strong track record – during COP26, throughout the pandemic and over many years – of facilitating peaceful demonstration. We have rightly gained international recognition and interest as a police service which places personal liberty and human rights at the heart of all we do – day in, day out in operational reality, not simply academic theory.

Arrests

On a very small number of occasions during Operation Unicorn, operational officers on the ground made at the time dynamic assessments that the behaviour of individuals required police intervention as it appeared to breach the threshold of criminality. It is now for the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to independently review the circumstances, sufficiency of evidence, and whether the matter is in the public interest to prosecute. As I have mentioned, one arrest has already concluded with a conviction for breach of the peace and due process must be respected in regard to other matters.

Of course, where concerns are raised about policing, we will assess them, seek contact with any relevant individuals and respond. I categorically undertake, as I have done consistently while holding the office of Chief Constable, that if we have got something wrong in relation to a specific set of circumstances or we could have done something better, we will acknowledge that and take necessary and proportionate

action to put it right.

I have underlined on numerous occasions, including at various meetings of this Board, that policing is often placed in an invidious position by those calling for a certain response depending on which group is making their voice heard. As I made clear, and repeat again today, campaigning and demonstration is a legitimate, necessary, vital part of civic life, irrespective of the position being advanced. However, let us be equally clear – abusive or threatening behaviour is not legitimate protest.

I have also previously urged everyone to exercise caution when seeking to draw conclusions from partial coverage of events.

Proportional response

As was the case during the pandemic, throughout the COP26 period and in everything we do, our response will always be driven by proportionality, by accordance with the rule of law and public safety, exercised through the professional judgement of operational officers and experienced commanders guided by the overarching values of upholding human rights and personal freedoms.

As with any operation of this size, scale and scope, Police Scotland will undertake a full and thorough de-brief in relation to Operation Unicorn to capture the good practice which was evident and to learn any lessons, from the magnitude of resources deployed through to specific cases and instances.

Our experience across the Operation Unicorn period was that communities supported their police service during a large number of events and public gatherings across the country.

I thank and pay tribute to our officers and staff, and their families who support them, for successfully delivering a safe and secure operation following the death of Her Majesty The Queen.

On behalf of policing, I had the great honour to meet His Majesty The King when he travelled to Scotland during these events. I expressed the condolences of policing in Scotland to His Majesty and The Royal Family and I know the regard with which the effectiveness and high standards of police officers and staff was received.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has also written to me, asking that I pass on her thanks and gratitude, and those of The Scottish Government, to officers and staff.

Everyone played their part and many will continue Operation Unicorn related work in the weeks ahead, such as the important matters of de-brief and ensuring cost recovery from the United Kingdom Government.

The rapid activation and delivery of an enormous and complex operation was greatly enabled by our structure as a single police service and, along with our response to Covid and COP26, continues to underline the significant benefits that the Police Service of Scotland brings. Our ability to quickly deploy with a shared mission, values and capability.

Reform of policing in Scotland now delivers better, more effective service and capability at greater value to the public. Operation Unicorn; the policing of pandemic; and the safety and security operation around COP26 could not – would not – have been delivered as successfully under legacy arrangements.

That progress, demonstrated by operational delivery, should be a source of confidence in policing in Scotland.

Of course, a key aspect of delivering large policing

operations, is to continue to provide effective service for all our communities, 24 hours a day including throughout intense periods such as Unicorn.



A proclamation was read by The Lord Lyon King of Arms Joseph Morrow at the Mercat Cross PHOTO '2022 The Edinburgh Reporter