

Chief Constable's old pals act raises more questions over judgement

EXCLUSIVE

Under pressure Police Scotland Chief Constable Jo Farrell called in expert advice from her former police force despite it being slated over its performance in a report by an independent watchdog, The Edinburgh Reporter can reveal.

The newly appointed Chief's seat at Police Scotland headquarters at Tulliallan was barely warm when she sought counsel from her former Durham Constabulary colleague Gary Ridley, who as Assistant Chief Officer is in charge of finance, IT, business support and other strategic areas at the UK's seventh smallest police force.

But just five weeks after Mr Ridley ran the rule over Police Scotland, a damning report by the independent inspectorate body HMICFRS on the performance of Durham Constabulary landed on the desk of Ms Farrell's successor Chief Constable Rachel Bacon.

From ten categories assessed in the inspectorate report, two areas were singled out as "Requires improvement", five were said to be "Adequate", two were assessed as "Good" and only one area was termed "Outstanding".

The report assessed “Leadership and force management” at Durham as adequate but said it found examples of inconsistent performance across the inspected areas. Among the criticisms were a lack of investment in IT systems, inefficient and time-consuming processes, and force systems which did not communicate with each other – impacting on data gathering, decision making and productivity.

It was claimed Mr Ridley had been providing “unpaid advice” on matters including budget challenges, strategic planning and reducing bureaucracy. The Chief Constable later told the Scottish Parliament’s Criminal Justice Committee on 20 December: “Having been in policing for more than 30 years, I have a network of people whom I know bring value to policing, and Mr Ridley is one of them.”



ACO Gary Ridley provided “unpaid advice” to Chief Constable Jo Farrell

The Edinburgh Reporter has established that at the time of his Tulliallan visit, Mr Ridley had tendered his resignation from his £110,000 a year post at Durham Constabulary and also from the part-time post he fulfilled as Chief Finance Officer at the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office. Mr Ridley, 56, is due to retire at the end of March, according to Durham Constabulary.

At the end of Mr Ridley’s two day visit, Chief Constable

Farrell took a decision which called into question her judgement, forcing her to make a humiliating public apology for an “error of judgement”.

It emerged that on October 20, at the height of Storm Babet and with southbound rail journeys from Waverley Station cancelled, the Chief Constable had commandeered a police vehicle and driver to ferry her and Mr Ridley on a 120 mile journey to their homes in England, effectively reducing the number of police traffic patrol cars available during a crisis.

Subsequently, Police Scotland’s most senior civilian employee, David Page, lodged a grievance against the Chief Constable and he is currently on sick leave, as [exclusively revealed by The Edinburgh Reporter on 10 January.](#)

Mr Page sits on Police Scotland’s executive alongside deputy and assistant chief constables and is responsible for Corporate Support services at the UK’s second largest police force, including finance, procurement, estates and people and development.



Deputy Chief Officer David Page has lodged a grievance against the Chief Constable

Calum Steele summed up the concerns of Police Scotland observers when the retired head of the Scottish Police Federation told the Sunday Times: "Pissing off the most senior of the civilian staff with David Page either demonstrates supreme confidence in her own abilities or supreme naivety in the fact that she never assessed the capabilities and skills of David Page in that short space of time before she's bringing in former colleagues."

Scottish Conservative justice spokesman Russell Findlay, MSP, told The Edinburgh Reporter: "The chief constable has stated

that she's free to seek advice from whoever she wants. However, there will be concern if doing so has resulted in the grievance being raised by a senior colleague. The SNP's creation of Police Scotland has brought about a decade of drama and distraction, which does nothing for public confidence or officer morale."

According to the HMICFRS report one of the areas requiring improvement by Durham Constabulary was in responding to the public. The force was said to be below the expected standard for quickly answering 999 calls and the review focussed on a lack of long-term investment into systems and IT infrastructure which meant they were outdated and not meeting demand.

It said the force "... doesn't always answer emergency and non-emergency calls in a timely way, and it doesn't always respond to calls for service as quickly as it should. This is partly because the constabulary hasn't re-invested in IT systems as they have become outdated."

[The PEEL report](#) (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) added: "... it needs to make sure that it prioritises and appropriately funds its plans to replace and upgrade aging IT infrastructure ... we would encourage the constabulary to make sure these plans are implemented to avoid further deterioration in service."

The report said: "The constabulary continues to operate with several manual and time-consuming processes. Some of these could be replaced with automated systems that would allow it to produce and present good-quality data more efficiently.

"For example, force systems don't communicate well with each other. This can make gathering data much more difficult and time-consuming before any analytical work can be carried out. The constabulary needs to sort out the inefficiencies within its systems and processes so that the workforce can be more

productive.”

Police Scotland refused to comment on the appropriateness of the Chief Constable’s decision to call in external advice from her former force, adding that she had “covered off details of the advice provided at the Justice Committee last month.”

Durham Constabulary refused to divulge how many occasions Mr Ridley had provided advice to Police Scotland or confirm if his visit was on a formal or informal basis. A spokesman said: “ACO Ridley remains in post. He is expected to retire, as scheduled, at the end of March 2024. Durham Constabulary has received no payment (financial or otherwise) in respect of advice/support provided by ACO Ridley to Police Scotland.”



Chief Constable Jo Farrell
Photo Credit: Allan Bovill