

New report shows number of people killed or injured on Scotland's roads has increased

A new report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland notes that since 2020 the total number of people killed or injured on Scotland's roads has increased each year.

In 2023, 155 people were killed and 1,930 were seriously injured.

Road fatalities for 2024 so far are already 26 per cent higher than at the same period last year.

A reduction in police activity targeting the most common causes of fatal crashes has been identified as a key factor affecting Police Scotland's ability to keep people safe on the nation's roads.

The HMICS report states that police officers carrying out enforcement activity to detect crimes including speeding and drink or drug driving, can help reduce tragedies on Scotland's roads.

Road policing officers also play a crucial role in disrupting serious and organised crime.

However, since the creation of Police Scotland in April 2013 latest data shows there has been a 63 per cent drop in the number of road traffic offences being detected and recorded.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, Mr Craig Naylor, has called on Police Scotland to review its commitment to road policing.

Mr Naylor said: "It has now sadly become an all too regular occurrence to read about another death on Scotland's roads.

"It appears there is a societal acceptance around such tragedies, but it is utterly unacceptable and almost every death is preventable.

"The recent increases in road casualties are complex, and there is no single factor that has caused this trend.

"However, we are concerned that at a time when casualties are increasing, Police Scotland has decreased rather than increased its enforcement activity in this high-priority area."

The HMICS report, A Thematic Inspection of Road Policing in Scotland, aimed to assess the state, effectiveness and efficiency of road policing arrangements in Scotland.

The report praised the dedication and professionalism of Scotland's road policing officers.

It said Police Scotland had a good leadership and governance structure when it came to road policing.

And it commended the way the force used social media to good effect to promote key road safety messages.

However, HMICS inspectors said the drop in overall officer numbers was one factor impacting Police Scotland's ability to achieve its road safety goals.

Latest figures show officer numbers fell from 17,431 in March 2020, to 16,425 in October this year.

Road policing officers currently make up 3.5 per cent of police officer numbers in Scotland.

The HMICS report said as officer numbers reduced, so did the visibility of both specialist road and local policing officers dealing with road safety and road crime.

Competing priorities – including the increasing role of the police in dealing with those experiencing poor mental health – further limited any opportunity to carry out proactive road policing duties.

The report said: “This reduction in visibility will inevitably lead to a reduction in the public’s fear of being caught, which in turn, is likely to lead to an increase in the type of activity and driver behaviour that leads to serious and fatal road collisions.”

HMICS inspectors said they were aware of a recent proposal by senior management within Police Scotland’s Road Policing Division to change the shift pattern of its officers, as a result of the unit’s reduced staffing levels.

It said the proposal – currently on hold – would see road policing officers focus on day and late shifts only, rather than attempt to fulfil a 24-hours-a-day staffing model.

The report stated: “Given the importance of detecting and disrupting criminals who use the roads, we consider that any review of road policing by Police Scotland should consider its ability to properly resource and police – on a 24/7 basis – the road and motorway networks that connect major cities, towns, airports and ports across Scotland.”

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland called for urgent steps to be taken to address a backlog in specialist

training for road policing officers and in advanced driver training for other officers.

He also urged Police Scotland to make it easy for the public to report road traffic offences by directly uploading video clips.

Mr Naylor said: "As part of our review we visited Surrey, Sussex and West Midlands Police forces and identified best practice in making optimum use of intelligence, analysis and technology.

"In our report we've highlighted two specific examples we found during these visits, that I believe should be progressed and implemented in Scotland.

"Firstly, the provision of educational courses as an alternative to prosecution.

"Secondly, the means to allow members of the public to directly upload footage from journey-cams to report road traffic offences."

The HMICS report noted Police Scotland are currently considering the introduction of a national dashcam portal, which will provide the public an opportunity to upload footage.

However, rather than people being able to directly upload video of an incident, they will first have to report it to the police, who will then send them a link to forward the footage.

Mr Naylor said: "While this would be a move in the right direction, we see the requirement to phone the police before being able to upload footage as an unnecessary additional step.

"It doesn't make it easier for the public to report road traffic offences, or expand the scope for enforcement by

essentially enabling them to become the 'eyes' of the police."

The HMICS report said that when it came to alternatives to prosecution, Police Scotland was the only UK police force not offering National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme courses.

The scheme offers courses on subjects including motorway driving awareness, speed awareness and seatbelt safety.

The report made 13 recommendations for improvement to Police Scotland, including that it should engage with its criminal justice partners to explore ways of officers spending less time attending court – such as virtual appearances.

It said Police Scotland should work with the Scottish Government on a legislative change that would allow the escorting of abnormal loads in Scotland to be carried out by an agency other than the police.

It urged Police Scotland to review its policy position, and the training and equipment provided, for local policing officers responding to incidents on the fast road networks.

And it called on Scotland's national force to adopt best practice in the deployment and use of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system.

Mr Naylor added: "It is an exceptionally challenging time for public services across the UK. Police Scotland is not exempt from this.

"However, the reduction in focus on road policing does raise questions about Police Scotland's contribution, both in reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on Scotland's roads and supporting the objectives of the Road Safety Framework to 2030."