

Police officers trained to refer people experiencing mental health distress to the right agency

Police Scotland has announced that around 1,700 officers are now trained to signpost and refer people experiencing mental health distress to the right agency which can provide the support they need, allowing them to redirect to core policing duties.

The Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) service has helped 75,000 people across Scotland since it launched as a pilot seven years ago in Lanarkshire, Borders, Inverness and Aberdeen.

Police Scotland officers as well as partners at the Scottish Ambulance Service, Accident and Emergency Departments, Primary Care and NHS 24, can be trained as level one DBI providers.

This enables them to identify when someone is in distress, and in need of support, and make a referral to the appropriate third sector organisation which can provide compassionate and personalised support.

Level 2 is provided by commissioned and trained third sector

staff who contact the person within 24-hours of referral and provide community-based problem solving support, wellness and distress management planning, supported connections and signposting.

Assistant Chief Constable Catriona Paton met with Jenni Minto MSP, Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, at Dalrnarnock police office on Tuesday, 26 November, 2024, after it was confirmed that all 31 Health and Social Care Partnerships across the 14 health board areas in Scotland have now signed up to the DBI service.

It was also an opportunity to discuss the important work our officers have carried out in identifying those in distress and referring them to the appropriate agencies.

Assistant Chief Constable Catriona Paton said: "Policing is often the first response when people need help. Our mission is to keep people safe and we'll always respond to threat, harm and risk to ensure public safety.

"Our involvement in mental health incidents and supporting vulnerable people has a significant impact on this organisation and is beyond where policing should be. That's not the best support for those who need help and it's not delivering best value for the public.

"DBI enables trained officers to identify when someone needs support and signpost them to the right service, allowing them to redirect to tackling threat, harm and risk and preventing crime."

Police Scotland is determined to reset the parameters of policing's involvement in mental health incidents and Chief Constable Jo Farrell set up a Mental Health Taskforce to co-ordinate work, as part of Operation Evolve.

Distress Brief Intervention is an important part of this work, and a training model is in place to train more officers as and

when required. Further training will be progressed in line with the capacity of DBI third sector provision in each area, to ensure our partners can manage the demand of the referrals officers are making.

ACC Paton continued: "This work is a key element of the Chief Constable's vision for the future of policing in Scotland and we continue to work on resetting the parameters of our contribution to a system wide approach to mental health.

"We are committed to collaborating with our partners to provide better outcomes for individuals and the communities we serve, at better value to the public, ensuring our frontline officers are able to focus more of their time on core policing duties."