



## Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

### **The impact of police reform on local policing** **Evidence from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities**

[Click here](#) to read the call for evidence

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC) is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. SCoJeC advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, by providing information and assistance to educational, health, and welfare organisations, representing the Jewish community in Scotland to Government and other statutory and official bodies, and liaising with Ministers, MSPs, Churches, Trades Unions, and others on matters affecting the Jewish community. SCoJeC also provides a support network for the smaller communities and individuals and families who live outwith any Jewish community, and assists organisations within the Scottish Jewish community to comply with various regulatory requirements. SCoJeC also promotes dialogue and understanding between the Jewish community and other communities in Scotland, and works in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to promote equality, good relations, and understanding among community groups.

In preparing this response we have consulted widely among members of the Scottish Jewish community.

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The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomes this opportunity to provide evidence about local policing. We question, however, whether 6 months after such a major organisational restructuring may not be too early to draw conclusions about the way in which Police Scotland is operating, and suggest that this consultation should be repeated once the new structures have had time to evolve and bed down.

Given the nature of local policing, it is, perhaps, not surprising that different organisations in the Jewish community have had different experiences, but we would emphasise the importance of ensuring that Police Scotland provides a consistent and responsive service throughout Scotland that remains sufficiently flexible to enable local decision making to respond to local need.

On the one hand, the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, the umbrella body of the Glasgow Jewish community, and a few of its affiliated organisations, told us that *“There has not been any discernible change to local policing arrangements and relationships with the Jewish community continue to be very receptive and good.”*

Jewish Student Chaplaincy Scotland, a national organisation supporting students at universities and colleges throughout Scotland, welcomed the *“excellent model at St Andrews, where they have a university liaison officer who is very visible on campus”*. They are not aware of a similar system at other universities, and suggest, if not already in place, that it should be rolled out Scotland-wide. They also hope that the single police force will facilitate *“better sharing of info/intelligence, so if something happens at a university in one part of the country they might be better informed and be able to deal with something similar elsewhere.”*

However, other organisations, both in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland, remarked on a noticeable reduction in contact with local officers. The security liaison officer for one of the major synagogues, who has for many years also been a lay diversity advisor to the police, told us that there had been a *“very marked dilution in contact”* since April. *“We used to be on first name terms with the local bobby, sergeant, and inspector, but now we don’t even know who they are ... and we no longer receive phonecalls from the police to ask us “Is everything ok this week?”.”* This was echoed by the representative of one of the smaller synagogues, who told us *“We used to have a nice relationship with the local police. They used to pop in to check we’re ok, and came to our barbecues to meet the community, but it’s been a while now since we saw them.”*

Another lay diversity advisor to several of the previous area Police Forces commented *“There has been noticeably less contact with locals but more visibility for national brass (but since that’s at expense of local brass, not sure whether that’s pro or con).”* He added, *“What I’ve definitely noticed (potential plus) is that we don’t need separate contacts x 8 – the same person pops up in more than one area and makes contacts as required. So we feel less connected, but may be more!”*

Despite their varying experiences, all of the organisations we consulted felt confident that the police would respond in an emergency, but some commented on what seemed to be *“a move towards crisis policing – they’ll respond if we have more incidents – antisemitic graffiti or incidents because people associate the synagogue with what’s going on in the Middle East – but they’re not there the rest of the time. There’s not any relationship being built up during the good times.”*

It is widely recognised that the actual incidence of hate crime is much higher than of reported hate crime, and the development of good relationships during the “good times” can encourage victims to come forward to report incidents during the bad. In the course of our recent Scottish Government funded project *Being Jewish in Scotland*<sup>1</sup> that investigated the experience of Jewish people living throughout Scotland, we heard from many people who had not reported antisemitic incidents to the police because, sadly, they regarded these as “a fact of life”. The police response at a recent event to raise awareness of the project findings was unequivocal: *“There was sadness and disappointment that a significant level of bigotry and antisemitism seem to be accepted by victims as a ‘normal’ occurrence, and therefore a part of life, not worth reporting to police. This is contrary to police Scotland’s Zero Tolerance approach – we want all incidents where prejudice may be a motivating factor to be reported.”*<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve this aim, however, Police Scotland must not only recognise the importance of local relationships in its Annual Plan, which states that “it is essential that we continue to strengthen connections with the communities we serve”<sup>3</sup>, but also actively nurture grassroots relationships with local organisations and potentially vulnerable individuals.

Although we share the confidence expressed by communal organisations, in an effective police response at times of crisis, we are concerned by the potential long-term effects of the loss of contact that some have experienced since the introduction of Police Scotland. Any new organisation, especially one as large and complex as Police Scotland, will inevitably require time to define priorities, but we urge that there should be no delay in rebuilding local relationships in areas in which these have been lost.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.scojec.org/jewishinscotland.html](http://www.scojec.org/jewishinscotland.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13ix\\_police\\_dundee/dundee.html](http://www.scojec.org/news/2013/13ix_police_dundee/dundee.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotland.police.uk/assets/pdf/138327/150739/police-scotland-annual-police-plan-2013-14?view=Standard>