



Police Investigations &
Review Commissioner



Strategic Plan

2026-29

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1. Commissioner's foreword

Our Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 sets out five strategic objectives and how we will deliver them over the next three years.

These strategic objectives reflect the findings and recommendations of PIRC's 2025-26 Strategic Review. They are designed to ensure that we are well-positioned to build on our achievements and respond to future challenges, arising from legislative, societal, technological and other developments affecting both our people and our operational functions.

The objectives also reaffirm our strong commitment to our oversight role, while better reflecting our purpose, mission, values and public impact. Delivering our objectives will strengthen governance, support continuous improvement and enhance transparency across the organisation while providing a strong foundation for our future ambitions.

PIRC operates within a complex and evolving regulatory environment, and against a challenging financial

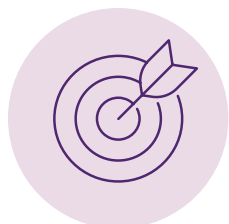
background. We have experienced unprecedented demand on our service and anticipate that this will continue in the coming years. The Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025 (the PECSS Act) introduced significant reforms which will expand and strengthen our role. Our strategic plan recognises the need to adapt and evolve in response to these reforms, whilst maintaining the highest standards in fulfilling our statutory responsibilities.

Delivering our strategic objectives, while managing demand for our service and meeting legislative and public sector requirements, will be challenging. Nonetheless, we are fully committed to ensuring that we have a dedicated and supported workforce which remains responsive to the needs of the public, our stakeholders and partners.

“Delivering our objectives will strengthen governance, support continuous improvement and enhance transparency across the organisation.”

Laura Paton
Commissioner

2. Our purpose, mission and values



Our purpose

PIRC's purpose is to fulfil our statutory duties to provide independent oversight of policing in Scotland.



Our mission

PIRC's mission is to promote and support public confidence in policing in Scotland through independent, evidence-based oversight.



Our values

PIRC's values are at the forefront of everything we do:

Impartiality

We work fairly and independently, considering all evidence objectively and basing our decisions on sound professional judgement.

Respect

We treat everyone with courtesy and dignity.

Integrity

We act with honesty, openness, and accountability.

3. The role of the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner

The Police Investigations and Review Commissioner is appointed by Scottish Ministers and is entirely independent of the police.

PIRC can investigate:

- Incidents involving the police at the direction of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. These may include deaths in custody or following police contact, or allegations of criminality about police officers or staff
- Serious incidents involving the police at the request of the Chief Constable or the Scottish Police Authority (SPA). Referrals for investigation may include the serious injury of a person in police custody or following police contact, or the use of firearms by police officers
- Allegations of misconduct by senior police officers
- Other policing matters which the Commissioner considers would be in the public interest.

At the conclusion of an investigation, the Commissioner may recommend improvements to the way police operate and deliver services to the public in Scotland.

PIRC can review:

- How policing bodies operating in Scotland have handled complaints made to them by members of the public. The purpose of the Complaint Handling Review (CHR) process is to determine whether the complaint was handled to a reasonable standard by the police.

At the conclusion of a CHR, the Commissioner can make recommendations, identify learning points or direct the policing body to reconsider its response.

PIRC can also review:

- Arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA for the handling of relevant complaints
- Arrangements made by the Chief Constable and the SPA for the investigation of whistleblowing complaints.

The role of PIRC is primarily set out in the Police, Public Order and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006, as amended. The PECSS Act, once fully commenced, will significantly expand and strengthen our role.

4. Our three-year plan

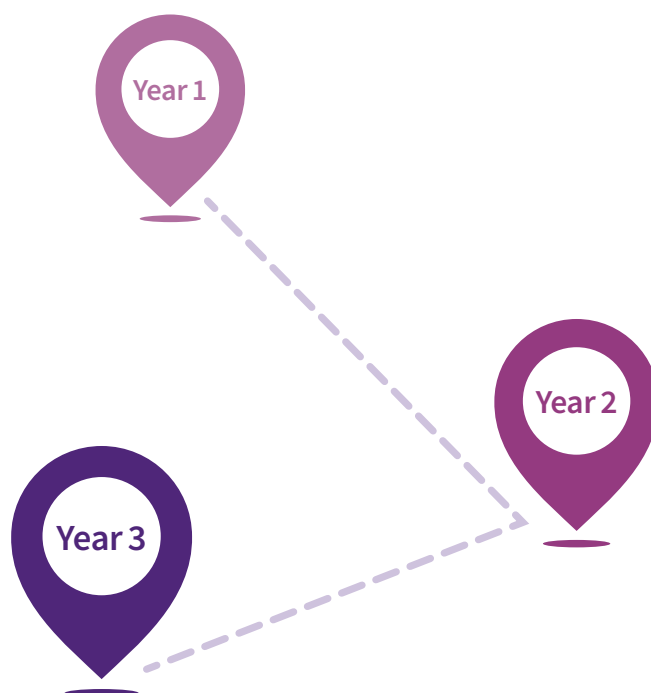
This strategic plan sets out our five strategic objectives and how we will deliver them over the next three years.

By delivering our duties and exercising our powers effectively, we will:

- provide a quality service to the public
- hold policing bodies to account
- highlight good practice and support continuous improvement in the policing service delivered to the public
- promote and support public confidence in policing.

Delivery of these objectives will help us contribute to Scotland's national outcomes, which are determined by Scottish Ministers.

Our strategic objectives are also aligned to the Scottish Government's Vision for Justice in Scotland with its focus on person-centred, trauma-informed justice. In addition, our objectives support the ambition of the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform Strategy, to ensure efficient, high-quality and effective service delivery.



5. Strategic objectives

1. We will deliver independent oversight of policing in Scotland, pursuing continuous improvement in the policing service provided to the public.

- > We will conduct thorough, independent investigations.
- > We will undertake independent, evidence-based reviews of complaint handling by policing bodies.
- > We will highlight good practice and recommend areas for improvement to policing bodies.
- > We will carry out audits to bring about wider systemic and meaningful change in policing.
- > We will deliver our expanded statutory role, as set out in the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Act 2025.

Operational outcomes performance

Measurement
In 90% of cases, assess incidents and make investigation decisions within five working days of receipt of relevant information
In 80% of cases, complete and submit Category A ¹ investigation reports (minus major cases) within 90 days of receipt of case papers
In 80% of cases, complete and submit Category B and C investigation reports within 120 days of receipt of case papers
In 90% of cases, complete Senior Review Officer (SRO) assessments of CHR applications within five working days of receipt of case papers
In 80% of cases, complete CHRs (minus major cases) within 90 working days of receipt of case papers
In 80% of cases, complete Discretionary Decisions (i.e. a decision not to proceed with a CHR) within 15 working days of initial SRO assessment of the CHR application

¹PIRC categorises investigations as A, B or C depending on the complexity of the case, the scale of enquiry and resources needed, and the degree of public interest in the matter under investigation. Category A cases are the most complex and resource intensive or are those with the highest level of public interest.

Capacity, development and service performance

Measurement
Deliver quality investigation and review outcomes, assured by the Commissioner, Director of Operations, Heads of Service and external stakeholder feedback, which represent PIRC's values
Ensure our investigation and review outcomes provide good practice feedback and recommendations for improvement to policing bodies whenever appropriate
Engage with policing bodies to support implementation of our recommendations and learning points, promoting service improvement and increased public confidence
Commence a review of our statutory guidance on the handling of complaints about the police in Scotland
Review our existing performance management framework and key performance indicators
Establish and deliver a programme of audit for the ongoing assessment of police complaint handling
Undertake a post-legislative review of PIRC's implementation of the PECSS Act

2. We will build public confidence in PIRC and invest in our own continuous improvement by engaging with service users and stakeholders.

- > We will deliver people-centred, trauma-informed and rights-based oversight, prioritising empathy, fairness and procedural justice.
- > We will proactively engage with service users, stakeholders and our own staff to seek and act on feedback that helps us continually improve our service.
- > While often dealing with sensitive and confidential matters, we will seek to be open and operate transparently where possible.
- > We will keep our strategic objectives under review and monitor progress against the underpinning actions.

Capacity, development and service performance

Measurement
Develop a framework for embedding trauma-informed and rights-based approaches to our work
Explore how developing stakeholder engagement, such as establishment of an Advisory Reference Group, can improve PIRC policies, procedures and emerging areas of business
Revise our current guidance and processes for managing senior officer misconduct investigations
Develop and implement our Communications Strategy
Establish and implement effective mechanisms for gathering and analysing service user and stakeholder feedback
Benchmark against other oversight bodies to develop process for publication of more information about PIRC's work, including investigation outcomes
Ensure active Senior Leadership Team oversight of strategic risks and progress against strategic objectives

3. We will develop our organisational capacity, capability and resilience.

- > We will optimise our resources, systems and processes to ensure we manage current and future demand efficiently and effectively.
- > We will develop our governance and leadership arrangements, ensuring clear lines of accountability and effective strategic and business planning.
- > We will demonstrate robust financial management and provide value for money.
- > We will work collaboratively with partner agencies to maximise the impact of our work, while maintaining our independence as an impartial oversight body.

Capacity, development and service performance

Measurement
Conduct an organisational review of governance meeting structures and internal working groups to establish efficiency, effectiveness and ensure resilience
Scope and deliver pilot project to establish resource footprint in the North and inform long term resource and capability structure
Maximise the benefits and use of existing software for financial and workforce reporting
Work closely with the PIRC Statutory Advisory Board in support of their ongoing independent oversight
Contribute to new national outcomes, National Performance Framework and other reform agendas relevant to our work
Review our Financial Strategy to support a fiscally sustainable organisation
Ensure PIRC's participation in partnership engagement opportunities, and develop and maintain memoranda of understanding and data sharing agreements where appropriate

4. We will promote a safe, supportive and high-performing workforce.

- > We will promote staff wellbeing and foster an environment where our people feel valued and able to thrive.
- > We will invest in the professional development of staff, ensuring all have the appropriate skills, knowledge and support to undertake their roles effectively.
- > We will champion diversity, professionalism and high standards of conduct through a values-based approach.
- > We will protect our staff by taking all reasonable steps to ensure their health and wellbeing, and safety at work.

Capacity, development and service performance

Measurement
Deliver and act upon results of staff surveys
Further develop and embed our Equalities Strategy
Ensure all staff-related policies and procedures are fair and transparent
Deliver improved access to staff wellbeing support channels
Review and update staff training and development plans
Develop our skills-based recruitment process to ensure a high-quality experience for all candidates and recruiting managers
Review our current approach to health and safety

5. We will enhance our organisational foresight, readiness and adaptability.

- > We will develop our ability to anticipate, influence and prepare for policy and legislative changes.
- > We will monitor policing and societal trends to assess their impact on our work, ensuring we remain informed and able to respond effectively.
- > We will seek opportunities to make evidence based contributions to public discussions about policing, helping to inform debate and improve the service provided to the public.

Capacity, development and service performance

Measurement
Work with the Scottish Government to implement the PECSS Act, including developing procedures for reviewing whistleblowing arrangements, calling in complaints and investigating officer misconduct allegations
Establish and implement data analytics capability to monitor demand and identify trends in our investigations and reviews, in order to inform workforce planning
Develop horizon scanning plan to monitor impact on our work of Scottish Government's Programme for Government and other policy/legislative developments, and ensure PIRC policies and procedures are revised accordingly
Respond to and take into account the findings of public inquiries and other reviews
Embed PIRC's role in relation to the process for domestic homicide and suicide reviews
Explore opportunities for safe use of AI

6. Delivering our Strategic Plan

Performance against our strategic objectives will be monitored regularly by the Commissioner and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The SLT will oversee the delivery of our Strategic Plan, ensuring that objectives and associated actions are achieved while identifying and managing potential organisational risks.

Implementation of the measurements set out above will be assessed and reported on using a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) framework with the following definitions:

Red – Significantly delayed / not delivered

Amber – Delayed

Green – On track / delivered

Each year, we will develop a detailed business plan to support the effective delivery of our Strategic Plan. These annual business plans will set out specific actions assigned to action owners and will establish clear timescales for implementation. Progress against these actions will be reported through our Annual Reports.

Individual staff objectives will be aligned to our strategic objectives, helping to ensure that all colleagues contribute to the successful delivery of our Strategic Plan. We will also maintain regular communication and engagement with staff through a number of channels and forums, including the Staff

Representative Group, to ensure ongoing awareness of our organisational priorities.

In addition, PIRC's Statutory Advisory Board provides independent oversight of our finances, risk management, internal audit reports, performance and governance. The Board has an important role in providing robust challenge, scrutiny and support to the Commissioner and the SLT, helping to strengthen delivery of this three-year Strategic Plan.

PIRC is accountable to the Scottish Government and our accounts are independently audited. The Commissioner publishes the Annual Report and Accounts annually, and these are laid before the Scottish Parliament. Progress against our strategic objectives may also be scrutinised by the Scottish Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee, and further publicised via other means, such as engagement with the SPA Board and the SPA's Complaints and Conduct Committee, whose meetings are held in public.



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June 2026 © Police Investigations & Review Commissioner

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