



Policing 2026 Strategy

Consultation response from Includem

Background

Includem is a specialist Scottish charity which provides intensive, personalised support for vulnerable young people and their families. We believe that no young person is beyond help and that with a responsive, consistent service at the time of most need we can rebuild relationships and deliver positive, sustainable outcomes.

Since 2010 we have worked in collaboration with Police Scotland to deliver our IMPACT programme in Glasgow. We engage with young people aged 16 to 25, who are causing the most harm to themselves and their communities through prolific, violent and often alcohol-related offending. Our work focuses on preventing reoffending, helping young people move away from a cycle of custodial sentences.

Overview of Consultation Response

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the ways in which Police Scotland can continue to serve communities and meet their changing needs.

We are pleased to see the emphasis on prevention and early intervention. From our experience we know that approaches rooted in prevention offer the most effective means of reducing levels of offending.

We particularly welcome the focus on effective partnership working and hope that as part of this process consideration will be given to partnerships which are already working effectively and are delivering positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

Q1: Does the Policing 2026 strategy identify and acknowledge the main risks, challenges, opportunities and demands likely to impact on policing over the next 10 years?

The strategy gives a good overview of the risks, challenges, opportunities and demands on Police Scotland over the next decade. In particular we would highlight the recognition of the changing nature of crime and communities. The need to diversify the skills of police officers to consider issues around inequality, health and emerging technology is all recognised.

Despite this changing landscape, some things do remain constant. We know from our work with Police Scotland on reducing violent offending in Glasgow that there continues to be a significant challenge from prolific, violent offending amongst young people. This challenge, despite headline statistics showing declining crime levels, has not been eradicated in the past decade and must continue to be a priority in the coming decade.

We would echo the recognition in the strategy of the role that alcohol and drugs continues to play in offending behaviour – this is a key risk factor in our reducing offending work and approaches to tackle this should be expanded and further developed.

Q2: Do you agree the main areas of focus proposed within the Policing 2026 strategy are the right ones to deliver an enhanced policing service?

Includem supports the emphasis on prevention and the focus on partnership working as a means of improving outcomes for individuals and communities.

In particular we support the focus on tackling the enduring problems which face communities especially mental health, substance misuse and past histories of abuse, trauma and domestic violence. We know from our experience that offending by young people continues to be prevalent in many communities and continued emphasis needs to be placed on tackling the underlying causes as a means to reducing and ultimately eliminating the offending behaviour.

Addressing the root causes of offending, in partnership with other statutory and third sector agencies is a crucial development for Police Scotland. We do not underestimate how challenging this will be in practice, however our independent evidence base shows this achieves results¹.

Particular attention must be paid to addressing the underlying causes of offending by young people. Early intervention to address issues such as alcohol and drug misuse, is key. We would recommend that any approach takes into consideration the wider contributory factors, including public health issues, which often underpin violent and or offending behaviour. For example we would highlight the One Glasgow strategy, which we believe offers a prime example of this approach being effectively implemented in practice.

A renewed focus on reducing offending by young people should take into account research evidence which suggests that during later teenage years young people are still undergoing significant brain development relating to controlling impulsive and risk taking behaviour. However, those at the older end of this age range are out-with the scope of children's services, yet do not fall into adult service provision in many cases. This can often be the time when support is most needed.

Our one note of caution is that preventative approaches must be more than just a strategic objective. Since the Christie Commission reported in 2011 there has been very little shift in funding and delivery of early intervention work and where approaches have worked they have been short

¹ Includem's IMPACT programme was independently evaluated by Dartington Social Research Council. A full report is available on request.

lived. We must bring the Christie principles to life and they should direct day to day policing as well as specialised strategic programmes.

We also welcome the vision of strengthening effective partnerships. Our own successful working relationship with Police Scotland has shown positive outcomes for the young people we support. Includem is supported by Police Scotland's analysis and One Glasgow information sharing protocols, which allows for the support to be tailored to the specific offending risks for each young person.

Our partnership ensures our young people are afforded additional support when coming into contact with police in their communities. A flag system on the Police Scotland national computer identifies which young people are receiving support from Includem, and enables responding officers to coordinate with Includem in order to jointly address the needs identified. This allows us to respond at the earliest opportunity to de-escalate crisis situations and increase the intensity of our support to respond to emerging risk.

We are aware that an increasing number of police officers are being trained in responding to mental health issues, and would recommend that all police officers receive this training, so they possess an understanding of mental health and the impact it can have on the behaviour of young people who are offending in their local communities.

As a charity founded to be innovative, Includem welcomes the focus on innovation and on changing services. However, innovation should not come at the expense of existing successful practice. We would recommend that this focus on innovation should be combined with a similar focus on understanding what works well now. Programmes and approaches which work should be sustained and expanded to meet need across the country.

Q3: Do you agree the methods proposed within this strategy are the right ones to deliver an improved policing service?

We agree the methods proposed will contribute to delivering an improved policing service. From our practice experience we particularly welcome the focus on effective partnerships, improving public engagement and empowering and developing police officers and staff.

We would welcome further details on how the four strategic outcomes will be measured – especially the focus on 'better outcomes of safety and wellbeing'.

Q4: The Policing 2026 Strategy states that public confidence will be a key measure of success and the effectiveness of Police performance. Do you agree with this approach?

The public must have confidence in the police and we recognise this is an important measure of success. However, it is by definition subjective and we would encourage as broad a range of views as possible to be taken on board when making any analysis of what current 'public confidence' is. In particular, the views of children and young people should be sought.

We can share a range of experiences young people have with the police.

One young person had a number of charges and had a poor perception of police officers. The involvement of a police officer at the point of referral to Includem's service started to build a different kind of relationship. Over several months the young person's interactions with the police officer changed with a recognition that the officer was expressing concern for his wellbeing and safety. The transparent relationship between Includem and the police further fostered this change in perceptions, and as the young person started to see the police not as one entity but as individuals in their community, his offending behaviour changed and reduced.

On the basis of these experiences we would welcome any initiatives where young people are able to engage in an open and transparent manner to share their experiences. Not only would this ensure best practice is identified and recognised, but we also feel this would align with the focus on improving communication and engagement with young people as expressed in the Children and Young People 2016/2020 Approach.

As referenced in Together's annual State of Children's Rights report, there are negative aspects of interaction between the police and specific groups of some young people, such as those with experience of being looked after, which frame perceptions. This particularly extends to the practice of stop and search. We would recommend that future practices build on the new stop and search protocols as published by the Scottish Government in January 2017. If these protocols are adhered to in practice we believe this would greatly improve confidence in policing from young people.

Q5: The Policing 2026 strategy highlights that we will need to re-shape our organisation with a workforce focussed on having the right skills and capacity to meet future challenges. Do you agree with this approach?

Yes, we would agree with this approach.

As the needs of communities shift, the skillset and experiences of police officers must shift to meet new demands. Fully understanding the underlying causes of offending and linking to the preventative approach means training police officers in mental health awareness, drug and alcohol prevention etc will be key.

Workforce development should also take into account the increasing body of evidence which indicates that those children and young people who are involved in frequent offending in their local communities tend to be the most vulnerable young people, who have experienced trauma in their life. Training which focuses on the relationship between trauma and offending, so that policing adopts a more understanding approach to working children and young people who are involved in offending in their local communities.

We further feel that any workforce development should emphasise a proportionate balance of enforcement and engagement when working with young people. We know that when there is individual buy-in from police officers in terms of establishing relationships, and when young people

are viewed as young citizens and not as 'young offenders', this greatly aids development of respect and mutual understanding.

Q6: Is the strategy presented in a clear and understandable way?

Yes, although clearer links between the recognised demands/opportunities and the intended actions would be helpful to be able to map out where progress will happen.

Q7: We would welcome any additional views you have on our strategy and how it will affect you, or any other person.

There is very little mention in the strategy of the role of the third sector in supporting the work of Police Scotland. Charities across Scotland have a clear role in providing early intervention and preventative services but also reaching people where the relationship with police officers is poor. We would suggest there is a specific action to build stronger networks with third sector organisations as an underlying objective which would contribute to each of the five focus areas.

We would be happy to expand on any of these points and more generally on this theme going forward. We can also provide case studies and evidence of our work in reducing youth offending and re-offending in partnership with Police Scotland. Please contact our Policy Manager, Michael Shanks, on michael.shanks@includem.co.uk for further information.