




**Attitudes towards and perceptions of  
institutional discrimination within Police  
Scotland among Police Scotland  
colleagues**

**Strategy, Insight and Engagement  
November 2023**

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At the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) Board meeting on Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone publicly addressed the matter of institutional discrimination. In his statement he highlights that institutional racism, sexism, misogyny and discrimination do exist, and that acknowledging this is essential in becoming an anti-discriminatory service. The Chief Constable reiterates that institutional discrimination does not mean that individual officers and staff are racist and sexist, but that it precisely exists institutionally, as highlighted by recent court and conduct cases, independent reviews, and from listening to the people of Police Scotland.

*“Our intention is to move towards meeting the ambition set out by Sir William Macpherson to eliminate racist prejudice and disadvantage and demonstrate fairness in all aspects of policing.”*

**Overarching Aim**

This survey seeks to provide Police Scotland colleagues the opportunity to convey their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to discrimination, equality, diversity and inclusion within the Service.

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*Sir Iain Livingstone deemed that Police Scotland is institutionally discriminatory. Having considered his reasons for doing so, I can say that I agree with him. Police Scotland is institutionally discriminatory. I know that this has been a difficult message for many of you to hear, but at the same time we must acknowledge that communities with different backgrounds have not always received the service that they deserve.*


**Chief Constable Jo Farrell**  
Message on Institutional Discrimination

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### [Baroness Casey Review of the Metropolitan Police: The Findings – YouTube](#)

#### Entire Statement:


“Sir Iain Livingstone deemed that Police Scotland is institutionally discriminatory. Having considered his reasons for doing so, I can say that I agree with him. Police Scotland is institutionally discriminatory. I know that this has been a difficult message for many of you to hear, but at the same time we must acknowledge that communities with different backgrounds have not always received the service that they deserve. In addition, our colleagues do not always feel they have been fairly treated. It is important that we identify and address discriminatory policies, processes and behaviours where they exist through the continued delivery of our “Policing Together” programme. I am wholly committed to driving professionalism and leading an organisation that represents the communities we serve.”

<b>CONTEXT</b>		OFFICIAL: POLICE & PARTNERS		
<p><b>Following the Chief Constable's statement, we are taking a considered approach to exploring the experiences and perceptions of institutional discrimination among Police Scotland colleagues.</b></p>				
<p>We are doing this by:</p>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Designing and implementing a considered survey that provides the opportunity for colleagues across the service to relay their perceptions and experiences both quantitatively and qualitatively</li><li>• In doing so, we are being inclusive by opening up the conversation into understanding the breadth and depth of experiences and perceptions as they relate to institutional discrimination. The purpose of engaging and involving colleagues is to understand and listen to lived experiences and ideas on how the organisation can best tackle this issue and areas for change together.</li><li>• This engagement provides insights into the conditions which are moving colleagues away from recognising institutional discrimination as well as enablers which are taking the service towards its anti-racist organisational ambition.</li></ul>				
<p>Share your thoughts on Institutional Discrimination Following Police Scotland's public address on institutional discrimination at the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) Board meeting on Thursday, 25 May, 2023, an online survey has been created to allow officers and staff to anonymously share their views on discrimination, equality, diversity and inclusion within the service.</p>		<p><b>KNOW OUR VALUES. LIVE OUR VALUES. POLICE TOGETHER.</b></p>		
<p>Policing Our Communities - update on financial position</p>	<p>Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone retires</p>	<p>Chief Constable start date confirmed</p>	<p>Share your thoughts on Institutional Discrimination</p>	
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## CONCLUSIONS




Colleagues express concerns in the survey about contributing fully without harassment or discrimination within Police Scotland.

The Policing Together portfolio focuses on two key actions: supporting social diversity to address social inclusion issues, and promoting social justice by eliminating racism, sexism, and other forms of social oppression.




Those occupying a minoritised status(es) often perceive institutional discrimination as an issue for the service. This perception is not seen across all colleagues.

It is incumbent upon senior leadership to identify, consult on, and support action to tackle discrimination.



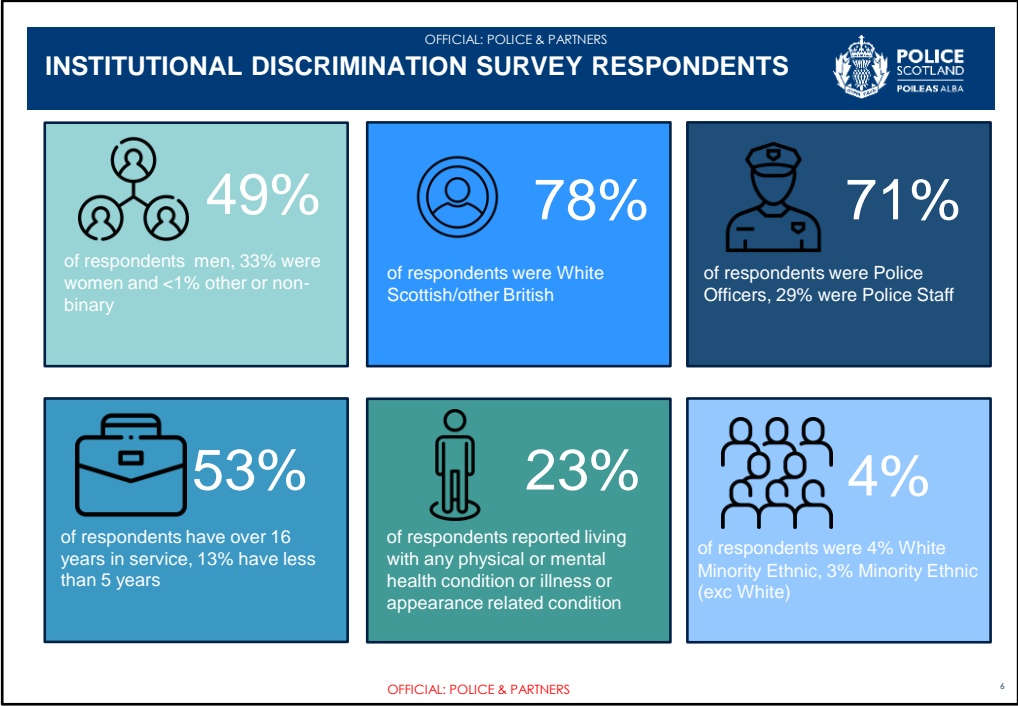
Colleagues fear reporting discrimination, believing the consequences may be worse than staying silent, identifying a need for building trust to address the culture of silence in that the reporting professional standards and processes are meaningful.

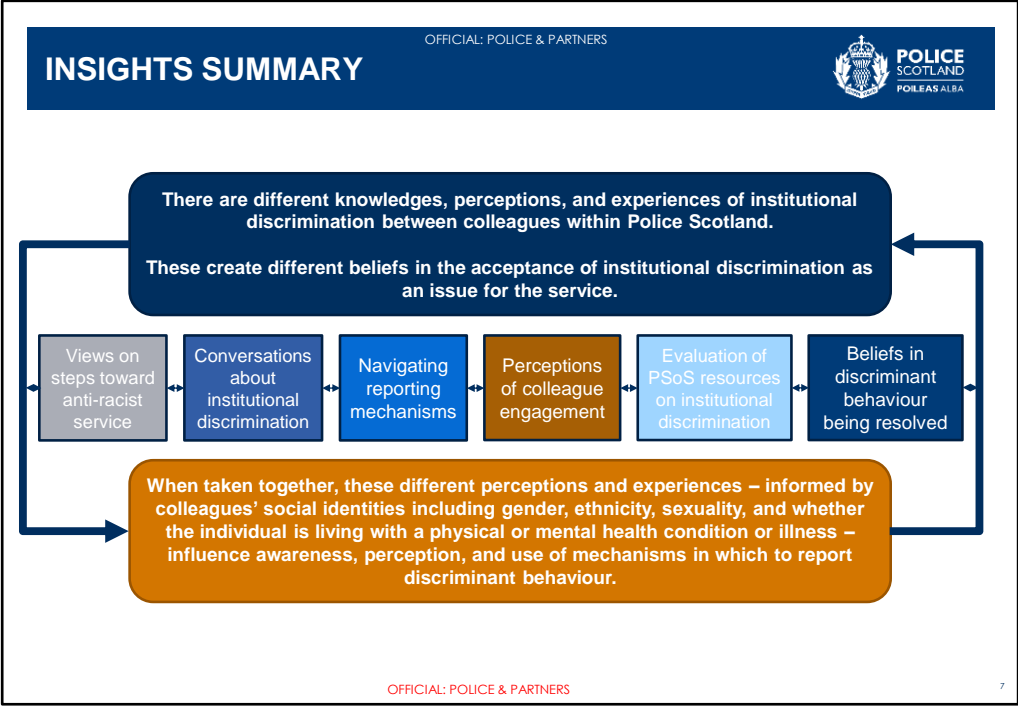


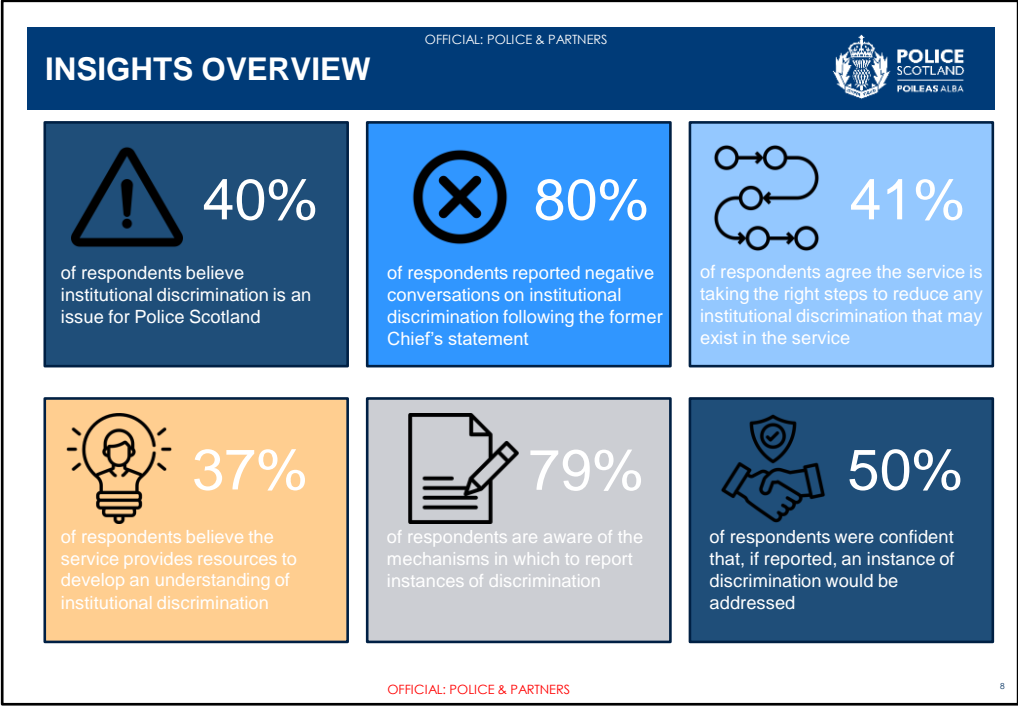
Increasing visibility, resourcing, and support for the Policing Together portfolio, backed by the Chief Constable, is crucial to enhance credibility and address the lack of psychological safety which permeates across beliefs regarding institutional discrimination being an issue for Police Scotland.

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**Institutional discrimination as an issue for Police Scotland**



**There are varying degrees of acceptance that institutional discrimination is an issue for Police Scotland**



**A focus should be on recognising the relative and varying knowledge, skills, confidence, and understanding of institutional discrimination across the service**


[Redacted]

- Approximately 40% of survey respondents agree institutional discrimination is an issue for Police Scotland, a higher proportion of 47% disagree that institutional discrimination is an issue for the service
- Agreement that institutional discrimination is an issue for Police Scotland is reported highest amongst Minority Ethnic (excluding White Minority) respondents
- Being aware of, witnessing, or experiencing instances of discrimination were identified as key drivers in recognising – or rejecting – institutional discrimination as an issue for the service.
- Negative reactions in response to the former Chief Constable's statement referring to institutional discrimination were common, with a significant portion of respondents feeling it negatively affected all members, including those who disagreed with the statement.
- Respondents challenged the idea that discrimination which occurred between colleagues should be attributed to the entire service, expressing scepticism about institution-wide claims of discrimination
- Some respondents highlighted the positive impact of acknowledging and addressing institutional discrimination, emphasising the service's commitment to continuous improvement in engaging with diverse communities.

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## Conversations on institutional discrimination

**Experiences in discussing institutional discrimination have been largely negative**

**Scaffolding future dialogue on institutional discrimination should create a supportive environment where thoughts can be challenged**




- Approximately 75% of all respondents agreed that more conversations on institutional discrimination had been had following the former Chief Constable's statement
- Over 80% of respondents deemed these conversations to be negative in nature
- There were transparency challenges reported by colleagues, navigating the issue of institutional discrimination was perceived as more difficult because of the challenges in accessing and being forewarned about the former chief's statement
- The perceived lack of clear information contributed to a perceived negative culture of communication, with respondents feeling unaware of the timing of the former chief's statement
- Practical implications of responding to the issue of institutional discrimination, compounded by other perceived stresses on policing including staffing, contributed to the perceived negative impact on community-policing relationships
- Respondents expressed a pervasive desire for a pathway to overcome institutional discrimination, emphasising the need for action that extends beyond the former chief's statement

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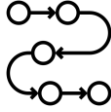
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**Feedback on becoming an anti-racist service**



**Perceptions that the service is taking the right steps to becoming an anti-racist service is low**

**Communicating Policing Together activities in pursuit of becoming an anti-racist service need to be reinforced**




- Approximately 41% of respondents felt the service was taking the right steps to become an anti-racist service, this was felt the least among Minority Ethnic (excluding White Minority) respondents
- Some respondents emphasised the importance of recognising institutional discrimination, initiated by the former Chief's statement, as a crucial starting point for addressing the issue within Police Scotland
- Beyond the official statement, some respondents had negative attitudes toward the potential for change, with some colleagues expressing low expectations for reducing institutional discrimination within the service
- Achieving lasting change in reducing institutional discrimination was perceived to require a systematic approach that identifies and addresses inequalities and discrimination across all Police Scotland ranks and staffing structures
- Respondents showed varying degrees of awareness regarding steps being taken, with some perceiving positive steps based on this awareness, while others were critical due to a perceived lack of substantive dissemination of information
- The perceived workplace culture(s) in creating a fair and inclusive environment were critiqued by some respondents, with many expressing an eagerness to see how evidence of discrimination is documented and how individual misconduct process are followed in instances of discrimination

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**Engaging colleagues on tackling institutional discrimination**

  
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**Perceptions of Police Scotland's resources to develop an understanding of institutional discrimination were low**

**Engaging with colleagues on this issue should take multifaceted approach recognising individual differences and experiences of service culture(s)**



**Engaging with colleagues on this issue should take multifaceted approach recognising individual differences and experiences of service culture(s)**

- Under 40% of colleagues agreed Police Scotland provides the resources to develop an understanding of institutional discrimination
- Approximately one third of respondents were satisfied with the information on institutional discrimination provided on the intranet
- Respondents felt that enhancing training approaches to include face-to-face opportunities would reinforce engagement on this issue
- Taking an evidence-led, lived experienced informed approach to sharing awareness and providing evidence of institutional discrimination would be an aligned approach bolstering engagement and understanding
- Respondents showed a want for leaders to be visible in leading on the 'difficult' conversations around institutional discrimination, supporting colleagues to have a space to discuss this sensitive issue
- The reporting systems were perceived as requiring work to be strengthened, with some respondents exploring the idea of using an external or third party to explore the issue of institutional discrimination

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## Navigating reporting mechanisms for instances of discrimination



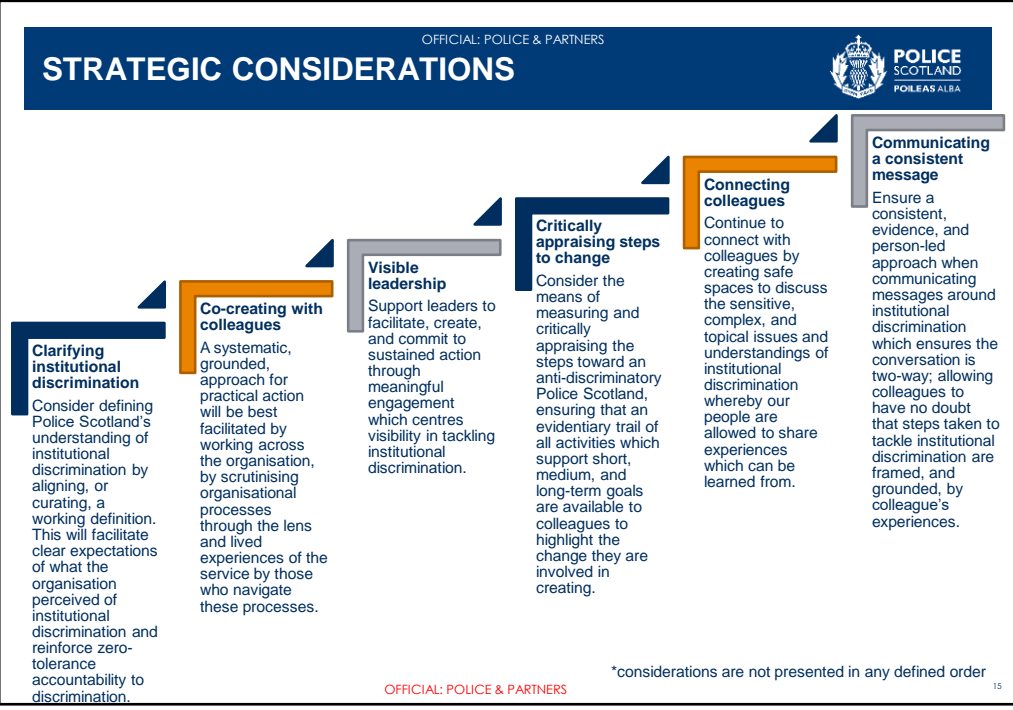
**While awareness of reporting mechanisms was high, being comfortable in using these were low, and confidence in discrimination being addressed lower still**



**Creating psychological safety in navigating reporting discrimination is crucial for all colleagues across rank and staffing structures**


- Approximately 79% of all respondents were aware of the mechanisms in which to report instances of discriminant behaviour. Colleagues were not asked if they had had direct experience in using these mechanisms.
- Being comfortable in using these mechanisms reduced to 60%. Minority Ethnic (excluding White Minority) respondents reported the lowest comfort and highest discomfort in using these mechanisms
- A culture of silencing was prevalent across many respondents, a consistent theme of the dangers of raising an issue potentially impacting the individual was a key driver in not raising instances of discrimination experienced, witnessed, or observed
- Some respondents felt that their line management would be powerless in supporting them if they were to report an instance of discrimination, leading this lived and/or anticipation furthering the decision to remain silent
- The process and procedure of reporting discriminant behaviour was also seen as problematic among some respondents, whereby experiences or understanding that the process is not confidential or anonymous further drove a reduction in feeling safe to report discrimination
- Relationships between colleagues further influenced reporting discrimination, a positive relationship with line manager was seen to benefit reporting discriminatory behaviour, but awareness of other reporting mechanisms were low.





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**NEXT STEPS: AREAS OF IMPORTANCE HIGHLIGHTED BY COLLEAGUES**



**Communication and Engagement**

**Internal**

- Communications with colleagues around institutional discrimination must continue
- Considerations for colleague feedback on lived experiences should be explored to ensure we are providing tangible accounts, and evidence of, institutional discrimination

**External**

- Communicating with our communities to ensure transparency and accountability
- Providing reassurance that steps to tackling institutional discrimination are being taken

**Engaging with minoritised groups**

- Transparency and good communication between Police Scotland and minoritised groups on this issue is crucial
- Results of the institutional discrimination survey should be discussed with appropriate diversity staff associations
- Next steps should be informed by, or co-produced, with sub-groups mentioned

**Addressing Police Scotland cultures**

- Attitudes toward, perceptions and experiences of, institutional discrimination and how individuals navigate these are impacted upon by perceptions of Police Scotland culture(s)
- Relevant areas of (perceptions and experiences of) wellbeing, leadership and people management, and cultures which are inclusive and/or exclusive compound negative feelings of disclosing instances of discrimination
- Reinforcing a values-led, people-focused, supportive working environment is required

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## REPORTING DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR: LINKS TO OTHER ENGAGEMENT WITH COLLEAGUES



Insights on reporting discriminatory behaviour are consistent with the findings from past engagement, highlighting the importance of the issue.

### Raising workplace issues and our grievance process (2023)

Insights from respondents show that colleague barriers to reporting issues include:

- **Gender** – Female colleagues may be reluctant to raise issues due to fear of sexist or misogynistic behaviour.
- **Length of service** – New or young colleagues may be less likely to raise issues due to fear of how it will be perceived or the impact it could have on their future.
- **Past personal or witnessed experience** – Negative experiences, such as personally or witnessing a colleague being treated unfairly, when raising an issue impacts whether someone raises issues in future.
- **Culture** – Many respondents mentioned a perceived culture that raising issues would have a negative effect on career and future promotions.

### Understanding Sexism & Misogyny (2023)

Insights from respondents highlight the overall negative perspective held by colleagues around reporting issues.

- Female colleagues said there is **no point** in challenging behaviours as this could cause more problems for them, particularly if the behaviour is viewed as 'banter'.
- Male colleagues said the **policing culture** is a barrier to calling out behaviours, particularly if it is against a more senior officer as it could have potentially harmful consequences for career development.
- Colleagues often described how it is easier to "**get on with it**" and not report or challenge behaviours and to just wait to be moved to a different business area or division.

### Your Voice Matters (2021)

Insights from respondents found that there is a negative culture around speaking up about issues.

- Respondents highlight there is an overarching sense of fear for staff to speak out or question management in fear of the potential repercussions.
- There is a widely held view of a '**culture of getting on with it**' and it's just '**part of the job**' which affects colleagues' feelings, behaviours and wellbeing.
- Insights show this has led to a decrease in staff morale and creates a tense, unhappy working environment with a divide in team structure.