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Submitted to 2026

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Risks

1 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?

Not Answered

We would welcome any view you have.:

The strategy does identify many of the main risks, challenges, opportunities, and demands for the coming decade. CRER would like to raise a few considerations for BME communities in relation to these.

Society is changing

The strategy recognises that Scotland's population and demographics are expected to change in the coming years, with a growing population due largely to international migration. This, as noted, will lead to more diverse communities.

CRER is concerned that this will also lead to a rise in racist incidents and racist hate crime. Racist hate crime continues to be the most reported hate crime in Scotland with 3,712 charges reported in 2015-2016, alongside 4,807 racist incidents recorded by the police in 2013-2014 (a rise from 2012-2013). We believe the level of racist incidents and racist hate crime will continue to rise in the coming years.

CRER agrees that a key concern for Police Scotland should be the potential for increased social isolation among some communities, which will lead to people being less visible to police. It is likely these groups will face additional barriers in engaging with the police and in seeking proper responses to incidents.

The Scottish Household Survey 2015 found that those from a white ethnic background were more likely to feel very strongly that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood compared to those from a BME background (34% to 19%). Social isolation is also created by racism at a local level, with discrimination and prejudice present in Scotland's communities.

Social isolation, therefore, is a greater risk for those from BME groups and we would ask that Police Scotland acknowledge the important role it has in tackling this and in implementing initiatives to address this issue.

CRER also notes that the emphasis in relation to diversity seems to be on migration and the cultural and linguistic needs of newer migrants. We would ask that Police Scotland also consider the needs of established BME communities in Scotland, as many BME individuals living in Scotland were born in Scotland. The needs of this group – which faces additional barriers in relation to employment, poverty, community cohesion, representation, and housing – should not be overlooked.

Inequality and health

The strategy acknowledges that income inequality may continue to rise and that the gap between the richest and poorest in society may continue to grow. It will be important to recognise that BME individuals are twice as likely to be in poverty as their white British counterparts, with racial inequality cited as one of the key contributors to the income gap, according to Scottish Government statistics and the report "Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Scotland" from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. With BME groups already facing additional social isolation, the impacts of further income inequality could be particularly harmful and must be brought into consideration by Police Scotland.

CRER notes that often 'inequality' pertains to only income inequality, rather than wider issues of equality relating to groups with protected characteristics. It is important to consider all forms of inequality and the effect these inequalities will have on society in the coming decade.

Changing nature of crimes and incidents

The strategy acknowledges the rise of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime. For BME communities in particular, the need to address online racist hate speech and hate crime is key.

As people live more and more of their lives online, the risk of encountering this type of hate crime increases. CRER recognises that these crimes are difficult to investigate, given the frequent anonymity of perpetrators, challenges in gathering evidence, and limitation of national borders. We would ask that Police Scotland consider addressing and prioritising online hate crime as part of its adaptation to cybercrimes.

A changing workforce

The workforce in Scotland and the nature of work itself are likely to change significantly in the coming decade. As it stands, BME groups face significantly higher levels of unemployment than white groups (5.0% of people from white ethnic groups compared to 15.4% from African ethnic groups, for example), according to the 2011 Scottish Census. Within the public sector, BME people face significant barriers and discrimination. BME groups are severely underrepresented in Police Scotland's workforce at only 1% of police officers, police staff, and special constables. There appears to be a particular problem with retention of BME staff once recruited. This also needs to be examined, as if the pattern continues, any additional efforts made to increase recruitment may not lead to a more representative workforce. There is no point in bettering recruitment if BME police officers and staff continue to leave Police Scotland in high proportions.

CRER hopes that as Police Scotland considers the changing workforce, it also considers ways in which it may become more representative of the people it serves. It is important to acknowledge the effects increasing gender equality and generational expectations may have on working culture, but the needs of underrepresented groups, including BME groups, must also bear consideration.

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Focus

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

Not Answered

Please tell us why you think these are the right or wrong areas of focus?:

CRER accepts the main areas of proposed focus within the strategy and sees links between these and the Strategic Policing Priorities. There are a few notable areas of particular concern for BME communities.

Protection (based on threat, risk, and harm)

The strategy notes a key concern for protecting vulnerable people and responding to incidents. Concern for protecting vulnerable people should also extend to vulnerable communities and those most at risk for discrimination and violent hate incidents.

Please note, while CRER does not support the use of the term 'vulnerable' to relate to BME communities, we would expect Police Scotland to take account of the increased threat, risk, and harm BME communities face in terms of racially aggravated crime and racist incidents. As such, we are addressing this in this section.

According to COPFS, racist hate crime remains the most reported hate crime in Scotland, with 3,712 charges relating to race crime reported in 2015-2016 compared to 1,020 for crimes relation to prejudice against sexual orientation, the next highest. The Equality and Human Rights Commission reports that BME groups, alongside those from religious minority groups and women, were more likely than others to be worried about physical attack, sexual assault, or acquisitive crime. It is clear from the evidence that BME individuals and groups have a special concern in relation to protection based on threat, risk, and harm.

Responding to incidents effectively and efficiently should be a priority for the police. However, for BME groups, a poor response to a racist incident or a hate crime fuels a distrust of the police and causes communities and individuals to feel unsafe and vulnerable. CRER is aware of several cases in which people have been discouraged from reporting a crime as being racially motivated, usually following face-to-face contact with officers. Often this involves the officer(s) putting forward alternative motivations or asserting their own opinions in a way that diminishes the complaint being made. There are also instances in which investigations have been pursued ineffectively, resulting in insufficient evidence being gathered to demonstrate racist motivations and therefore racial aggravation charges being dropped.

To effectively protect all communities, Police Scotland must improve its interactions with BME communities to build trust and confidence, and effectively respond to demand and threats. Better workforce representation is key to this.

Prevention (tackling crime, inequality, and enduring problems facing communities)

The strategy also identifies prevention of crime as a focus area, ensuring that enduring problems facing communities are dealt with through a focus on prevention, early intervention, early resolution, and diversion to reduce inequalities and improve life chances.

For this focus area, there is a key concern regarding appropriate response to hate crime and prejudice-based discrimination, and the perpetrators of these crimes. For BME communities, a crucial aspect of this is properly and effectively addressing 'low level' racist incidents before they escalate, particularly into acts of racist violence.

To reduce hate crime, preventative approaches must include an emphasis on tackling this 'low level' offending. In our experience, many people who report ongoing racist harassment (often culminating in violence or serious damage to property) have previously complained to the police about issues such as verbal harassment or minor vandalism. These complaints are often not resolved at an early stage; doing so could potentially discourage further incidents. Furthermore, it is our experience that once a more serious incident has occurred, there is often a failure on the part of the police to treat all complaints as part of a pattern of harassment.

Indeed, individuals should be encouraged to report these 'low level' incidents and the police should respond appropriately. If not, BME individuals will feel as though it is useless to report racist incidents and will hesitate to contact the police regarding more serious and potentially violent offences. Victims should never feel unheard or let down by police.

As part of the prevention approach, the police must consider approaches (in addition to and beyond diversion activities) which ask people to look at the attitudes and beliefs which fuel these racist acts. These activities should encourage attitude changes, which is particularly pressing considering that most racist crimes in Scotland are committed by young white men. Simple diversion – such as getting individuals to play a game of football – are not enough and do not actually challenge or change attitudes. Robust evaluations – following the use of evidence-based approaches to plan activities - will be needed from the beginning of these activities and programmes to ensure that the police services know what is effective and what is not in anti-racist work and are better able to determine whether interventions are working. CRER notes that this is part of a wider programme of work that will involve other public bodies and services, particularly schools, but would encourage police services to lead the way in this endeavour.

Communities (focus on localism, diversity, and the virtual world)

CRER appreciates the recognition that communities are not limited to place and that communities of demography must also receive due consideration. To achieve the safe, cohesive, and sustainable communities the strategy envisages, special considerations are needed for BME groups.

Key to this is improving relationships between BME communities and the police, and building trust in the police.

As we have noted above, inadequate responses to racist incidents and discrimination – both personal and institutional – have seriously affected the view many BME groups have of the police. If Police Scotland want to see the resilient, participative, engaged communities aspired to in the strategy, resources will have to be dedicated to improving relationships with BME groups.

In particular, for BME groups, the two key aspects to ensuring that communities are engaged and able to effectively collaborate with the police are 1) building a more representative workforce and 2) responding more adequately to racial hate crime. The lack of appropriate representation and poor experiences with the police following racist incidents are among the most significant barriers for BME communities engaging effectively with the police locally and nationally.

Knowledge (informing the development of better services)

CRER agrees that sharing knowledge to inform the development of better services is beneficial to all involved. CRER sees a particular benefit in improving the sharing of hate crime data on a local level. Before the creation of Police Scotland, some local authorities were able to obtain hate crime data at ward-level, which could be used to identify flashpoints and develop bespoke initiatives and approaches. We understand difficulties in database systems prohibit this at present, but we would ask that Police Scotland address this to ensure that this important knowledge can be shared with local groups to improve responses and build resilience.

Innovation (dynamic, adaptable, and sustainable)

CRER believes that ongoing community engagement is critical to ensuring that police services are innovative and adaptable. Furthermore, Police Scotland should ensure that any changes to policy and practice are assessed for impact on BME communities through Equality Impact Assessments. The loss of relationships between community organisations and trusted Community Liaison Officers through the process of restructuring is one example in which a change has had unintended negative consequences, and all efforts should be made to anticipate and mitigate these.

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Methods

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

Not Answered

Please tell us why you think this is the right or wrong approach?:

CRER is supportive of these methods, and raises a few key areas for consideration in reference to BME communities.

Improving public contact, engagement, and service

CRER is supportive of this method and is hopeful that its implementation will recognise the need to build better relationships with BME communities, as discussed previously. Better public contact, response to incidents, and community engagement can foster an atmosphere of collaborative working and resilience.

Key to this will be focusing on BME community engagement to build trust, improving responses to racist incidents, and improving upon internal representation. We ask that as Police Scotland enacts its commitment to “engaging, listening, learning, and adapting” that it pays particular attention to how it can enhance and improve relationships with BME groups.

Strengthen effective partnerships

CRER is also supportive of the movement to strengthen effective partnerships. From our own work, we are aware of limited positive steps in collaborative working between Police Scotland and the third sector, particularly through the Glasgow Hate Crime Working Group.

Key to these partnerships and engagements is a commitment to open and honest dialogue and the willingness to listen to negative accounts from community members and respond appropriately.

CRER also notes that police services should not only consult with community leaders, as this can often ignore large segments of communities, particularly BME women and young people. Engagement must be both across and within communities.

Alongside this, it is important to note that BME groups are not homogenous. Police services will need to engage with all communities, rather than assuming engagement with one minority ethnic group will serve as a proxy for engagement across the board.

Furthermore, CRER believes there to be very little BME representation on Community Planning Partnerships and Community Councils. This will create a barrier for these communities to engage with local commanders and police services to shape the delivery of local services.

CRER believes that a partnership approach with the third sector can allow police services to learn from communities where failures have occurred and allows individuals to feel heard and understood by the police services.

However, there are also areas in which collaboration between Police Scotland and the third sector has weakened since the restructuring from the previous regional forces. Many minority ethnic community organisations report that while they used to have good relationships with Community Liaison Officers, these relationships have now broken down due to reassignment or changes in the work of the officer, and no other officer has replaced them. We would ask that Police Scotland consider this in its implementation of the strategy.

Finally, CRER would ask that Police Scotland be as transparent as possible with its partnership working. Networks and official advisory groups that exist for one protected characteristic should, where possible, be developed for other groups to improve information sharing and better address pressing issues. Police Scotland should be clear about which advisory groups it supports, how such groups are formed, and what the membership and remit of these groups are.

Empower and develop our people and culture

CRER believe that a critical aspect of empowering and developing the Police Scotland's employees and culture will be to improve the recruitment, retention, and progression of BME police officers, staff, and special constables. Positive action measures which can be evaluated for effectiveness should be utilised where possible.

Furthermore, Police Scotland must root out any and all institutional racism from its structures, policies, and practices. High ranking members of Police Scotland have denied that institutional racism exists, which indicates a misunderstanding of the issue (as articulated in the Macpherson Inquiry), as well as a refusal to acknowledge the experiences of BME individuals and the discrimination they have felt. The problem of institutional racism (both within Police Scotland itself, through its low levels of BME staff, recruitment, and retention, and within its service provision, through its treatment of BME communities and handling of racist incidents) must be named and acknowledged before it can be addressed.

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Performance

4 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?

Not Answered

We would welcome any views you have :

CRER believes this is a very appropriate key measure of success.

During the development of the Scottish Government's Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016-2030, CRER engaged with many BME communities around issues of community cohesion and justice, including public confidence in the police services. These concerns are reflected in a key goal of the Framework, namely: "Scotland's police workforce is better able to tackle racism and promote equality and community cohesion in the delivery of police services." The Framework further notes that to achieve this, practical knowledge on racism, racial equality, and cultural awareness is needed in the police force.

At present, BME confidence in the police is low. We do not accept the data on police confidence in BME communities as reported in the Scottish Survey Core Questions, as the sample sizes used for this survey are unrepresentative and, in some communities, extremely small. Indeed, sample sizes tended to be larger in communities not known for experiencing tension with the police.

We further note the negative effects of the Prevent agenda; the way in which this is being implemented is not helping improve BME confidence in the police services. Counter-terrorism needs to be addressed with BME communities, rather than through aggressively policing them.

Police Scotland will need to improve the entire experience of BME communities with the police to successfully implement the strategy and live up to its values of fairness, respect, and integrity.

We also note that it is important to establish a baseline to measure success in this manner. Engagement with communities will be crucial to determining this and, thus, to evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy. We have previously noted that in the Outgoing Strategic Police plan, there is a strategic priority to, "Make communities stronger and improve wellbeing by increasing police confidence and reducing fear of crime, making the new Police Service an exemplar of visible, ethical, and responsive policing," which sits alongside a strategic objective to, "Increase public confidence in the police service by understanding and responding to the particular needs of Scotland's diverse communities."

We would ask Police Scotland to consider the monitoring and evaluation that has been carried out regarding these commitments, and use this as a baseline against which the effectiveness of this new strategy can be measured. If evaluation is not possible, measures should be taken to ensure it will be possible by 2026.

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Workforce

5 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?

Not Answered

We would welcome any views you have.:

CRER recognises that it is important to ensure that the Police Scotland workforce has the right skills and capacity to carry out its role. However, it is also important that the workforce fully represents Scotland's communities.

We have noted previously the importance of increasing BME representation in line with figures from the Scottish Census (4% Scotland-wide, with much higher concentrations in major cities). It is worth noting that these figures are from 2011 and it is safe to assume the numbers of BME groups have increased since. There is also a concern as to how Police Scotland can improve its diversity if staff numbers are remaining static or are decreasing. Positive action measures will be necessary, as will the evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of these approaches.

CRER asks that Police Scotland make equal representation of BME communities a key aspect of its strategy for the coming years.

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Clear & Understandable

6 Is the strategy presented in a clear and understandable way?

Not Answered

We would welcome any views you have.:

We felt that, although the strategy contained useful diagrams and infographics, it could be made clearer and more transparent.

In particular, we felt it was not clear how the Strategic Police Priorities, Strategic Objectives, five foci, and overall vision and values were related, both in policy and practice. Additional clarification on this would be useful, as would information on how the strategy will be monitored for effectiveness and impact.

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Other views

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

We would welcome any views you have.:

CRER is concerned that there does not appear to be links between this strategy and the Public Sector Equality Duty Equality Outcomes 2017-2021. These outcomes will also have an important effect on how Police Scotland operates in the coming years, particularly in relation to groups with protected characteristics. It would be beneficial, we believe, to link these better, particularly as Police Scotland will be legally bound to these outcomes under the Equality Act 2010.

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About you

8 What is your name?

Name:

Rebecca Marek

9 What is your email address?

Email:

rebecca@crer.org.uk

10 Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

I am answering on behalf of an organisation

Organisation Name:

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

11 What is your postcode?

Postcode:

G1 1JQ

12 Police Scotland would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Yes - Publish my responses, including my name and my organisation name.

13 We will share your response internally with Police Scotland / Scottish Police Authority policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for us to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

14 How have you found completing this consultation?

Some of the questions were hard to complete

Do you have any comments you wish to make about the consultation process?:

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No

About you (Page 2)

15 Age

Choose not to disclose

16 Gender

Choose not to disclose

17 Are you transgender?

Choose not to disclose

18 Sexual Orientation

Choose not to disclose

19 Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Choose not to disclose

20 Ethnic and Cultural Origin

Choose not to Disclose

Other:

21 What religion do you identify with?

Choose not to disclose

Other:

22 Are you an employee of Police Scotland?

No