# Concerns rise over police response amid escalating public disorder in Scotland



In recent months, growing concerns have emerged across Scotland regarding escalating incidents of public disorder and the perceived weakening of police responses. These issues have come to light through a series of disturbing events in cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen, reflecting a broader debate about the state of law enforcement in the country.

One particularly vivid example occurred in The Meadows, a beloved recreational park in Edinburgh. Residents have reported that every few weeks, a group of masked quad bikers wreak havoc there, riding at high speeds and damaging the grounds. The bikers have been described as “roaring past children, pensioners and dog walkers at speed, putting them in fear for their lives.” The aftermath leaves the park scarred and marred, much to the frustration of locals who wonder, “Where are the police?”

Similar frustrations have been voiced in other parts of Scotland. In Cambuslang near Glasgow, an off-licence owner recounted an incident where he refused to serve a known troublemaker, who responded by grabbing a four-pack of beer from behind the counter, drinking it openly. When the shopkeeper called the police, the offender taunted the operator, shouting, “Come and f**\***\* get me.” Despite this provocation, no police response occurred.

In Aberdeen, a pensioner confronted a home intruder who had stolen perfume and inquired about cannabis sales before fleeing. The victim made two extended attempts to contact police on the 101 non-emergency number but was unable to make contact. Eventually, she gave up, and the crime went unrecorded.

These individual accounts are part of a wider pattern. Recent figures suggest that since January 2022, over one million calls to Police Scotland’s crime hotline have ended without a response, with many callers hanging up unanswered. The Daily Mail reports that these events raise questions about a “fundamental shift” in the police response to crime, leaving victims feeling isolated.

Martin Gallagher, a retired superintendent and former divisional commander in Paisley, shared his own experience to underline this trend. Last month in Linlithgow, West Lothian, he witnessed a five-man street fight amidst a crowd of 40 onlookers. No police officers were present. “I didn’t even phone the police because what was the point?” he said. “If I’m at the stage where I know I’ll never get through – and even if I do the police aren’t going to arrive – and I’m an ex-superintendent, then what is the general attitude from the public who don’t know what I know? No one else phoned the police and they certainly never arrived.”

Mr Gallagher reflected on how policing has changed since his career began in 1994, noting that back then, tackling such disturbances—like the quad bikers in The Meadows—would have involved proactive, plainclothes officers eager to “ruin their fun and ensure the public were kept safe.” He contrasted that approach with the current tactics in 2025, which he described as “risk-averse” and limited by scarce manpower. Inspector Scott Casey mentioned the potential use of drones to pursue the offenders, but highlighted legal restrictions on their use over residential areas.

The cautious approach, according to Mr Gallagher, stems from a desire to avoid “tragic, unintended consequences” during police action but may overlook risks posed to the public, such as children potentially being run over by quad bikes.

The handling of public disorder provides further insight. Following violent clashes among football fans in Glasgow in December and the chaotic firework attacks in November in Glasgow and Edinburgh, police opted for containment rather than immediate intervention. Officers attributed their restraint to orders from senior command. Arrests were made later based on CCTV and social media evidence, although masked offenders hindered identification.

Mr Gallagher questioned the strategy’s effectiveness, asking, “How many people were assaulted while the police were standing watching?” He also criticised the deployment of significant police hours post-event, which might have been better spent making immediate arrests and preventing harm.

Tom Buchan, a retired chief superintendent from Strathclyde Police, pointed to changes not only in policing strategy but also in the qualities and expectations of officers entering the force today. He expressed surprise that recruits are now allowed mobile phones in training sessions and noted a decline in rigidity and discipline compared to his era, describing it as a reflection of wider societal change. He shared a story of a probationary officer involved in a domestic violence case whose mother called his superior to request he never be sent on such assignments again.

Both former officers commented on the expanding scope of police responsibilities beyond traditional crime fighting, now encompassing social and mental health issues due to gaps in other service provisions. Mr Gallagher observed that much of the information police gather on social issues is discarded by social work departments, leaving police overburdened with non-criminal matters.

Further contributing to police challenges is a trend toward shorter custody periods and a reduction in available cell capacity, fostering a “revolving door” where offenders are quickly released. According to a freedom of information request, around 7.5 per cent of Scotland’s approximately 16,600 police officers in 2023 were in a “non-deployable” status, unable to be assigned to field duties.

The cumulative effect, Mr Gallagher suggested, is a “perfect storm” that undermines the core policing mandate of preventing and detecting crime. As police stations close and frontline numbers dwindle, many crimes go unreported or unanswered, emboldening criminals and eroding public confidence.

Local politicians have also voiced concerns. Councillor Marie-Clair Munro of Morningside, Edinburgh, described constituents’ frustration as they witness what they feel is a “receding police presence” with vandals “laughing in the face” of law enforcement. She called parts of the city “policing deserts” and criticised the Scottish National Party’s handling of police support.

Responding to these concerns, Police Scotland emphasised that Chief Constable Jo Farrell has outlined a vision focused on safer communities, reduced crime, victim support, and workforce wellbeing. Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors told the Daily Mail: “We’ve driven efforts to focus our response on threat, harm and risk and on problem solving and proactivity which can prevent crime and help to reduce demand.”

Ms Connors highlighted ongoing efforts to prioritise frontline policing and improve justice system services, including mental health incident responses. She also noted the introduction of body-worn cameras being rolled out nationally and stated that the recruitment pipeline remains “healthy” with officer numbers at 16,535, close to reported figures.

While acknowledging the changing context of policing, former Chief Superintendent Buchan cautioned against harsh criticism of contemporary officers, noting that societal changes bring new challenges. Nevertheless, he concluded that the level of service currently offered does not match the standards of previous decades.

As Scotland grapples with this complex landscape, the evolving realities of policing shape the experiences and perceptions of communities across the country.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)