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News release

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Merger of Scotland's police achieved but the service faces significant financial challenges

The creation of a single Scottish police service was one of the biggest reforms in Scotland's public sector since devolution and was achieved by the deadline of 1 April 2013. Work is now urgently needed on a financial strategy for achieving the £1.1 billion of savings expected from the restructure.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Police reform*, looks at the planning and implementation of the reform of the police service, and how well governance is operating.

The report says:

- The creation of a single police force was one of the biggest reforms in Scotland's public sector since devolution and the biggest change to Scottish policing for more than 40 years. The Scottish Government, Police Scotland and Scottish Police Authority (SPA) achieved much before the new service launched in April, creating legislation, structures and national services. Front-line police services were kept running throughout
- Planning the move to a single service was hampered by poor information, a lack of clarity about roles, and difficult relationships between the government, Police Scotland and SPA. There have been significant changes to governance arrangements, and some important strategies and plans are still under development
- The government expects police reform to save £1.1 billion by 2026, but it is not clear how these savings will be achieved. The SPA and Police Scotland need to finalise and agree a financial strategy with detailed savings plans by the end of March 2014
- The government, Police Scotland and SPA need to agree how to monitor and report on whether the reforms are achieving their intended benefits, and agree how to report on police performance.

Auditor General for Scotland, Caroline Gardner, said:

"The creation of a single police service has been one of the biggest reforms in Scotland's public sector. Much was achieved over a short timeframe and front-line operations were maintained throughout. However, a lack of good information in non-operational areas like finance and staffing, and differing views on how the new arrangements would work in practice affected planning for the move to a single police service.

"The Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland will find it challenging to deliver the savings expected by these reforms. There are a number of reasons for this, including limited flexibility with police officer and staff numbers. They need to urgently agree a long-term financial strategy and savings plans."

Notes to editors

1. The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 brought together the eight existing regional police forces, the Scottish Police Services Authority and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency into two new national bodies; the Police Service of Scotland (or Police Scotland) and the Scottish Police Authority. The Act also created a new structure for fire and rescue services. This report only focuses on the delivery of police reform.

2. The Scottish Government set three objectives for the reform: protect and improve local services despite financial cuts; create more national capacity and equal access to specialist police services; and strengthen the connection between the police and communities. Although financial savings are not a stated objective, the reform is expected to save £1.1 billion by 2026.

3. The restructure transferred about £1.1 billion of annual spending and over 24,000 people, including 17,496 officers, into the new bodies. It also transferred responsibility for policing from local government to central government. It is one of the largest and most complex reforms in Scotland's public sector. It is the biggest change to policing since the Police (Scotland) Act 1967, which was the primary source of legislation for policing in Scotland.

4. As the reform process is in its early stages, this audit did not look at whether the three objectives for reform are being achieved, nor did Audit Scotland review the operational performance of Police Scotland or the SPA.

5. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

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