



SCOTTISH POLICE FEDERATION

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Humza Yousaf MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice
Scottish Government
Room 1W.11
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DG

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By email: CabSecJustice@gov.scot

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Coronavirus Vaccine Programme

I refer to the above and our previous conversations in respect of this matter.

As you are aware police officers do not work in a clinical setting. Their work environment is often chaotic, uncontrolled, and unavoidably “up close and personal” with the public. It is fast moving and with the best will in the world, it is often impossible to avoid the need for physical intervention.

At the best of times these realities are an unfortunate part of life; in a coronavirus world, they carry considerable additional risk and these risks are not always capable of being mitigated.

As we are both aware, the Scottish Government has consistently warned (and stated that the science supported) that house parties are one of the greatest drivers of infection in our communities. The Scottish Government legislated to make such gatherings unlawful, and in doing so placed an implicit obligation on the police service to attend such high-risk incidents.

By contrast, the Scottish Government has consistently reported (and stated that the science supported) that schools remaining open was safe. The Government has consistently commented that schools do not present a high risk of coronavirus transmission.

Against this backdrop it was therefore surprising to hear the First Minister allude (in her update to parliament on the 4th January 2021) to the possibility of teachers being prioritised in the Coronavirus vaccination programme, whilst at the same time, nothing has been said by any member of Government in respect of the police service.

Clearly the SPF has no axe to grind with the dedicated professionals who work in our education system, and we wish them well in their bid to be prioritised for vaccine. We do however find it difficult to reconcile the Government's approach with its messaging and legislative output.

At the risk of repeating the point, the Government has stated house parties are a high-risk environment for the transmission of Coronavirus; has legislated to tacitly require police officers to put themselves right in the heart of these high-risk activities; yet has advocated that a sector of the workforce it has consistently stated is not at high risk, should be prioritised for vaccination.

The SPF accepts there is an inevitable requirement for Government to consider a whole host of factors that the Joint Committee on Vaccine and Immunisation (JCVI) does not, when forming policy. It is clearly a political consideration as to when teachers should be vaccinated; and not strictly a "health risk" one.

We cannot accept however that a service so critical for the functioning of our society, and so critical in responding to this public health emergency, like the police service, is not subject to the same considerations.

Since the prohibition on house parties was introduced on the 28th August, police officers have attended almost 7,000 such events. The SPF has not been able to identify a single day in all that time that unlawful house parties have not been reported to the police.

After attending calls to house parties, police officers continue to attend other calls like domestic violence calls, hate crimes, and concerns for the vulnerable. In every single case, police officers, through no fault of their own, increase the risk of bringing virus they have been exposed to into the homes of others. They are the very epitome of state designed super-spreaders

These realities are compounded with the new strain of the virus ripping through our country and we are seeing a steady increase in coronavirus related absences across the service. Some of our stations have experienced absence rates in excess of 40% and many of our critical departments live in constant fear that an infection could wipe out their ability to function. Given the widespread non-compliance with the regulations (granted by a small, but still considerable minority) it will also directly impact on the ability of the police to continue our sizeable contribution to curtailing community transmission. We cannot imagine this possibility would be one the Government would welcome.

From the moment vaccines became available the SPF was clear that health care professionals, social care professionals, and the most very vulnerable should be at the front of the queue. It should not require the Wisdom of Solomon to conclude that police officers and those who work in such a critical public service should not be far behind them.

I remain grateful for the personal support you have offered police officers throughout this pandemic but as I am sure you appreciate; our members are becoming tired of kind words. Their concerns have amplified significantly in recent weeks and it is not unfair to say that they consider they are the poor relation in the Government's thinking. I would implore you therefore to advocate that police officers should be prioritised in the vaccination programme and look forward to hearing that they will be so.

Given the overwhelming strength of feeling on this matter, I will be publishing a copy of this letter for the information of members.

The SPF continues to wish you and the wider Government every success in defeating this virus that has blighted, and claimed so many lives.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Calum Steele', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

CALUM STEELE
General Secretary