

## Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Act 2020:

### Annual Compliance Assessment for Statutory Code of Practice 2024/25.

#### Scottish Police Authority (SPA)



## Introduction

On 16 November 2022, the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner's statutory [Code of Practice](#) took legal effect after being approved by the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers. The Code covers the acquisition, retention, use, and destruction of biometric data for criminal justice and police purposes by Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), and the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC). The Code is designed around twelve guiding principles and ethical considerations to which Police Scotland, the SPA, and the PIRC must comply.

Further information on the legal basis for the Code of Practice can be found in sections 7 to 27 of the [Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Act 2020](#). The meaning of 'biometric data' in the Scottish legislation is distinct and may be found in section 34 of the Act.

## Programme of annual compliance assessments

The Commissioner's [4-year Strategic Plan](#) (as revised), covering the period from 01 December 2021 to 30 November 2025, sets out the intention to conduct a rolling programme of annual compliance assessments for the [Code of Practice](#).

Once the current plan concludes in November 2025, the subsequent strategic plan will set out how the Commissioner will discharge his functions between 01 December 2025 to 30 November 2029. It is likely that formal assessments on compliance with the Code of Practice will move to a biennial cycle at that stage to reduce the scrutiny burden on those to whom the Code applies. However, this will be determined following extensive consultation on the shape and form of the next Strategic Plan over the summer and autumn of 2025.

## Assessment methodology

To ensure that the programme of annual compliance assessments does not place an unreasonable administrative burden on the organisations to whom the Code applies and thereby detract from important public service delivery, the initial assessment methodology was based on '**validated self-assessment**' and followed a 5-stage process involving:

- initial self-assessment against a questionnaire containing sixty-four self-assessment questions provided by the Commissioner.
- independent review of the self-assessment evidence provided in response to the questionnaire.
- a strategic validation conversation.
- a draft report prepared by the Commissioner for factual accuracy checking, and;
- the publication of an overall assessment on compliance with the Code on the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner website.

The independent validation of the self-assessment evidence was conducted using the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner's [National Assessment Framework](#) of quality indicators for biometric data as also detailed in Appendix 'A' (pages 55 to 60) of the Code of Practice.

For 2024/25 and for reasons of proportionality, the bodies to whom the Code applies were asked to revisit their self-assessment from 2023/24, to consider anything that had changed, and then to provide a letter of assurance to the Commissioner on compliance with the Code.

### Scope of validated self-assessment

The scope of the independent validation of the self-assessment evidence provided by the Scottish Police Authority re compliance with the statutory Code of Practice in Scotland is restricted to matters within the legislative authority of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner assigned through the devolved competence of the Scottish Parliament. It does not therefore consider or infer compliance with:

- UK GDPR, The UK data Protection Act 2018, or any matter within the statutory oversight of the UK Information Commissioner (ICO).
- Arrangements for the retention of biometric data obtained under either the UK Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, or Schedule 7 to the UK Terrorism Act 2020, and held in relation to non-convicted persons under the provisions of a National Security Determination (NSD), within the statutory oversight of the Biometrics Commissioner for England and Wales.
- The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2002 (RIPSA), or other legislation governing covert activity within the statutory oversight of the UK Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO).
- Forensic Science accreditation across a broad range of examination and testing activities within the remit of UKAS the National Accreditation Body for the United Kingdom, or the delivery of forensic services in Scotland under the oversight of HMICS.

## Handling of Confidential Information

Section 19 of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Act 2020 creates an offence for the Commissioner or a member of the Commissioner's staff to knowingly disclose confidential information except in certain prescribed circumstances. Accordingly, the written self-assessment return provided to the Commissioner by the Scottish Police Authority on 7 January 2025 is exempted from publication on the grounds that it may contain sensitive operational information, which if released, could compromise the integrity of those operations, and thereby endanger public safety.

## Areas for further development self-identified by the SPA

As part of its internal governance arrangements including the self-assessment on compliance with the Code of Practice, the SPA is currently progressing the following developments:

- Progressing the actions from internal audit, including the development of joint biometrics strategy/plan/policy with Police Scotland and reporting on progress to the SPA Audit and Risk Committee.
- Ongoing weeding of Fingerprint Evidence Books.
- Ongoing discussions with COPFS on criminal justice and evidential DNA sampling.

## Complaints about the Code

There have been no complaints received by the Commissioner relative to the Scottish Police Authority in the past 12 months from data subjects relative to non-compliance with the Code.

## Reporting breaches of the Code of Practice

In circumstances where the Commissioner determines that the Code is not being complied with, the Commissioner must prepare and publish a report about that failure and lay a copy of the report before the Scottish Parliament. No such reports have been laid in Parliament during 2024/25.

## Overall Conclusion and Determination

My conclusion based on independent assessment of the evidence available to me for fiscal year 2024/25 is that the Scottish Police Authority are using biometric data and technologies in a lawful, effective, and ethical manner.

Consequently, my overall determination for 2024/25 is that the SPA is currently compliant with the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner's Code of Practice.

*Brian Plastow*

Dr Brian Plastow  
Scottish Biometrics Commissioner

Date: 08 January 2025.