

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2013-14

Written submission from UNISON Scotland

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee regarding the police reform aspects of the draft Budget 2013-14.

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 160,000 members working primarily in the public sector in Scotland, including police staffs who are impacted by police reform cuts.

Police and Fire Reform Act

As we said in our evidence to the Justice Committee on the Bill, it was difficult to assess whether the estimated costs and savings provided within the Financial Memorandum were either reasonable or accurate. The paper highlighted a wide range of figures for both costs and savings, depending on what assumptions are made. For instance, in the case of police reform the costs ranged from £137million to £163million, while the potential savings ranged from £1.135billion to £621million. These figures were generated as a 'top down' requirement with task groups told to find the savings.

This approach results in optimistic assumptions about the effectiveness of shared services and simply passing even more police staff tasks onto operational staff through cost displacement. Others have also expressed concerns over the savings estimates, particularly in areas like IT. Experience of past reorganisations has rarely justified the scale of optimism shown in the plans.

UNISON also highlighted the potential VAT liability for the new organisation. Our subsequent Freedom of Information requests showed that the Scottish Government was fully aware of the Treasury's position even before the Bill consultation. Our concerns were justified because the new police force will be liable for VAT because of the way the Scottish Government organised it - precisely as we predicted.

Police staff cuts estimates

As the Scottish Government has an arbitrary target to maintain police officer numbers at 17234, the focus of the savings are concentrated on police staffs. This is because Police staffs constitute 15% of the police budget, Police officers 73%. The balance are non-staffing costs that have already been the subject of efficiency savings and may offer some, but not massive savings.

ACPOS estimates during the Bill process showed 2054 police staff posts to be lost by 2015/16. Plus a further 350 if police staffs don't accept massive cuts in terms and

conditions. Then a further 800 if the new service is not exempted from VAT. That is 3,200 posts.

A survey of our membership shows that around 53% of the 1000 police staff posts which have already gone are being covered in part or in full by police officers. That means around 500 police officers are now not out on the street fighting crime full time. If you extrapolate this to the future staffing plan it would suggest up to 2,000 officers could, at least in part, be taken off operational duties. We accept this is a very rough calculation, but even one officer taken off operational duties is a wasted resource.

Current saving plans

ACPOS have now undertaken further work on the police budget and identified a list of savings options for the next four financial years. The lowlights as far as Police staffs are concerned include cuts of:

- 550 further voluntary redundancies this year by existing Police Boards.
- 117 HR and finance staff.
- 48 procurement, fleet and estates staff.
- 94 custody staff to be “replaced by police officers”.
- 170 front counter staff.
- 134 traffic wardens.
- 28 licensing staff.
- 131 clerical staff with “Police officers performing basic administrative duties themselves”.
- 20 specialist roles specific to individual forces.
- 145 crime analysis and intelligence staff.
- 328 corporate services staff
- Reduction in police staff in control rooms (£6m, numbers not specified)
- Privatisation of cleaning staff (£1.5m, numbers not specified)
- Forensic staff cuts (£955k, numbers not specified)
- Police staff terms and conditions cuts (£6.2m)

Some of these cuts (HR, finance and corporate services) are aimed at economies of scale created by one centralised police force. However, past experience of such savings is that they are rarely achieved and certainly not without passing the workload onto operational staff.

The vast majority of these job cuts can only be achieved by substituting police officers for the roles currently undertaken by police staffs. These include custody staff, front office, traffic wardens, licensing staff, clerical support, intelligence gathering, control room and forensic staff. This is already happening with police officers being drafted in, typically at twice the salary, to undertake these duties.

Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative or specialist tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness. It is also contrary to the Best Value provisions in the Act. This will return the police service in Scotland to almost the 1980’s, with inefficient and outdated police practice.

This is in contrast to the report by the National Police Improvement Agency in England and Wales, which examined how forces could save resources by removing the use of a warrant card for some jobs where there is no need for one, and having a better workforce mix between civilian and uniformed staff. Scotland is already some way behind modern police practice in this regard as the Stewart Report (2009) showed. With these cuts we could end up with a ratio half that of English police forces. Police staffs includes properly qualified civilian personnel delivering a wide range of routine, complex and specialised functions that are central to modern day police forces, while allowing uniformed officers to concentrate on operational policing duties.

UNISON believes that the Scottish Police Authority and the Chief Constable should be able to decide the correct balance of police officers and police staff using Best Value principles. They should not be subject to a political direction from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice that effectively restricts cuts to police staffs.

Conclusion

The provisions for police staff will turn back the policing clock in Scotland by decades. Police officers will be performing duties they are not qualified to undertake at greater cost. The aim should be to ensure the maximum number of police officers in operational roles, not substituting for police staff roles. The SPA should be able to decide on the proper balance of staff, free from political direction.

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