Justice Committee
Scottish Government’s Draft Budget 2013-14

Written submission from the Scottish Police Federation

I refer to the above and to your correspondence dated the 3rd October 2012 and thank you for inviting the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) to make a submission.

The SPF does not have access to the empirical data detailing the exact areas of expenditure within the police service. That being said it would be anomalous if we, as an organisation did not hold a view on the challenges facing the police service as a consequence of reducing budgets for the foreseeable future.

Police numbers

The SPF absolutely believes the commitment to no fewer than 17,234 police officers in Scotland over the lifetime of this parliament to be one worth celebrating. These numbers have resulted in record low crime and record public confidence. Whilst reduction in crime is clearly influenced by a number of factors it is our view, based on years of policing experience, that numbers make a difference. If we look at the rate of recorded crime in Scotland prior to the commitment for 1000 extra officers, we see that the number stubbornly remained around 420,000 per annum. Since the recruitment of these ‘extra’ officers crime has fallen year on year to just over 320,000 last year.

The importance of police numbers is well espoused by members of the Scottish Parliament but it is important to note this support extended to Westminster also. In a speech in March 2010, arguably at the start of the most severe period of spending cuts in a lifetime, the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, insisted that despite the recession and a commitment to halve the deficit by 2014, frontline policing would be protected. He stated; “Reducing fear of crime begins with - and is founded upon - a strong police presence on our streets...our commitment to protecting the record numbers of police officers and PCSOs is clear”

Additional to this of course is a well-motivated police service which commands public confidence. If we look to our near neighbours in England & Wales we see police numbers falling drastically (estimated to fall by over 16,000 by 2015) and a service on its knees. Public perception in England & Wales suggests crime is rising and the police service is undervalued. This is in no small measure due to the corrosive effect of two reviews on police terms and conditions which has resulted in exceptionally low morale and officers calling for the right to strike and work to rule. These issues are not in evidence in Scotland.

The SPF believes there is an inherent danger in attempting to pigeon hole the vast array of tasks and activities police officers perform into those that require police powers and those that do not. This approach is often pursued when attempting to establish the ‘cost of policing’ with the very simple (and flawed) logic being that jobs not requiring police powers could more effectively (and cheaply) be performed by support staff. There are a number of dangers in this thinking, not least amongst them
the risk of fundamentally altering the nature of policing to merely appearing at the point of conflict.

The police service in England has been told their job is to catch criminals – nothing more. We believe this approach to be offensive to police officers and an affront to the communities who deserve a largely non adversarial police service. We would despair if this political thinking was to manifest itself in Scotland as a consequence of the financial challenges.

**Police officer terms and conditions**

Active discussions on the challenges of saving money within a shrinking budget settlement commenced some time before the police reform programme itself. Indeed the SPF is unique in that we are the only public sector staff association or union that has actually agreed a reduction in our members’ income. In 2010 we negotiated and agreed a settlement with Scottish Minister that saw our members giving up around £2,000 per annum, saving £10 million pounds annually. We are aware this money was and is directly used to mitigate reductions in support staff numbers. We know of no other organisation that would be so benevolent in its considerations.

The SPF continues in discussion with representatives from the Scottish Government and ACPOS. These discussions are at an early stage and are progressing smoothly. We recognise the continued challenge of further reducing budgets and are working towards proposals which will help in this regard. We trust you will recognise that in order to maintain the integrity of our negotiations the SPF will not get into the specifics at this stage. We can say that any efforts to minimise the use of overtime will be welcomed by the SPF as will any proposals to better manage sick or injured colleagues. The exact financial impact has yet to be worked through and this can only take place following negotiation. Suffice to say the SPF does not see a slashing of terms and conditions as being conducive to a well-motivated police service.

**Support staff**

The SPF absolutely values and appreciates the contribution members of support staff make to policing. They provide many vital functions and skills and often directly assist police officers in providing service to the public. We must however not be surprised that support staff numbers are to be reduced. This is the inevitable consequence of removing duplication across the eight forces. In the first ten years of the Scottish Parliament support staff numbers rose by over 70%; in the same period police numbers rose by only 8%. Had police numbers grown by the same margin in the same period, Scotland would have had over 25,000 police officers.

We have enormous sympathy for support staff who face losing their employment but as painful as this is, we believe the public is more concerned with an efficient and effective police service. The SPF has no desire to see police officers taken from public facing roles to be deployed on administrative tasks. We do not accept the argument that loss of police staff will see police officers taken off the streets to fill their roles. Whilst we would never be naive enough to say never, there are legal implications for doing so. We have seen the figures estimating that as many as 3,200 members of support staff may be lost. There is an inherent challenge in managing that reduction, not least as a consequence of the commitment to no compulsory
redundancies and we would hope the number would be nowhere near that high. However we absolutely believe that if we look at what we do and not who does it and genuinely examine whether what we do actually contributes to policing that the service can be delivered to the public with minimal disruption.

In previous evidence sessions before the committee the SPF highlighted how policing and justice feature far more often than any other subject or portfolio in questions and debates before the Scottish Parliament. In many ways this simply reinforces additional points the SPF has made about the importance that our communities attach to our police service. This is despite the portfolio receiving only a fraction of the expenditure on health and education for example. As welcome and understandable as that scrutiny is, there has to come a point where the cost of gathering the information to hold the service to account becomes prohibitive when measured against the value and benefit of that information in the first place. Put simply if politicians expect the service to manage with less money, they must demand less themselves. We believe there are many ways of scrutinising and holding the service to account without requiring armies of people to provide information for that purpose. Physical visits and engagement with the service are often far more revealing than any statistic.

**Support staff terms and conditions**

The SPF believes it would be inappropriate for us to comment on the terms and conditions of other employees.

**Scottish Police Authority**

The SPF was often critical of the ability of police boards and authorities to perform their function properly and as such we welcome the creation of the new Scottish Police Authority (SPA). We believe that if the right people are appointed to it, the SPA will be able to truly scrutinise policing in a manner it deserves. That being said we do believe the arrangements at section 4 (1) of the Act are overly loose and creates the potential toward some form of expensive and unnecessary empire building.

One of the most compelling arguments for the SPA was the ability to bring in individuals with skills and expertise in say I.T, HR and finance. As such we would expect the SPA should not need to expend vast sums of money in creating executive support in these rolls. The issue of executive support will require to be clarified at an early stage not least as beyond the actual staffing of the SPA, the authority also has responsibility for the delivery of forensic services to the new police service. Clearly the police service itself will require significant executive support to enable it to deliver its functions and obligations. We believe this support must come under the direction and control of the Chief Constable and there would be no benefit in an expensive parallel set of arrangements within the SPA. Indeed we would see such a proposition as confusing and as a source for conflict as debate over primacy would take priority over actual scrutiny.

Scottish Police Federation
16 October 2012