

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

CAPITAL RESOURCES FOR POLICE SCOTLAND IN THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S BUDGET 2020-21

SUBMISSION FROM THE SCOTTISH POLICE FEDERATION

I refer to the above and thank you for inviting the Scottish Police Federation (SPF) to contribute to the work of the Committee.

Whilst the SPF is pleased to be able to advise that our engagement with the Police Service of Scotland (PSoS) has improved considerably in respect of financial matters, this has not extended to meaningful discussions over budgetary decisions. This is a source of continual frustration for the SPF.

As is known the capital allocation for the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) for 2019/20 is little over £43 Million. The PSoS and SPA have already laid out in their budget (approved on 28 March) how this allocation will be used. The papers presented to the SPA, and indeed the subsequent (public) discussion at the meeting on that date, in the view of the SPF, fall far short of narrating just how woefully inadequate this capital allocation really is.

The SPF also considers that the SPA in particular is deliberately using language that seeks to underplay the severity of the reality of what this funding will mean for the effective delivery of policing. We consider that in doing so, the SPA is in breach of its statutory responsibilities under section 2(3) of the 2012 Act, and it is a moot point whether they are discharging their responsibilities under section 2(1)(a) and (c).

We will leave it to the PSoS to articulate its views on what the capital funding means for its transformation agenda.

Turning to the specific issues we were asked to comment on:

The overall capital provision for Police Scotland, both in the immediate and longer term?

The overall picture is bleak. It is impossible to completely separate the capital funding from revenue as the lack of the former has a direct impact on the latter (due to for example increasing amounts required to be spent on care and repair even where it is economically illiterate to do so).

We consider that the scale of capital investment required in the police service wasn't truly understood (or wasn't willing to be discussed in public) in the early years of the PSoS when much of the discussions were centred on replacement of, or building ICT capabilities. These discussions were taking place whilst in many areas of the country the estate was crumbling and the fleet was well past its serviceable best. It is our view that the pursuit of tomorrow's technology was considered such a prize that neglect of the basic needs of today was considered an acceptable price to pay to get it.

The SPF considers the PSoS capital needs are of such magnitude that a wholesale change in political mood and will is required. The alternative is for the service to continue to attract criticism as its basic infrastructure decays yet further, whilst what ought to be considered essential tools for a modern and effective police service become increasingly distant aspirations.

The priorities for capital spending on police Information & Communications Technology (ICT) systems?

The SPF considers that the priorities ought not to be any different to those which drove the now ill-fated i6 project. Despite the headlines at the time i6 was not seeking to put in place anything more complicated than basic system functions that were able “to talk to each other.” We consider this continues to be the single greatest challenge for the service in terms of ICT today. We are aware that much has been made of the roll out of mobile data devices and we hope this proves to be successful. We are however minded that the hardware is only as useful as the software that supports it and that functionality will be limited. It remains to be seen if officers will continue to maintain enthusiasm for mobile devices whilst the functionality takes time to be developed.

The priorities for capital spending on other police assets, such as the police vehicle fleet, non-ICT police equipment such as uniforms, and maintenance and management of Police Scotland’s building and estate?

It is our understanding the PSoS estate requires to spend approximately £250 million to secure full compliance with all building standards and Fire regulations. This year £4 million has been allocated. We also understand the service identified an investment of £40 million is required to replace 2,400 vehicles over the next few years. The police fleet should be replaced at either 5 years old or 150,000 miles. This year alone a bid of £13 million was requested to maintain that position. £5 million was secured.

Self-evidently this ludicrous shortfall leads to further deterioration in both estate and fleet and simply adds to eventual compliance or replacement costs later in the funding pipeline. It will not be lost on the Committee that the SPF has highlighted the realities of this dire situation for several years now.

How capital expenditure priorities are identified and prioritised by force management, and how those priorities are advanced in budget discussions with the Scottish Police Authority and Scottish Government, to inform the required capital expenditure for the annual policing budget.

The SPF cannot answer this particular question. As laid out at the start of this submission, the PSoS and SPA do not enter into this level of discussion with us.

Calum Steele
General Secretary