

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2015-16

Written submission from the Scottish Police Federation

The Scottish Police Federation (SPF) is the staff association that represents every Constable, Sergeant, Inspector and Chief Inspector, cadet and special constable within the Police Service of Scotland. This amounts to over 18,000 members, or just over 99% of police officers in Scotland.

The SPF believes the Police Service of Scotland will be better placed to explain the impact the draft budget will have on specific spending decisions within the service. We will therefore reserve our comments to wider generic considerations.

From the outset the Scottish Police Federation wishes to be clear that we recognise that the Scottish Government is working with a reduced budget itself. That being said, the Scottish Police Federation considers that an approach which in simple terms could be described as top slicing everything is not imaginative enough to deal with the very real difficulties diminishing resources present.

The Scottish Police Federation notes that the overall staff cost for the police service is now approximately 90% of total budget. This has been a steadily increasing cost (as a proportion of overall budget) over the last number of years. Quite clearly the largest single influencer on this has been a reducing overall budget as self-evidently even modest increase in wage costs set against that background will result in a larger proportion of that budget being spent on staff.

The Scottish Police Federation is acutely aware of the pernicious destruction of police officer terms and conditions in England & Wales. We wish to be clear that any question of pursuing a similar approach in Scotland will be met with the fiercest of opposition and be considered as a flagrant betrayal of the contribution of the fine women and men of the Police Service of Scotland to delivering the first priority of Government; keeping its citizens safe.

We also wish to be clear that even the suggestion of such an approach will be considered an act of considerable bad faith for a service that has limited employment rights and has been at the forefront and delivered the largest organisational change to have been visited on Scotland's public sector in a generation. The Scottish Police Federation considers that the unique employment status of police officers should always be recognised and police officers should never be expected to pay for the privilege of being employed or be expected to subsidise being so.

Quite clearly the increase in police officer numbers in Scotland has been welcome and has delivered an exceptional service to the citizens of Scotland. At this time we are aware that despite the positive reductions in crime and increased confidence in the police, our members are busier than ever. The expectations on our members are matched only by the levels of disruption they endure to consistently deliver a world class service to our communities.

Whilst there are no Commonwealth Games or Ryder Cups' scheduled to take place in Scotland in 2015/16, this does not mean police officers will be any less 'stretched'. The Scottish Police Federation considers it likely that following postponement or reduced capacity events in 2014/15, many of the social events that demand police presence are likely to be more prolific and larger than before. This will have an inevitable impact on police officers and police resources.

Legislative changes and proposed legislative changes will impact on policing. We have already commented on the air weapon proposals and consider the properly expressed desire to establish dedicated units for prevention of child exploitation and human trafficking will need to be properly resourced. Quite simply we do not envisage that demand on police time and resource will diminish any time soon and this need to be properly reflected in a fair and adequate budget settlement.

The Scottish Police Federation is aware that some consider the Scottish Government commitment to 1000 extra officers for Scotland to be a poor policy and has come at the expense of support staff jobs. We disagree. The Scottish Police Federation knows our communities value and regard police officers. We know because they tell us and we know because whenever there is an implied suggestion of reducing police presence in our communities, this is met with a backlash. The Scottish Police Federation also notes that our local authorities desire additional police resources and fund them accordingly.

Therefore increased police numbers is a policy which should be lauded and supported. We do however have considerable sympathy for our colleagues and friends in support staff roles who have lost their employment. The Scottish Police Federation suggested in evidence last year that local authorities could support policing through more than their own desire for police officers. We suggested that rather than seek to fund additional police officers, or perhaps even in addition to this, that local authorities engage with the Police Service of Scotland and dedicate funding to specialist support staff roles in their communities. We believe it is now more important than ever that such discussion take place.

The Scottish Police Federation does not support the transfer of money from the police budget to the health budget. We clearly recognise that medical forensic provision should be paid for by the police but unless we are suggesting that our citizens are not entitled to health provision whilst in police custody, we believe the cash transfer to be unjustified.

This is perhaps a symptom of unthinking top-slicing and narrow old fashioned budget allocation. Regardless of where our citizens happen to be it should be for the health service to design its service accordingly. We don't for example see transfer of funding from health to police to reflect the innumerable occasions police officers are called to enforce the law within NHS establishments or to assist NHS personnel.

The Scottish Police Federation recognises and values the contribution of the NHS in Scotland and in particular those who deliver it. We recognise the increase in demand but unless we face up to the challenges posed by the need to access and supply medical and nursing services in new ways, and not simply transferring money in an old fashioned way, we see no end to the auction that is NHS funding.

The Scottish Police Federation also supports the Scottish Government commitment to international development (page 107). We are however of the mind that a commitment to international development can be demonstrated in more effective ways than simply "throwing money at it". We believe the funding currently allocated to international development should be incorporated in general budgets. We believe this should be matched by placing an obligation on public services to commit to delivering the development commitment as part of wider service provision.

In policing for example, this could include assisting with the training and development of police forces in developing or post conflict nations. This would have the advantage of providing tangible benefits for such nations in addition to providing developmental opportunities within the police service itself. This is perhaps more important than ever given reduced career advancement opportunities within the new streamlined service.

Calum Steele
General Secretary
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