

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2016-17

Written submission from the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents

I refer to your email of 10 November 2015 regarding the above and would offer the following comment on behalf of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents.

As you will understand, this Association is unsighted on detail relating to budget commitment by the Police Service of Scotland and therefore must limit our response to the general principles under which the policing budget is allocated.

We fully understand the tough choices that the Scottish Government faces when it is required to allocate a budget to the public sector in Scotland which has already been subjected to a reduction as part of the programme of austerity. Notwithstanding, it is clear that the Police Service of Scotland is struggling to meet its savings requirement at the current time and a further reduction in the policing budget will place severe restrictions on the quality of service that it can provide in the immediate future. Given the current threat level, this may be an issue that should focus minds during the budget deliberations.

As you are aware, policing in Scotland was restructured in 2013. Whilst there were sound operational reasons for this change, we believe that it was ultimately the potential for cost reduction that became the major factor in the reform programme. An initial target of £1.1bn in savings by 2026 resulted from the creation of the Police Service of Scotland which would require a major change to the service delivery model to achieve.

Unfortunately, the government's commitment to the provision of an extra 1000 officers to the service based on the number deployed in 2007 has severely hampered any moves to modernise in line with the savings target. Given that staffing costs account for more than 92% of the current budget spend, the savings have been focussed on the remainder requiring offices to close, control rooms to amalgamate and the vehicle fleet to be reduced as certain distinct examples. The vast majority of these changes has met with an adverse reaction from the public who have viewed these alterations as a centralisation of service and a removal of localised service delivery as envisaged by the founding legislation.

Added to this a programme of voluntary redundancy has seen valued members of police staff leave the service with their places often being taken by 'warranted' officers on a programme of 'back filling'. This has reversed the introduction of a balanced workforce, a process that had been developed over many years by the legacy forces.

In addition to the more obvious tasks now returning to the uniformed officer, such as custody processing and call handling, other more administrative tasks including witness citation and firearms certificate inquiry are also diverting constables from their primary functions as a direct result of the budget restrictions currently experienced. All of the above remove police officers from their central task of delivering policing services in our communities.

We must also acknowledge that stringent attempts have been made to reduce the policing budget within the current constraints. To maintain officer numbers at the requisite level, higher paid senior ranks have been reduced. For members of this Association that has necessitated a reduction of about 25% since 1 April 2013, a change we fully expected when we gave our support to the reform programme. That said, we did not expect the service delivery model to remain unaltered and the application of these two factors have resulted in the majority of our members working exceptionally long hours over an extended period of time whilst undertaking additional levels of responsibility. This is a situation that cannot continue indefinitely and is undoubtedly taking a toll on their health and wellbeing.

In addition to these issues, major changes within the justice area in Scotland will necessitate additional expenditure for the service. These include:

- implications of the Criminal Justice Bill;
- Digital Evidence and CCTV;
- Rise in sexual crime and costs of forensic investigation;
- Costs arising from the Victims and Witnesses Act;
- additional inquiry requirements and administrative costs arising from the Air weapon Act;
- Costs of historic crime investigation;
- Costs of improving our response to the terrorist threat;
- Continued cost of ICT provision and modernisation.

You may recall that this association added certain caveats to our long term support for the police reform programme. One such was the need for wider public service reform in Scotland aimed at reducing the number of health boards and local authorities to provide a fairer distribution of public sector funds. We note that currently we have seen no proposals from the government in respect of wider public sector reform. Indeed, it would appear from previous budget setting exercises that some of these bodies are being prioritised despite the levels of duplication that remains within their structures.

It is clear therefore that the Scottish Government faces a distinct choice in relation to budget funding for the police service. If it continues to pursue a policy which restricts the service from reducing police officer numbers, it must fund this decision appropriately. This is a government policy that comes with a price tag. If, however, it continues to decide to prioritise its reducing budget to other areas of the public sector the consequences are also clear, however unpalatable these may be. The restrictions on officer numbers must be removed and the Police Service of Scotland

should be allowed to restructure its reducing resource in line with agreed priorities. This will require the cessation of certain aspects of policing service delivery.

In the opinion of this Association, the laudable attempts of the Police Service of Scotland to deliver its full range of traditional functions under the financial constraint it currently experiences is a recipe for disaster. In many areas of the country our services have been spread so thinly that officer safety is an ongoing concern.

A more mature debate about police funding and expectation is urgently required.

I trust that this information will be of assistance to you.

Niven Rennie
Chief Superintendent
President
23 November 2015