

Justice Committee

Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2016-17

Written submission from Unison Scotland

Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Justice Committee's scrutiny of the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2016-2017. Obviously we have not seen the draft budget, so our comments are based on our understanding of the current position.

UNISON Scotland represents the majority of Police Staff employed by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA).

Background

We expect the overall budget for Policing to decrease to a detrimental level in line with that set out in the Outline Business Case (OBC) for Police and Fire Reform. UNISON has previously stated that the expectations of budgetary savings which could be achieved through reform were overblown and unachievable without severely impacting on efficiency and service delivery outcomes. Given the cosmetic target for police officer numbers, the brunt of these cuts has fallen on police staffs. It gives us no great pleasure to say that our predictions have again been entirely accurate.

Due to the fact that estimated savings and thereafter, the likely draft budget proposals for 2016/17 are still based on the OBC and not a Detailed Business Case (DBC), there remains, unrealistic expectations regarding what can be achieved in the timescales given and at what cost. This is illustrated by the presence of a £25m (and rising) budgetary black-hole in the 2015/16 SPA finances and the now emerging picture of staffing costs accounting for 92% of the annual budget – despite only being in year 3 and the deletion of thousands of police staff roles.

UNISON has called several times for a DBC to be carried out, in line with Treasury Green Book principles (Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government). This view was shared by Audit Scotland¹ who said that the OBR estimates were not updated nor a full business case prepared. If this exercise had been carried out, anomalies which are evident in the OBC would have been highlighted and corrected and would have resulted in a more realistic and achievable budget proposal for policing.

Reform

In UNISON's view, police reform has been rushed without warnings being heeded or due diligence being paid to complex business areas which would benefit from greater planning. This has resulted in structural reform proposals within Police Scotland (PS) which are purely designed to reduce costs and meet the unrealistic budget. These proposals are not the most efficient nor offer best value to service delivery.

It has, in effect, meant de-civilianisation has taken place on a huge scale. Structural proposals have and are being consulted on which have meant that large groups of police staff posts are being deleted although the work in those areas remains. This work is being carried out by police officers, already stretched in their duties and effectively taking them from active policing. In addition, the restructuring is being carried out with little synergy, cognisance of interdependent business areas or long term planning. Assumptions are being made around systems or procedures which may or may not be in place rather than establishing a cohesive, structured and modernised organisation.

The findings of the Police Scotland 'Your Survey'ⁱⁱ for staff provided useful insight as to what impact reform has had on staff. A committed and dedicated workforce has become increasingly demoralised and overworked with the perception that the organisation they work for doesn't care and won't invest in their health, safety and wellbeing. Only 8% of staff thought the organisation was genuinely interested in staff wellbeingⁱⁱⁱ.

We would like to think that lessons have been learned from the experiences of the last 12 months. However, the expectation is that the anticipated 'modernisation' of police staff terms and conditions will be used to further undermine police staff morale.

Police reform was meant to identify efficiencies through reductions in duplication of posts. Again, the proposals currently being consulted on are purely designed to reduce budgets, not reduce duplication. Through the pursuit of an agenda of centralisation, structural proposals are agreed which involve the closure of mainly local service provisions such as; station front counters, call-handling, control rooms and custody, leading to police staff who are sourced from and are stakeholders in the communities they serve, being sacrificed to maintain police officer numbers at an artificially high number.

Staffing Numbers

There still has been no indication that detailed work has been carried out to establish the number of officers required to police Scotland. The previous Chair of the SPA announced that this work was to go ahead shortly after his appointment, but we are still waiting. Nor has any work been carried out to establish how effective this figure is in maintaining low crime figures. As a case in point, hundreds of police officers were involved in the creation of the Single Force with no apparent detriment to the effectiveness of the Force.

UNISON Scotland has consistently highlighted areas of the organisation which have been backfilled by police officers to allow staff to be released on Voluntary Redundancy or Early Retirement (VR/ER). Significant numbers of police officers are now performing roles created by PS which can and should be performed by police staff at a fraction of the cost. If recent figures in the media^{iv} are anything to go by, there may be a gap of approximately 7,000 police officers who are not frontline when compared to the 17,261 officer strength figure quoted by the SPA.

As Dr Kath Murray, from Edinburgh University, puts it: *“Unlike England and Wales, data is not available on rank or officer function. There is no data on officers available for duty, nor the numbers that join or leave the force. Meanwhile, the published totals include officers on maternity leave, long-term sick leave and on secondment. The net result is that officer strength in Scotland cannot be openly scrutinised or analysed.”*

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, s37 and s38 place a requirement on the authority and the Chief Constable to secure Best Value. A full Best Value study on the replacement of civilian staff by police officers is long overdue.

The decision to employ 1000 extra Police Officers was taken pre-austerity and there is now widespread support to review this figure. For example, the Police Superintendents (APSE) has said: *“There is clearly some significant budget pressure and challenges ahead. We would like to see an intelligent conversation to consider all of the options. Included within that would absolutely be whether the lock-in on 1,000 additional officers remains the right policy, or whether it’s time to review that and look at more of a mixed staffing model.”*^v

We believe it is now time to look closely at the *Total Workforce Requirement* of Police Scotland to ensure a balanced workforce; the correct types of Staff or Officers carrying out roles appropriate to their qualifications and needs of the organisation.

Systems

As we have previously highlighted, much of the rationalisation of posts and reduction in duplication comes from commonality of IT systems. The previous provision for IT in the OBC was shown by PS to be inadequate and there have been subsequent acknowledgements to i6 in previous budgets. However, the wider cost implications to the organisation for i6 and other IT projects such as Command and Control need to be pinned down as we experience delays and discover further liabilities beyond procurement^{vi}.

Similarly, the need for partnership working in the Justice sphere and beyond takes a considerable amount of co-operation, time and planning with commonality of both procedural and IT systems required. There will be efficiencies in such systems. However, the planning required for this to happen is substantial and poor decisions made now will have a negative impact, not only on how the police deliver outcomes , but also those of other partners.

Getting systems right is not just about cost and efficiency, as the M9 tragedy showed. UNISON Scotland welcomed^{vii} the *HMICS Independent Assurance Review: Police Scotland – Call Handling Final Report* and called on Police Scotland to implement all its recommendations. HMICS has taken into account the high level of pressure that UNISON police staff members work under in the Contact, Command and Control (C3) division of Police Scotland. We hope this report shapes the C3 direction with greater accountability and assurances for the public.

Conclusion

Previously, much has been made of the apparent success of the implementation of the Single Scottish Force with the chair of the SPA stating that this should be a model for others to follow. However, this past year has exposed a number of frailties, operationally and internally, directly as a result of reform and its unrealistic challenges. We would also agree with our colleagues in the Scottish Police Federation^{viii} that the Scottish Government would be foolish to continue with its programme of police cuts in the wake of the Paris terror attacks.

We cannot underestimate the significant flaw in this area of public sector reform which differs from others in that one major part of the workforce, police officers, have been ring fenced to the detriment of others. This flaw does not allow flexibility to management to make the right Best Value decisions to create an effective, efficient, modern police force for Scotland.

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Scottish Organiser
24 November 2015

ⁱ <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/police-reform>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.scotland.police.uk/assets/pdf/138327/307421/spa-police-scotland-opinion-survey-2015?view=Standard>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/news/2015/sepoct/1001.htm>

^{iv} http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14032524.Revealed_only_half_of_all_Scottish_police_officers_are_on_the_frontline/

^v <http://www.scottishlegal.com/2015/11/03/snp-maintains-controversial-1000-police-officer-policy/>

^{vi} http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13771608.New_delay_in_60m_police_IT_project/

^{vii} <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/news/2015/novdec/1110.htm>

^{viii} <http://www.scotsman.com/news/leader-police-scotland-needs-help-but-can-help-itself-too-1-3955554>