

Briefing on ...

Impact of Police Cuts in Scotland

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Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of the impact that cuts to civilian staff will have on Scotland's police forces. It briefly looks at the benefits civilian staffs bring to modern police forces and how the loss of such posts will impact on policing across Scotland. In this briefing, the term 'police staffs' is used to describe civilian posts within police forces.

Background

Recent press reports have highlighted potential cuts to police staffs at Scottish police forces, either at individual police boards or through the potential amalgamation of some or all of Scotland's police forces. Currently Scotland has eight police forces but press reports have indicated this might be reduced to three boards or even a single national police force.

As Chief Constables have limited powers to cut police officers – other than recruitment freezes; the main focus seems to be reducing the number of police staffs. Strathclyde Police have already asked all police staffs to consider applying for voluntary

redundancy in an attempt to offload at least 600 such employees in the next financial year alone.

All these staffing decisions are taking place before police boards know their actual budgets for the following year. The result of the Comprehensive Spending Review for the UK will not be known until 20th October 2010, with details on the Scottish Budget not available until mid November.

It is clear however that some police chiefs are looking at police staffs as the first option to reduce their budgets.

Impact of the Cuts

P&I Briefing No.209 highlighted the benefits of police civilianisation in Scotland. This includes properly qualified civilian personnel delivering a wide range of routine, complex and specialised functions that are central to modern day police forces, while allowing uniformed

officers to concentrate on operational policing duties.

If the proposals to focus cuts on police staffs go ahead, this will have serious implications on current policing across Scotland.

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Some Chief Constables may argue that police officers are more flexible because they can be deployed anywhere. However this is simply lazy management. Police officers are not trained to carry out the range of specialist tasks in a modern police force. In addition this flexibility comes at a price. Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness. This will also result in a reduction in the number of police officers on the beat, raising concerns about a potential increase in crime.

Police staffs are a vital part of modern effective policing.

Scotland has made progress in ‘police civilianisation’ in recent years but still has some way to go to catch up with the situation in England and Wales.

UNISON Scotland’s briefing on Police Civilianisation in Scotland highlighted that police staffs comprise 28% of all police personnel in Scotland. In comparison the figure for England and Wales is 32%. The percentage of police staffs within Scotland’s police forces range from 33% (Dumfries & Galloway and Grampian) to 25% (Strathclyde). The largest cuts announced so far have been from Strathclyde Police, because it has been the slowest to modernise.

Conclusion

The proposals to focus cuts on police staffs is turning the clock back thirty years or more, wiping out all the efficiencies and advances that have been made since then. P&I Briefing No. 209 highlighted the benefits of civilianisation in Scotland.

These cuts will impact on the services that police forces can deliver, from removing police from front line policing duties, to replacing well qualified and experienced police staffs roles

with police officers who do not have the necessary skills.

Modern day policing relies on a team approach, with police staffs providing essential support to allow police officers to carry out their roles. When such support is withdrawn it will result in a reduction of services and will result in less police officers on the beat and potentially an increase in crime in local communities.



Action for Branches

This briefing paper is mainly for information purposes for branches and members. It highlights the impact that police cuts will have on local police forces and the communities they serve.

Further Information

UNISON Scotland
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk>

P&I Briefing No.209 Police Civilianisation in Scotland
<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/209policecivilianisation.pdf>