



## Submission to Scottish Police Authority on the draft Strategic Police Plan

### Introduction

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the SPA's draft Strategic Police Plan. UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 160,000 members working primarily in the public sector in Scotland, including police staffs.

### Overview

UNISON Scotland believes this plan does little to clarify the confusion over the respective roles of the SPA and PSS. This is a consequence of badly drafted legislation as we warned at the start of the legislative process. We believe the best way forward would be for the SPA to limit its role to strategic overview and scrutiny, rather than managing police services that should properly be under the operational control of the Chief Constable.

The introductory sections of the plan leave the reader with little confidence that the SPA grasps the scale of the challenges facing policing in Scotland. They contrast to the much more realistic presentations to staff being made by operational leaders within the PSS. For example under the heading 'Reform Landscape' is the broad statement;

"In policing itself, recorded crime is at its lowest level for 37 years while officer numbers have been maintained in the face of the economic challenges"

This ignores the fact that because the Scottish Government has an arbitrary target to maintain police officer numbers at 17234, the focus of the savings are concentrated on police staffs. This is because Police staffs constitute 15% of the police budget, Police officers 73%. The balance is non-staffing costs that have already been the subject of efficiency savings and may offer some, but not massive savings.

The vast majority of these job cuts can only be achieved by substituting police officers for the roles currently undertaken by police staffs. These include custody staff, front office, traffic wardens, licensing staff, clerical support, intelligence gathering, control room and forensic staff. This is already happening with police officers being drafted in, typically at twice the salary, to undertake these duties.

Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative or specialist tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness. It is also contrary to the Best Value provisions that are supposed to be at the heart of this strategic plan. This will also return the police service in Scotland to almost the 1980's, with inefficient and outdated police practice.

UNISON believes that the Scottish Police Authority and the Chief Constable should decide the correct balance of police officers and police staff using Best Value principles.

## **Strategic Priorities and Objectives**

We would comment on following priority and objectives:

### **Strategic priority 1:**

It would be better to use plain English descriptions. For example, the Chief Constable uses the phrase, 'Keeping People Safe' to encapsulate the message more clearly.

### **Strategic Objective 1:**

We do not believe that the SPA is the appropriate body to, "*provide appropriate support to the Police Service of Scotland in its delivery of services*". This implies that the SPA will provide service that should be under the operational command of the Chief Constable.

### **Strategic Objective 2:**

The phrase "collaboration between the Police Service of Scotland and the public, private and third sectors" could be interpreted as support for the privatisation of police services. An approach that the Cabinet Secretary has rejected in Scotland.

We have no view on the remaining priorities and objectives other than the language could again be clearer with less management jargon.

We would however add a strategic priority that:

"The SPA will, using Best Value principles, aim to ensure the maximum number of police officers in police operational roles, not substituting for police staff roles."

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

The strategic plan states that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) 'will' be completed. The EIA should be part of the process in drawing up the plan, not an afterthought. This gives the very clear impression that equality is simply a tick box consideration at the SPA.

## **Conclusion**

In general the strategic plan seeks to establish a role for the SPA that goes further than is required for the scrutiny function that we believe should be the authority's primary role. A much shorter document with a few strategic priorities that encapsulates this role would be a better approach. This paper reads like an organisation in search of a wider role.

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