

Police Civilianisation in Scotland

Briefing on ...

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Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of recent research commissioned by UNISON Scotland on the issue of the civilianisation of police forces in Scotland. This briefing will highlight the main themes that have arisen from this research report. In this briefing, the term 'police staffs' is used to describe civilian posts within police forces.

Background

Over the past decade UK legislation has increasingly allowed for the civilianisation of 'police roles', whereby officers can be released from non-operational technical or administrative tasks which do not require their expertise. Although there have been moves towards civilianisation in

Scotland since the late 1980's and early 1990's, recent interest has been largely due to a commitment by the Scottish Government to recruit 1000 extra police officers and an inquiry by the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee into police resources.

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Extent of Civilianisation

In terms of WTE (whole time equivalent), police staffs comprise 28% of all police personnel in Scotland. In comparison, the figure for England & Wales is 32% (excluding Police Community Support Officers). The overall numbers of WTE/FTE staff, however, have declined over the period March 2007-June 2008. In contrast with police officers, most police staffs are females (64% compared to 23%).

There is appreciable variation across police forces in Scotland in terms of the proportions of police staffs they employ and their gender balance. Despite being the largest police force, Strathclyde Police has the lowest proportion of WTE police staffs in Scotland.

Police Staffs roles are multifunctional and diverse. They mainly operate in

corporate and administrative support roles in functions such as intelligence, information technology and human resources. There are also increasing numbers of staff taking on operational roles in areas such as custody and detention, investigation and surveillance.

The roles of police staffs are largely determined by individual police forces. This has led to a 'patchwork' or variable use of police staffs across forces where they have been used to suit local policing needs. In Scotland, police staffs largely occupy corporate (27%) and administrative and support (61%) roles. Just over a tenth of police staffs are in operational roles (12%), though this is higher in some forces.

Benefits of Civilianisation

Police forces in Scotland have always employed civilian staff as an essential support to their operations and they are not a cheap option or substitute for police officers. There are many police

functions where properly qualified civilian personnel are simply the most effective way to deliver the full range of routine, complex and specialized functions that are central to modern-day police forces.

While the desire for greater civilianisation primarily arose in an attempt to generate cost savings and develop more specialist functions in areas such as forensics, recent workforce modernisation (WFM) studies in England & Wales demonstrate that further civilianisation allied to a reconfiguration of police personnel is associated with a wide range of performance, economic, stakeholder and community benefits for police forces. These studies also clearly demonstrate the effective use of police staffs in operational roles.

In the WFM studies, using police staffs alongside officers allows: performance improvements in terms of the freeing up of police officer time, the establishment of new police functions and the quality

of service; savings in costs and greater efficiencies of service; personnel benefits in terms of the increased morale and commitment of staff, recruitment and levels of diversity in the police service; and public benefits in terms of the provision of more dedicated services, the greater visibility of 'beat' personnel and local intelligence gathering.

There are however, a number of cultural, legal and cost barriers to the increased civilianisation of police forces in Scotland: the cultural and operational resistance of officers; contractual issues affecting staff deployment; restrictive duties for police officers; and the set-up costs of initiating changes in staff-officer deployment.

Scope for future civilianisation

The research highlighted that there may be some scope to extend civilian posts within police forces.

This can either be done by extending the civilianisation of existing police officer roles (such as dispatcher posts in some forces) or through new policing roles (such as the use of Police Community Support Officers in England & Wales).

The report also provided a comparison between Police Community Support Officers and community wardens and

the possibility of introducing this role within Scottish Forces. This highlighted that PCSO's (not to be confused with the acronym for Police Custody & Security Officers used in Scottish police forces) would be employed by the police and have a wider range of enforcement powers.

UNISON Scotland is currently carrying out further research into the current roles and responsibilities of community wardens.

Conclusion

The research report highlights that the civilianisation process has developed differently across each police force. One example of this is the role of dispatchers, while one force employs only officers for this duty, another employs only civilian staff. Similarly the percentage of civilian posts within

forces varies from 25% to 33% of all staff employed.

As well as the scope to expand civilianisation across existing police roles, the research highlighted the possibility of introducing Police Community Support Officers to Scotland.

Action for Branches

This briefing paper is for information purposes for branches and members, highlighting recent research commissioned by UNISON Scotland. UNISON Scotland has also had discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice on this issue.

Further Information

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