

Reform of Police & Fire Services in Scotland

Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of the key issues from the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill. It focuses on the implications this reform will have on accountability, finance and non-uniformed staff within police and fire & rescue services across Scotland.

UNISON Scotland has submitted a response to both Scottish Government consultation exercises on this Bill and responded to the Calls for Evidence from the Scottish Parliament's Finance, Local Government and the Justice Committees.

The legislation

The key elements of this legislation are:

- the establishment of a national Police Service of Scotland;
- the establishment of a national Scottish Fire & Rescue Service; and
- changes to existing legislation to allow for the two national services to be established.

Police: background

Instead of the current eight regional police forces (and the SPSA & SCDEA), this legislation will see the creation of a single, national Police Service of Scotland (PSS). The new police force will be funded directly by the Scottish Government and be governed by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), who will, in most cases, delegate management to a Chief Constable. Other key features include:

- Establishing 'the Police Service of Scotland', comprising a Chief Constable, other officers and police staff. The Chief Constable and other senior officers will be appointed by the SPA. All constables and police staff will transfer to the new service.
- Regular, formal opportunities for the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise policing.
- A statutory duty for the Police Service of Scotland to provide adequate local services.
- A designated local policing commander for each local authority area, responsible for involving the local authority in determining priorities and objectives for policing in the local area.
- A local plan for policing for each local authority area, agreed between the relevant local commander or local senior officer and the local authority, setting out priorities, objectives and arrangements for local service delivery.
- Complaint reviews and investigation of serious incidents and criminal offences involving the police to be handled by one independent body, the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner.

KEY POINTS:

- **This reform is contrary to the principles of public service reform as described by the Christie Commission.**
- **ACPOS estimate between 2,000 & 3,000 police staffs will lose their jobs**
- **Taking trained operational police officers off the street to perform administrative tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness**
- **The link between communities and their local police force would be broken.**
- **The financial arrangements are sketchy to say the least**



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Fire: Background

Similar reforms are proposed within the Fire and Rescue Service, with the restructure of the existing fire and rescue services into a single, national Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Key features include:

- Establishing the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board to hold the Chief Officer to account.
- Regular, formal opportunities for the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise fire and rescue services.
- Transferring the current functions of fire and rescue authorities to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. All staff employed by the current eight fire and rescue authorities will transfer to the new service.
- A statutory duty for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to provide adequate local services.
- A designated local senior fire officer for each local authority area, responsible for involving the local authority in determining priorities and objectives for fire and rescue services in the local area.
- A local plan for fire and rescue services for each local authority area, agreed between the relevant local senior officer and the local authority, setting out priorities, objectives and arrangements for local service delivery.
- The creation of an Inspectorate of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Accountability

There are a number of concerns surrounding the issue of accountability:

- It is unclear as to why there are to be two policing bodies in the new structure, the SPA and PSS. In addition forensic services have a further degree of separation from the SPA and PSS.
- Potentially there could be 32 local commanders – one for each local authority area, although they may not all be the same rank;
 - this could lead to some commanders having more power and influence within the new police force than others and in turn lead to an unhealthy competition between local authorities unless a clear criteria is set on the distribution of resources;
 - UNISON Scotland is concerned that this could result in police staff being redeployed to other areas, possibly at short notice and disruption to work life balance.
- The relationship between local commander and local authority is unclear, with the Bill leaving it up to each local authority to determine.
 - This makes it unclear as to who, ultimately, the local commander is answerable– is it the local authority which may argue for one thing on behalf of its electorate, or the chief constable who may have other priorities?
 - Unless there is much stronger local discretion it is inevitable that central control will interfere with local priorities.

- There are concerns about the democratic accountability of a single police force with only 7 – 11 members on the SPA,
 - Board meetings may be difficult for representatives from all across Scotland to attend and many areas would have insufficient representation. This would break the link between communities and their local police force.

Finance

- It is difficult to assess the financial case for reform as a wide range of figures for both costs and savings are stated – all dependent upon which assumptions are used;
 - The costs of police reform range from £137million to £163million, while the potential savings range from £1.135billion to £621million;
 - Some savings projected to come from increased productivity but no comment on how this will actually be achieved.
- The figures have been generated as a ‘top down’ requirement and task groups have been told to find the savings, rather than build up from service requirements.
- Optimistic assumptions about the effectiveness of shared services and simply passing even more support staff tasks onto operational staff through cost displacement.
- Concern that local authorities may end up with additional budgetary pressures paying for the scrutiny of complaints, training for members, or even the administration of a local police board and local fire and rescue board – when this should come from the SPA/ Scottish Fire & Rescue Service resources rather than from local authorities own funding streams.
- There is also a concern regarding the VAT liability for both new organisations, with the police liable for £22million per annum and Fire & Rescue facing charges of £4million per annum.

Staffing

- As the Government has an arbitrary target to maintain police officer numbers at 17234, the focus of the savings are concentrated on police staffs, this will result in police officers taking on the work of police staffs. Police staffs constitute 15% of the police budget. Police officers 73%.
- ACPOS estimates show 2054 police staff posts will be lost by 2015/16. Plus a further 350 if police staffs don't accept massive cuts in terms and conditions. Then a further 800 if the new service is not exempted from VAT. That is 3,200 posts.
- An interim survey of our membership shows that around 53% of the 1000 police staff posts which have already gone are being covered in part or in full by police officers
 - That means around 500 police officers are now not out on the street fighting crime. If you extrapolate this to the future staffing plan it would suggest up to 2,000 officers could, at least in part, be taken off operational duties.
- Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative or specialist tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness. Together with the cost savings this will return the police service in Scotland almost to the 1980's, with inefficient and outdated police practice;

- Concern about staff who may be currently employed by local authorities but are working for police forces such as staff in camera safety partnerships and elsewhere. The Bill states that such staff will be transferred, subject to a staff transfer scheme but there is little detail about this within the Bill;
- The staff transfer scheme for police staffs is outdated and inadequate. Other provisions also reflect a very outdated view of the role of police staffs.
- We welcome police staffs being included in the new assault and impeding offences.

Reform of Public Services

The Christie Commission specifically commented on the reform of the Police and Fire & Rescue Services in their report. The Commission raised a number of specific concerns relating to their criteria for public sector reform. UNISON Scotland does not believe that this Bill meets those criteria. The Commission's priorities included recognition "that effective services must be designed with and for people and communities – not delivered 'top down' for administrative convenience". It seems to UNISON Scotland that these proposals are exactly the sort of 'top down' approach the Christie Commission warned against.

Conclusion

UNISON Scotland believes that the centralisation of police services in Scotland is wrong in principle and contrary to the principles of public service reform as described by the Christie Commission. Accountability is confused and the balance of powers between local commanders and the Chief Constable are insufficient to ensure genuine local policing.

The financial arrangements are sketchy to say the least. They have not been built up from service delivery need. Instead target savings appear to have been randomly allocated and staff told to fit services to those figures. This is a recipe for service chaos with the inevitable cost dislocation that goes with this 'top down' approach.

The provisions for police staff will turn back the policing clock in Scotland by decades. The proportion of police staffs could fall to as low as 10-15%, compared to nearly 40% in England. Police officers will be performing duties they are not qualified to undertake at greater cost. The aim should be to ensure the maximum number of police officers 'on the street', not substituting for police staff roles. The provisions in the Bill regarding police staffs reflect this outdated approach to policing. Finally the staff transfer arrangements are inadequate and unclear.

The main problem is sticking to an arbitrary target of 17,234 police officers. It is a cosmetic figure given the need to use officers to substitute for redundant police staffs. What the Scottish Government should do is to allow the new force to decide upon the most appropriate balanced workforce using the best value principles in the Bill.

Action for Branches

This briefing is primarily for information purposes and to encourage members and branches to examine the changes to the police and fire & rescue services.

Further Information:

- Evidence to Justice Committee:
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/Police&FireReform_SPJusticeCtteEvidence_Feb2012.pdf
- Evidence to Local Government Committee:
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/Police&FireReform_LocalGovtCtteFeb2012.pdf
- Evidence to Finance Committee:
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/Police&FireReform_SPFinanceCtteEvidence_Feb2012.pdf
- UNISON Scotland's response to Scottish Government consultation
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/response/Response_%20FutureofPolicinginScotland_May2011.pdf



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