

Write to your MSP

April 2012

As the Police and Fire Reform Bill makes its way through the first stage of the parliamentary process it is important that we reinforce the messages in UNISON's evidence to individual MSPs. This needs to come from members to their local MSPs – constituency and list.

Here is a suggested message:

“Dear

Police and Fire Reform Bill

I am writing as a constituent to express my concern about the impact the above legislation will have on policing in Scotland. In particular I am concerned about the potential loss of 3000 police staff jobs.

Police staffs include 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 their operational policing duties. Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative or specialist tasks, at greater cost, makes no economic or operational sense. This will return the police service in Scotland almost to the 1980's, with inefficient and outdated police practice.

Savings targets and the 17,234 officer target means almost all cuts fall on police staffs that only make up 15% of the budget. 1000 police staff posts have already been lost and ACPOS estimates indicate a further 2000 will have to go. This increases to over 3000 when VAT and other cuts are applied. As a consequence the proportion of police staff will fall from 28% to less than 15% - half the level in England. That takes policing in Scotland almost back to pre-civilianisation levels.

I believe that the new Scottish Police Authority should be able to decide on a balanced staffing structure free of cosmetic political targets for police officer numbers. This target was set before the new single force was proposed and is not based on a proper needs assessment. That is the proper best value approach and I would urge you to support a balanced police team in Parliament.

Yours..... “

This message is available on the police staff [web page](#) as an easy click process to send to your MSPs.

Some common rebuttal points:

- “*We gave a commitment to 17,234 police officers*” - Yes, but that target was set before the single police force was proposed. You should leave it to the new police authority to decide on a balanced staffing structure and not interfere politically from the centre.
- “*It's all to do with cuts from Westminster*” – No, the UK governments cuts to the Scottish Budget are wrong, but this is a Scottish Government policy. They have a duty of Best Value and self evidently this makes no economic sense.
- “*More police officers have brought crime down to a record low*” – It's the police team that have contributed to lower crime. Up to 2000 police officers will be taken off operational duties to backfill police staff jobs – probably badly and at greater cost.
- “*Police officers will not be used to backfill*” – Audit Scotland: “Our reports on police authorities have expressed concern that reducing non-police staff numbers may reduce the level of support available leaving police officers to perform administrative tasks and reducing their time on frontline duties.”

Treasury confirm VAT bill

UNISON Scotland has received confirmation from the Treasury that if the single police service is established as proposed by the Scottish Government they will lose the current VAT exemption (known as s33 status). This means Scottish taxpayers will have to foot an additional bill of around £26m for the police. This means a further 800 police staff posts being lost.

The Scottish Government has held out the prospect of resolving the VAT exemption throughout the Bill process. It turns out that they knew at the outset that this would not be the case. The Financial Memorandum to the Police and Fire Reform Bill states that “the Scottish Government is currently liaising with HMRC regarding whether the service could be given s33 status”. However, Treasury Minister David Gauke MP in a letter to UNISON states “The eligibility criteria for Section 33 are set out in HMRC’s published guidance and the Scottish Government was aware of them when formulating the current reforms”.

UNISON has argued that you could have a single police force established as local government joint board, funded through a precept and retain s33 status. Of course that would mean less direct ministerial influence over the police, but it would strengthen local democratic accountability.

Cabinet Secretary faces angry Police Staff

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill MSP attended the recent UNISON police staffs seminar to face a barrage of questions from UNISON police representatives.

He had some positive messages. He recognised the valuable role of police staffs although not enough to stop ordering cuts! On police privatisation in some English forces he said he was “not prepared to countenance what is happening south of the border”. Although later, when recent SPSA privatisation was highlighted, he made references to “core staff”.

On the main issue of police staff cuts he attempted to divert the issue onto cuts instigated by the UK government. But the audience kept bringing him back to his focus on police numbers to which he pleaded his party’s manifesto commitment. He did say that staff deployment was “fundamentally done by those running the police authority”. We agree and that’s why he should leave the balance of numbers to the new Scottish Police Authority under their Best Value duty.

Shared Services

One of the financial assumptions that underpin the optimistic savings targets for the single police force is based on sharing support services. A new report prepared by APSE and UNISON Scotland argues these 'efficiency savings' are rarely achieved. The UK National Audit Office reported that Whitehall departments have spent a staggering £1.4 billion over the past seven years - but saved just £159 million.

In a UNISON survey, the vast majority of front line staff - around 90% - who have faced cuts to so-called 'back office' admin jobs believe this has been at the expense of their primary tasks. [The front line starts here](#) document outlines the case for full service redesign. Of course the same arguments apply to many police staff posts facing de-civilianisation!

Useful UNISON police staff links

- [UNISON Scotland police staffs webpage](#)
- [Briefing on Police Reform Bill](#)
- [Evidence to Justice Committee](#)
- [Treasury confirms VAT Bill](#)

UNISON Scotland’s key campaigns

- [Public Works](#)
- [Protect Our Pensions](#)
- [UNISON Scotland website](#)

For more information contact Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2811, or email [Dave Watson](#) Scottish Organiser, or [Gerry Crawley](#) Regional Organiser.



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