



A Consultation on the Future of Policing in Scotland

The UNISON Scotland Submission to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 'Future of Policing in Scotland'.

May 2011

Executive Summary

- UNISON Scotland believes the focus of the consultation should remain on meeting outcomes however, the main motivation for the consultation appears to be focussed on saving money.
- The information on projected savings and costs of restructure is too vague. More detail is needed to allow a fuller response.
- As police boards and the Government have agreed to maintain police officer numbers, the focus of the savings so far are concentrated on police staffs. Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness.
- Reducing the number of police staffs would result in a loss of such specialist skills and a potential failure for police forces to deal with new challenges and threats.
- The majority of UNISON members who work in police forces do not support the radical structural changes proposed in the consultation paper. We believe there are strong arguments regarding local accountability and democracy for retaining the existing board structures.
- UNISON Scotland is concerned that the consultation on the future of policing in Scotland is being done in isolation from wider reviews of the public sector such as the Christie Commission. Any changes made as a result of the Christie Commission could impact on police forces in Scotland.
- There is a concern that the focus of the consultation is on the false divide between frontline and backroom staff. Each section of staff is important in modern day police forces, with police staffs providing support to enable police officers to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. Focussing the cuts on so called backline staff is a false economy.
- 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 When such support is withdrawn it will result in a reduction of services and will result in less police officers on the beat and potentially an increase in crime in local communities.

Introduction

This paper constitutes UNISON Scotland's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the '*Future of Policing in Scotland*'.

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union representing over 162,000 members working in the public sector in Scotland, and represents police staffs in Scotland. UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation exercise.

UNISON Scotland has a number of concerns regarding this consultation however they do not all fit neatly into the series of questions contained in the consultation paper. For this reason UNISON Scotland's response is grouped around a series of key issues.

Outcomes versus Savings

The first section of the consultation focuses on delivering better outcomes and highlights how this could be done with the proposed reforms. UNISON Scotland believes the focus of the consultation should remain on meeting outcomes, such as reducing crime, making communities safer etc., however the main motivation for the consultation appears to be focussed on saving money. UNISON Scotland is concerned that reducing costs will lead to fewer outcomes being achieved.

The figures given for the potential savings are taken from 'high-level financial data' and –as stated in the paper – require further assessment. Maybe such an assessment should have been carried out before publication of the consultation paper, to allow respondents to comment on specific savings options. The information given is too vague. The report also highlights that there will be costs involved in changing the structure of the police forces in Scotland, yet little detail is given on such costs.

As police boards and the Government have agreed to maintain police officer numbers, the focus of the savings so far are concentrated on police staffs. Police staffs 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.

Police officers are not necessarily trained to carry out the full range of specialist tasks carried out by police staffs in a modern police force. Also taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative tasks – at greater cost, is economic madness. This means more police officers will be taken off the street to perform tasks they are unsuited or unqualified to do – at a huge additional cost to the taxpayer.

New Challenges

The consultation identifies some potential new challenges such as e-crime. This is the type of issue where specialists within the police staffs can bring their skills, knowledge and experience to combat such challenges. It is unlikely that police officers would have similar levels of such specialist knowledge. Reducing the number of police staffs in such instances would result in a loss of such specialist skills and a potential failure for police forces to deal with new challenges and threats.

Restructuring Police Forces

The majority of UNISON members who work in police forces do not support the radical structural changes proposed in the consultation paper. We believe there are strong arguments regarding local accountability and democracy for retaining the existing board structures.

There is a concern that, although the paper mentions the potential for decentralisation, a single police force will inevitably look to locate as many of its staff in one location for ease of management. This will have an impact on jobs in rural areas as well as making a single police force more remote from many of the communities it is meant to serve.

Similarly there are concerns about the democratic accountability of a single police force, how much representation will be afforded to areas such as the Highlands and Islands which has to cover a large land mass but has a lower population. There is a concern that any board meetings would be difficult for councillors from all across Scotland to attend and that many areas would have insufficient representation. This would break the link between communities and their local police force.

Wider Public Service Reform

UNISON Scotland is concerned that the future of policing in Scotland is being done in isolation from wider reviews of the public sector such as the Christie Commission. Any changes made as a result of the Christie Commission could impact on police forces in Scotland. For instance, changes to police structure may be impacted by other changes such as potential boundary changes to local authorities and other community planning partners – what impact would this have on the new police structures? UNISON Scotland believes that if there has to be a wider review of all public sector structures it should be looked at together rather than in a piecemeal fashion.

Impact on police staffs

There is a concern that the focus of the consultation is on the false divide between frontline and backroom staff. Each section of staff is important in modern day police forces, with police staffs providing support to enable

police officers to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. Focussing the cuts on so called backline staff is a false economy. For instance, there will still be administration work that needs to be carried out but if there are not police staffs to do this, it will fall to police officers who although better paid, will not have the relevant skills and experience to carry out such duties, as well as having an impact on the numbers of police officers available for policing duties.

Some Chief Constables may argue that police officers are more flexible because they can be deployed anywhere. However this is simply lazy management. As mentioned earlier, 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.

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.

UNISON Scotland published independent research which highlighted the benefit of police staffs and the range of skills, experience and knowledge they contribute to a modern police force.

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