

UNISON Scotland
Justice Sub-Committee on Policing – 24 November 2016

Financial Planning 2017-18

Introduction

UNISON Scotland is the main trade union for police staffs in Scotland.

It is difficult to comment on financial planning for next year when we are still unclear what the budget provisions are for this year. In fact, it would be fair to say that we are unclear what financial planning has been undertaken, or what the outstanding budget deficit actually is. Our police staffs branch is meeting Police Scotland on Wednesday 23 November 2016 to discuss this year's budget.

It is extraordinary in our experience for any public service to have this form of detailed discussion about a budget more than seven months into the financial year. It is all the more concerning when we understand there is a significant deficit and in recent years, due to the cosmetic target for police officer numbers, the brunt of cuts have fallen on police staffs.

Financial Impact

As Police Scotland struggles to balance the books and meet the necessary efficiency savings an atmosphere of uncertainty and a lack of a clear future for police staff continues to grow.

The quick fix solution to the service's financial problems has been to the detriment of service to the public and our members. Business areas are quickly restructured to release staff; properties are lined up for sale with little consultation or forward planning to deliver an effective policing service.

The immediate response to the creation of Police Scotland and the budgetary demands placed on the new organisation, resulted in nearly 2000 police staff jobs shed under the auspices of a voluntary redundancy and retirement package. Many experienced and loyal workers no longer felt they were in the same job, no longer felt treated fairly and equally in relation to their police officer colleagues, and therefore chose to leave the service.

We are now informed that recruitment is needed to bolster staff such as in the Contact, Command and Control Division. We would normally welcome such much needed recruitment, but are mindful that these "new" numbers required are the same numbers of staff we had before the closure of Dumfries, Stirling, Glenrothes centres and the forthcoming closures at Dundee and Aberdeen. Public money has been spent on redundancies when the roles are very much required to meet service demand.

Our members continue to work on legacy force terms and conditions and different levels of pay for doing the same jobs across Scotland. The modernisation project staggers and delays in trying to bring all employers onto one set of terms and conditions and onto one pay scale. Next year will see the first outcome of that project, the move of members of staff onto one leave period across Scotland running from the 1st of April to the 31st of March annually. This is the one and only outcome from this project since the inception of Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority in 2013.

The worry among our members as they continue to see media coverage of the budgetary shortfalls and failings of their employer is that there will be no money to deliver a harmonisation of pay, an annual pay rise, or resources to recognise the pressures of carrying an increased workload due to reduced staffing numbers. There has been no recognition of going that extra mile, making it all work and a real concern that there is no indication of what a Voluntary Redundancy/Early Retirement Package may look like for 2017/18.

Best Value

The SPA and Police Scotland is under a statutory duty to provide Best Valueⁱ.

Cuts in police staff numbers has resulted in police officers backfilling jobs of police staff, which fails the Best Value requirement in a number of ways:

- police officers are more expensive,
- they don't have the specialised training for the jobs of police staff,
- it effectively removes them from their own role,
- the high turnover and transience of police officers in backfilled posts breeds inconsistency and instability. Once embedded within the organisational culture and structural design this leads to inefficiency.

Any financial planning for 2017/18 needs to be based on Best Value principles and include a balanced workforce.

Conclusion

Our police staffs branch has had no financial update and has been excluded from finance and investment meetings, despite being a key stakeholder. Any SPA pretence about openness and transparency has been abandoned.

Our members are the service, its very backbone and yet they see no improvement in their working conditions as they continue to be the target of measures to address overspending or underfunding elsewhere. They feel they are the second class citizens in our police family.

For further information:

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ⁱ UNISON Scotland Briefing – Police Best Value – July 2016 http://www.unison-scotland.org/library/b079_BargainingBrief_PoliceBestValue_July2016.pdf