

Police Best Value



BARGAINING BRIEFING

Police Scotland needs a balanced workforce for Best Value

UNISON Scotland represents police staff with a wide range of skills and specialisms working to deliver a high quality service despite facing an onslaught of job cuts over recent years.

Police Scotland has a statutory obligation to provide Best Value - but this is not being delivered because of unrealistic targets on the minimum number of police officers and an unsustainable austerity budget following centralisation of the service in 2013.

This briefing sets out the case for a balanced workforce - one which includes an appropriate number of police officers and police staff - in order to provide the best possible value to the public who fund and depend upon the Scottish police service.

Workforce imbalance plus austerity cuts

After the Scottish government committed to an arbitrary minimum target for police officers - set in 2007 at 17,234 (or in other words 1,000 more than there happened to be at that time) - increasing pressure on police budgets has led to the reduction of police staff by around 2,000 posts so far.

This has resulted in police officers backfilling jobs of police staff, which is costly in a number of ways: police officers are more expensive, they don't have the specialised training for the jobs of police staff, and the practice effectively removes them from their own role. In addition, the high turnover and transience of police officers in backfilled posts breeds inconsistency and instability, and once embedded within the organisational culture and structural design this leads to inefficiency.

Police staff offer dedicated skills and experience for specialised jobs in roles from corporate and admin support to functions such as intelligence, crime prevention, custody and detention and scenes of crime officers. For many police functions, properly qualified civilian personnel are simply the most effective way to deliver the full range of routine, complex and specialised tasks that are central to modern day police forces.

Cutting these jobs and backfilling with costly police officers makes no economic sense and is certainly not Best Value.

KEY POINTS:

- Police Scotland is failing to provide Best Value because of unrealistic targets to maintain an arbitrary minimum number of police officers while cutting back on efficient and cost effective police staff who deliver vital specialised and skilled functions
- Police reform has resulted in centralisation which undermines local control and effective decision making
- Police Scotland faces an impossible £1.1 billion austerity budget cut over ten years
- UNISON Scotland proposes Seven Steps towards Best Value



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The cuts in police staff have been exacerbated by the creation of Police Scotland in 2013 with a new austerity target of a £1.1 billion saving over a ten year period.

Police reform has not led to Best Value

Police Scotland took the place of eight police authorities in April 2013 as a result of the [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#). The driving force behind police reform - and that of the fire service which was similarly reorganised at the same time - was to save money and ostensibly provide Best Value for the public who fund the service through taxes. The 2012 Act placed a statutory duty of Best Value on the Chief Constable and the Scottish Police Authority.

[Best Value in Public Services](#) as defined by the Scottish Government in May 2011 requires “continuous improvement in performance whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost” and “regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities requirements, and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.”

It cannot be argued that Police Scotland has seen “continuous improvement” with an “appropriate balance between quality and cost” - and “sustainable development”.

The crime rate in Scotland has fallen over recent years - and this is sometimes used as justification for the increase in police officers. The crime rate in England and Wales has fallen similarly. Yet the number of police officers in England and Wales has been reduced over the same period. A House of Commons Briefing Paper in February 2016 on [Police Service Strength](#) found that in 2005 Scotland had 318 police officers per 100,000 population, whereas England and Wales had 264. In 2012, Scotland's figure was at 329, but that for England and Wales had fallen to 234.

Meanwhile crime clear-up rates have worsened in Scotland with the high and increasing police officer ratio. A Reform Scotland report '[The Thinning Blue Line](#)' in June 2015 observed that “the number of crimes cleared-up per FTE police officer has fallen from 12 in 2006/7 to 8 in 2013/14”.

Towards a modern balanced police workforce

A detailed study on [Police Civilianisation](#) commissioned by UNISON Scotland in 2013 (the Stewart Report) argues that in fact Best Value in policing would be better guaranteed by a balanced police workforce including officer and specialist staff.

It quotes workforce modernisation studies in England and Wales showing 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.”

Further info:

UNISON Scotland website

www.unison-scotland.org/service-groups-and-sectors/police/

UNISON Scotland Public

Works blog

publicworksscotland.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Police

Dave Watson's blog

unionsdave.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Police

References:

Best Value in Public Services, Scottish Government May 2011
www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Finance/spfm/BestValue

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012
www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice/policies/police-fire-rescue/police-scotland/LegislationPoliceServiceofScotland

Civilianisation of Police in Scotland – update, Stewart Research for UNISON Scotland Mar 2013
www.unison-scotland.org/library/CivilianisationofPolice_UpdateMar2013.pdf

The research indicates that workforce modernisation - in other words, a balanced workforce - 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."

Need for business case and adequate resources

The situation of Police Scotland is clearly not sustainable. The new structure was established without a full business case and is now facing a large budget deficit - estimated in December 2015 by [Audit Scotland](#) at around £85 million.

As a result of being removed from local government control, Police Scotland became liable for VAT which further erodes the resources available to provide an effective service. A letter from Police Scotland Chief Constable Phil Gormley to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee in June 2016 revealed that [Police Scotland has paid out £76 million in VAT](#) which cannot be reclaimed, over the first three years of its existence.

In addition, the new centralised structure has resulted in a loss of local democratic accountability - with the replacement of local councillors on police boards by a Scottish Police Authority appointed by central government - and the closure of local police stations and centralisation of call centre operations.

As well as its impossible financial targets, Police Scotland has faced a number of crises in its short life so far - including controversies over armed police patrols, the failure to properly deal with a fatal accident on the M9, and the resignations under pressure in 2015 of its original chief constable Sir Stephen House, and the first chair of the Scottish Police Authority Vic Emery.

New Parliament, new opportunity for Police Best Value

The [UNISON Scotland police mini-manifesto](#) published ahead of the May 2016 Scottish Parliament elections reinforced our [call to move to a balanced workforce](#) for policing that delivers best value.

Although the Scottish government [election manifesto](#) for May 2016 moved a little away from its hard line commitment to maintaining police officer numbers at the arbitrary target of 17,234, there is still no proper business case in place for Police Scotland more than three years after its creation. This has been repeatedly promised after demands by Audit Scotland, MSPs and police staff in UNISON.

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The Thinning Blue Line, Reform Scotland Jun 2015
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www.heraldscotland.com/news/14032524.Revealed_only_half_of_all_Scottish_police_officers_are_on_the_frontline/

Police Scotland, Audit Scotland report Dec 2015
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/news/auditor-general-reports-for-a-second-time-on-issues-with-scottish-police-authority-accounts

Audit Scotland warns of £85m Scottish police funding gap, BBC Scotland 18 Dec 2015

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35133634>

Police Service Strength, House of Commons Briefing Paper Feb 2016
researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN00634

The new Chief Constable, Phil Gormley, has said he is committed to developing a “sustainable operating model”. But cutting millions from budgets and demanding the same, or more, work from a dwindling number of police staff is not a “sustainable operating model”.

The new chair of the Scottish Police Authority, Andrew Flanagan, chair, told [Holyrood Magazine](#) in February 2016: "What we need is a highly skilled responsive mobile workforce. That may be police officers, that may be other people, and it's the totality of that resource that's important in terms of what it looks like rather than some relatively arbitrary number."

We believe that Best Value cannot be realised from Police Scotland in the absence of a proper business case - this should include a fully researched evaluation to establish how many officers are needed to police Scotland and a clear plan to implement a balanced workforce with the correct types of staff or officers performing roles appropriate to their qualifications and the needs of the organisation.

Seven steps towards Best Value for Police Scotland

- Police Scotland needs a proper and full business case.
- This should include a fully researched evaluation to establish how many officers are needed to police Scotland and a clear plan to implement a balanced workforce with the correct types of staff or officers performing roles appropriate to their qualifications and the needs of the organisation - and an end to the substitution of uniformed officers for police staff.
- There must be adequate resourcing to maintain local/ regional services, responsive to locally determined priorities. It should be possible to establish the single police force as a local government joint board - if funded through a precept this could have s33 status and would not be liable for VAT. This would also allow local democratic accountability.
- Closure of service centres and control rooms should be put on hold and a thorough review be instituted before any further action is taken. Police Scotland must develop and sustain an effective local network of emergency control room / services centres across Scotland.
- We need a proper oversight structure for Police Scotland with real local input into policing priorities. The Governance Review of the Scottish Police Authority should include making Police Scotland more responsive to local needs.
- The SPA must develop greater capacity to interrogate Police Scotland plans and data to provide effective oversight. A closer relationship and greater engagement with police staff would be of great assistance. The SPA board should include a trade union representative as recommended by the Working Together report. This should be a priority for the justice minister.
- The Scottish Government and Police Scotland management should commit to retaining current arrangements for staff representation and bargaining.

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