

14 November 2011

Reform Scotland bulletin on police numbers

On 7 September 2011 the Scottish Government unveiled its legislative programme which included proposals to create a single Scottish police force – a centralising move that Reform Scotland has opposed (see [‘Striking the balance’](#)). The key theme to the Scottish Government’s argument was to save money and protect its pledge of 1,000 extra officers compared to 2007 levels.

As welcome as extra police officers are, Reform Scotland has consistently argued that the key to their success, and indeed their value for money, is how they are deployed. If officers are out on the streets deterring and detecting crime they are likely to be more effective and provide better value for money than if they are stuck behind a desk dealing with paperwork.

However, in our response to the Scottish Government’s consultation ‘Keeping Scotland Safe & Strong’, Reform Scotland has called on the Scottish Government to be more open and transparent in their approach to police numbers. Figures obtained from Freedom of Information requests to all eight police forces in Scotland have indicated that while police officer numbers increased by 897.6 (Full Time Equivalent) between 2006/7 and 2010/11, the number of police staff fell during the same period by 899.6 FTE, resulting in a slight overall decrease. These figures suggest that police officers must now be carrying out duties which were previously civilianised and at a higher cost.

Background – civilianisation

There have always been a number of people employed by the police carrying out civilian roles, though previous administrations sought to expand this process of civilianisation in an attempt to both save money and free up police officers’ time as the following quotes illustrate:

- In 1999 when Jim Wallace was justice minister he told the Scottish Parliament *“Because a move towards civilianisation has taken place, more police officers have been freed up for the front-line operational duties that the public expect them to carry out.”*¹
- ACPOS’s Annual report on Best Value in 2008/09 commented: *“Forces have been continuing to review and improve internal staffing structures, saving £5.8 million and increasing the civilianisation of posts where police powers are not required, saving £5.6 million.”*

In 2009 Unison Scotland, which organises police staff in forces across Scotland, published a briefing on police civilianisation. The briefing comments:

- **Extent:** The roles of police staffs are largely determined by individual police forces. This has led to a ‘patchwork’ or variable use of police staffs across forces where they have been used to suit local policing needs. In Scotland, police staffs largely occupy corporate (27%) and administrative and support (61%) roles. Just over a tenth of police staffs are in operational roles (12%), though this is higher in some forces.

¹ 25 November 1999

- **Benefit:** ...using police staff alongside officers 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.

The figures

Due to the variation in figures that are available for police staff and police officers across the different police forces in Scotland, Reform Scotland submitted Freedom of Information requests to each of the forces asking for the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) number for both police officers and police staff for each year since 1999/2000. Not all forces had the complete history on record, but Tables 1 and 2 below illustrate the findings.

Table 1: Police officers in Scotland, Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

	Central	Dumfries & Galloway	Fife	Grampian	Lothian & Borders	Northern	Strathclyde	Tayside	Scotland
1999/2000	720			1183.18					
2000/01		474.35		1229.12	2573.79	666.3			
2001/02	718	476.85		1232	2580.7	680.7			
2002/03	740	473.18		1247	2671.82	687.3			
2003/04	777	488.11	980	1300.73	2744.96	680.8			
2004/05	817	483.78	1005	1359.24	2803.24	702.18	7436		
2005/06	822	504.89	1041	1368.29	2818.42	699.12	7538		
2006/07	821	500.72	1057	1376.73	2792.96	707.01	7601	1163.14	16019.56
2007/08	820	503.36	1058	1470.22	2839.62	724.55	7331	1169.34	15916.09
2008/09	852	519.99	1078	1524.26	2932.36	771.82	7873	1199.58	16751.01
2009/10	875	507.82	1082	1565.16	3008.12	798.25	8027	1210.57	17073.92
2010/11	883	503.09	1,112	1530.22	2958.64	781.59	7911	1237.62	16917.16

Source: FOI responses from individual police forces. The figures for Fife from 2005/6 onwards come from the quarter 2 figures from the Scottish Government. Tayside Police only provided FTE figures from 2006/7, previous figures were given as headcount. There was no 2006/7 figure provided for Central so midpoint between 2005/6 and 2007/8 used.

Table 2: Police staff in Scotland, Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

	Central	Dumfries & Galloway	Fife	Grampian	Lothian & Borders	Northern	Strathclyde	Tayside	Scotland
1999/2000				500.97					
2000/01			299	504.9	1038.5				
2001/02			315	596	1075.45				
2002/03			393	645	1063.55				
2003/04	340		411	651.75	1148.97				
2004/05	354	273.06	509	701.69	1247.19	383.41	2546		
2005/06	373	275.88	530	739.21	1300.85	397.36	2637		
2006/07	391	269.05	523	778	1335.99	392.34	2729	635.97	7054.35
2007/08	367	269.61	477	759.43	1273.42	367.26	2700	508.54	6722.26
2008/09	370	251.88	525	729.62	1215.92	357.27	2577	510.74	6537.43
2009/10	397	257.24	472	735.81	1280.55	362.39	2531	542	6577.99
2010/2011	362	223.78	464	660.74	1151.35	337.93	2405	549.91	6154.71

Source: FOI responses from individual police forces. Tayside figures are headcount prior to 2006/7. Strathclyde had no FTE figure for 05/06 so midpoint between 2004/5 and 2006/7 has been used.

Using the information in Tables 1 and 2, Table 3 shows how there has been a greater decrease in police staff than any increase in police officers.

Table 3: Difference in staff and officer numbers, FTE

SCOTLAND	Police officers	Police staff
2006/07	16019.56	7054.35
2007/08	15916.09	6722.26
2008/09	16751.01	6537.43
2009/10	17073.92	6577.99
2010/11	16917.16	6154.71
difference 06/07 to 10/11	897.6	-899.64

Table 4 also shows how the distribution of this change has varied across Scotland's eight forces.

Table 4: Difference in individual forces 2006/7 to 2010/11

FTE	Central		Dumfries & Galloway		Fife		Grampian		Lothian & Borders		Northern		Strathclyde		Tayside	
	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff	Police Officers	Police Staff
2006/07	821	391	500.72	269.05	1,057	523	1,376.73	778.00	2,792.96	1,335.99	707.01	392.34	7,601	2,729	1,163.14	635.97
2007/08	820	367	503.36	269.61	1,058	477	1,470.22	759.43	2,839.62	1,273.42	724.55	367.26	7,331	2,700	1,169.34	508.54
2008/09	852	370	519.99	251.88	1,078	525	1,524.26	729.62	2,932.36	1,215.92	771.82	357.27	7,873	2,577	1,199.58	510.74
2009/10	875	397	507.82	257.24	1,082	472	1,565.16	735.81	3,008.12	1,280.55	798.25	362.39	8,027	2,531	1,210.57	542.00
2010/2011	883	362	503.09	223.78	1,112	464	1,530.22	660.74	2,958.64	1,151.35	781.59	337.93	7,911	2,405	1,237.62	549.91
difference 06/07 to 10/11	62.00	-29	2.37	-45.27	55.00	-59.00	153.49	-117.26	165.68	-184.64	74.58	-54.41	310.00	-324	74.48	-86.06
% difference 06/07 to 10/11	7.55	-7.42	0.47	-16.83	5.20	-11.28	11.15	-15.07	5.93	-13.82	10.55	-13.87	4.08	-11.9	6.40	-13.53

Reform Scotland is not commenting on whether the strategy of cutting police staff to allow the 1,000 police officers target to be maintained is right or wrong. However, we are calling on the Scottish government to be more open and transparent with regard to current policies on policing. If a single police force is to be created to save money, why is another policy within policing being pursued which could be argued to be less cost-effective?

Other points on the consultation

Reform Scotland also made a number of other substantive points in our response to 'Keeping Scotland Safe & Strong' which are summarised below:

- **Division commanders:** It is essential that any changes to the current policing structure improve local accountability and, in this regard, we welcome the proposed 32 division commander structure which mirrors local authorities.
- **Appointment process:** We would disagree with proposals for the Scottish government to appoint members of the Scottish Police Authority, in effect creating a

policing quango, which blurs transparency and accountability. Instead, Reform Scotland would recommend that the Scottish Police Authority is made up of representatives of each of Scotland's local authorities, with each council, not Cosla, having a right to place a representative of their choosing on the board. We appreciate that this means a police authority of 32 members, which may not be ideal, but we are trying to recommend proposals to ensure that the single police force does not become a centralised police force and local government involvement is essential to this.

It is not clear how the need for diversity and flexibility could be accommodated within the proposed structure where division commanders would appear to have some level of accountability to local authorities but are also ultimately answerable to the sole chief constable. If there is a conflict between some of the policing policies being pushed then ultimately the local needs end up coming second – unless that chief constable is, in turn, answerable to a Scottish Police Board made up of representatives of local authorities, as recommended by Reform Scotland.

- **Funding:** Reform Scotland disagrees with the funding proposals set out in the consultation. We believe that it is essential that local authorities continue to contribute toward the cost of policing, just as we believe that they must be involved in the new Scottish Police Authority. As the old adage goes, "He who pays the piper calls the tune", and if local authorities have no control over the purse strings then it will be difficult for councils to adopt differing policies towards policing, or even have a meaningful input into policy direction.

For further information please contact Reform Scotland on 0131 524 9500.