


Officer numbers could be reduced if force mergers are pushed forward with no extra cash

 Force mergers could take their toll on officer numbers and the service to the public if they are hurried through and there is not adequate cash to back them up.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Federation, gave the warning following concerns from the Association of Police Authorities that they do not have sufficient funding to support the cost of restructuring.

Mrs Berry told *Police*: 'If forces are going to have to borrow, in order to do this, at some point they will have to pay money back and harsh decisions will have to be taken about where the money comes from. This could mean a reduction in the numbers of officers.'

'We have had year on year efficiency savings, at some point or another in the same way the hospitals are not doing operations, we could end up saying that we can not attend an incident.'

A letter was sent out by Home Secretary Charles Clarke to all Police Authorities last month offering extra funding to those who volunteered to merge on December 23.

But Bob Jones, chairman of the Association of Police Authorities (APA), called the move a 'bribe' for local authorities to get them to abolish local police forces.

The APA estimate it will cost between £500 to £600 million for the mergers and Tim Brain, ACPO lead on finance and business, said that there has been no provision for restructuring as yet.

He added: 'Unless the Government pulls something out of the hat, any authority and force intending to restructure in 2007 to 2008 will have to find the money locally. The Home Office has indicated that it will expect authorities to borrow in

order to deliver restructuring. That simply will mean there will be a call on local authority budgets to fund the cost for many years, possibly even decades, to come.'

The Home Secretary has now said that some money will be available this year, 2006 to 2007 and in 2007 to 2008 but estimates by the APA mean there will still be a shortfall in funding.

Mrs Berry said: 'I think the Government are trying to do too much at once. It will have an impact on workforce modernisation. If they are spending money then forces are more likely to look to cheaper alternatives to police officers which will have a big impact in the longer term.'



Mergers fact box:

- The Home Secretary asked police authorities to put forward their suggestions for force mergers by December 23 but this is not set to happen until the APA receive reassurances including whether the Government will find new money to meet the start up costs of force mergers
- Police authorities were asked to take into account factors such as: the size of forces, capability to address volume crime, criminal markets, cross-border criminality, whether the police boundaries tied up with their neighbouring forces, accountability, performance and costs and efficiency
- The Home Secretary has said that forces who offer to merge before December 23 will get financial help to do this, those who have not will not receive financial help
- There are currently 43 forces in England and Wales and have been for the last 30 years

Closing the gap

- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has suggested that forces with less than 4,000 police officers should look at merging with other forces to improve their capability to deal with crime in a report entitled, *Closing the Gap*.
- *Closing the Gap* assesses the ability of the current structure of policing in England and Wales to provide 'effective and sustainable protective services to a common standard in the future'.
- The report found that forces with over 4000 officers, or 6000 staff, tended to meet the standard across the seven key areas, demonstrating good reactive capability with a clear measure of proactive capacity. Forces below that size tended to fall somewhat short of the standard, with, in general, the smallest forces faring the least well.
- Denis O'Connor, author of *Closing the Gap*, said: 'Looking ahead the police service needs not only to deal effectively with volume crime, the current performance focus, but also have demonstrable readiness to tackle complex, volatile threats to individuals, neighbourhoods and businesses. This implies a major development in capability and to achieve this, changes must be made not only to the structure, but the whole configuration of policing at this level.'