



Steve Williams, chairman of the Police Federation National Detective Forum

Cutting detective numbers could damage service

The Police Federation National Detective Forum will meet later this month at Twickenham for a two-day series of seminars and presentations, and obviously the issue of budgets will be a key talking point.

It's clear that detectives are not going to escape any of the possible cuts that are currently being proposed. My biggest fear is for the level of service that we will then be able to deliver to the public.

It will be the public who will continue to pay for policing, so perhaps we need to ask the public what they want from their police force? If we are facing cuts anywhere near the 25 percent level that has been talked about recently, then obviously we are not going to be able to provide the same level of service across the whole divide. Something will have to give.

The reality is that at the moment, the 25 percent budget cuts being talked about are just that – proposals, not decisions. Which makes it all the more worrying to see some chief officers already rushing to make cuts.

As detectives, we deal with some of the most serious crimes and criminal organisations. If we are not going to be able to deal with those because we haven't got the resources to do so, it is going to open the floodgates to much more crime. As a service we've also talked a lot in the past about the importance of tackling the fear of crime, but reducing our ability to cope with serious crime can only increase that fear.

In some forces detectives have already borne the brunt of measures to reduce spending. Under workforce

modernisation plans, forces have got rid of detectives purely as a cost-cutting measure. Initially many of the civilian teams that were set up in their place were staffed by retired detectives, who brought with them a wealth of experience. We are now seeing more and more people employed from a non-policing background, who are given limited training and then asked to investigate serious crime.

We've also got real concerns about the way forces are considering using regulation A19. Under this, forces can 'retire' officers with more than 30 years' pensionable service. A number of forces seem to be going down this road, particularly with detectives. If they do so they are going to get rid of an awful lot of experience.

So detectives are used to feeling the impact of budget cuts, and it seems likely that we will feel the impact of this latest round of proposals. But the reality is that at the moment, the 25 percent budget cuts being talked about are just that – proposals, not decisions. Which makes it all the more worrying to see some chief officers already rushing to make cuts, before they know the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

There's still time to make the case for minimising any reductions in police budgets, and I'm sure it's something we will be discussing at Twickenham.