

Christmas for criminals?

ACPO's leaked proposals for a 25 percent cut in police budgets, and the government's belief that this will not affect the service to the public, is a recipe for disaster, says Police Federation chairman, Paul McKeever



Photography: Anderson Photography

Paul McKeever, chairman of the Police Federation

When I read about the leaked ACPO report to government in the newspapers last month, along with many others, I must admit I was somewhat surprised at its content. It contained, among other things, proposals for the wholesale dismantling of the current arrangements for police officers' pay and working conditions.

The reason for my surprise is that the Federation met the leaders of ACPO just a week prior to this report being made public, and not one mention of senior officers' true intentions was made during that meeting.

Some within ACPO seem to think they can achieve across-the-board cuts of 25 percent at the stroke of a pen. There has been a unilateral declaration among some senior officers that the way to make those cuts is to tear down the current, hard-fought system for officers' pay, pensions and working conditions.

Under the present leadership, it is clear to us that ACPO represents no-one, but themselves. They certainly do not represent the interests of their officers whom they are meant to be leading. Their profound disregard for their officers is breath taking.

We want to work with ACPO, but we cannot accept their proposals. We want to have a close working relationship with them, but not if they are so intent on selling their officers short.

In the run up to the general election, we were given to

understand the police service would be among those departments that would witness the fewest cuts and rightly so. The first priority for any government is to protect its citizens.

However, it appears ministers have been hoodwinked by some senior officers who view themselves as 'modernisers' into thinking that a 25 percent cut in the police budget will have no noticeable effect. That is utter nonsense. The government needs to understand that if the police officer numbers are reduced, two or three years down the line there will be serious consequences and they will be facing a public backlash.

Why are senior officers so willing to make such huge cuts? That is a question we at the Federation are still trying to answer. In the meantime we have a clear strategy. We still have time to persuade the government to step back from the precipice before it is too late. What may seem like a quick financial fix for them now will have disastrous consequences for policing and for public safety in three or four year's time.

If visible frontline services are not to be directly affected then the cuts are likely to be those specialist units that are integral to the important work we do; whether that's fewer dog and mounted units or the demise of units dealing with vital work to tackle paedophilia or domestic abuse.

We are a police service, not a business. The public expect us to be there, when and where they need us and to have sufficient resources to prevent and detect crime and ensure victims of crime are at the heart of the system.

What has happened in the last few weeks is almost beyond belief; whether it's the ideas put forward by a minority in ACPO or the government living in a state of self-delusion believing cuts of the magnitude of 25 percent will not affect the service the public get.

And at the same time, Justice Secretary, Ken Clarke, is talking about emptying the prisons and putting criminals back on the streets. Now that's a volatile cocktail.

Quite simply, if these cuts go ahead, one thing is certain; it will be Christmas for criminals.