

POLICE

Police Magazine Update

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Questions over government policy to cut numbers

The government's policy on reducing police numbers in the aftermath of the riots and questioning police tactics at the height of the disorder was put under the spotlight at a Home Affairs Select Committee this week.

A cross-party group of MPs listened to evidence from Lib Dem MP Tom Brake asking whether he believed the policy to reduce police numbers by 20 percent over the next four years given the public disorder was the right decision.

Mr Brake said: "In relation to reduction in police numbers, it is not government who is reducing police numbers, although clearly how much money is allocated to police forces does determine to some extent the numbers of officers that are available."

He said he would have preferred that the budget had not been cut but they were dealing with a large financial deficit. Mr Brake added that the decision to cut numbers of police officers, 16,000 across England and Wales by 2014, was down to forces and police authorities and that some forces had managed to maintain their numbers while others had not.

When news of the riots first emerged there were calls from politicians on all sides criticising the police for not being robust enough and suggesting they could have employed tougher tactics. Conservative MP Lorraine Fullbrook asked about the role of politicians in responding to such situations.

Mr Brake said he believed politicians needed to "take a deep breath" for a proper analysis of events to come out and then look at solutions.

He added: "It was very clear from senior officers I have spoken to that there is no desire for water cannons or baton rounds to be used."

He explained the practicalities of using a large water cannon that would need to be protected in a riot situation and can only be used for three minutes before they need to be re-filled.

Mr Brake also said that the range of baton rounds only goes to 30 metres and beyond this there is much greater risk of injury or death and that this could have an impact on communities that would be "very hard to predict".