

# Best value?

**Numbers of police staff have virtually doubled in just under a decade and growth has outstripped that of police officer numbers. The Federation has carried out research which raises serious concerns over the potential knock-on effect on the service. Syreeta Lund reports exclusively on the work**

The police service is undergoing massive transition with yet more likely on the way under the new government in the name of workforce modernisation and public sector cuts. But will this 'modernisation' really be beneficial to the future of British policing? The Federation has carried out research, analysing statistics from all 43 forces looking at the ratio of police officers to police staff from 2000 until 2009. Some of the findings present a stark picture for the future, axing the numbers of police officers and replacing them with cheaper police staff in some forces.

The Federation research, conducted by Ruth Meade, published this month, found that although there is value in some non-police roles that have helped to 'free up' officers for the frontline, there is a lack of consistency in training standards, definition of roles, pay structure and, most shockingly, no overall evaluation as to whether they even present better value for money – despite many forces steaming ahead with civilianisation.

In the year 2000, the average ratio of police officers to police staff was 2.3 to 1 and by 2009, the latest Home Office figures show this number standing at 1.4 to 1. Surrey Police has been at the forefront of workforce modernisation and a recent NPIA (National Policing Improvement Agency) discussion paper, leaked in February, which talked about culling officers numbers by 28,000 was led by Mark Rowley, chief constable of the force. Mr Rowley suggested policing can be 'at least as

Police staff numbers have doubled but is the public getting better value?



“Surrey Police not only has the lowest ratio of officers to staff; it is also the first to exceed the number of officers. Yet, the same force has the lowest detection rate in England and Wales.”



Police staff: Federation is keeping a close eye on numbers

good” in forces where civilians make up half the force.

The report states that the police service would save in the region of £400 million. On paper, this is an attractive prospect to chief officers struggling to balance the books, but would it actually ensure our police service, renowned throughout the world, could actually deliver what the public in the UK want and provide best value, the watch word from all the political parties in a time of economic turmoil?

The research reveals how Surrey Police not only has the lowest ratio of officers to staff; it is also the first to exceed the number of officers. Yet, the same force has the lowest detection rate in England and Wales. The research states: “This does little to support the likelihood that civilianising policing duties that do not require warranted officers will lead to improved performance or value for money for the public.”

The research also found that in around a quarter of forces, in 11 out of 43, police staff numbers have increased at ten times the rate of police officers. In Durham Constabulary, for example, officer numbers have increased by 86 percent, 167 times the rate officers.



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## Feature

Paul McKeever, chairman of the Federation said: “I think the situation with a hike in police staff numbers is absolute nonsense when the public want more police officers on the beat. Instead, we have more unaccountable, unidentifiable civilians who do not have the flexibility or resilience to give what is needed as an emergency service.”

As police spending is likely to come under extreme scrutiny under the new government, the Federation is supportive of any changes that improve service and are cost effective. However, they question why police staff numbers are increasing so dramatically when spending is under the microscope and if such roles have been properly evaluated.

example of Surrey Police who calculated that the performance of their Targeted Patrol Team could be improved by cutting officer numbers by 11 PCs and recruiting support officers at no extra costing. In order to properly evaluate this as being the ‘best option’ the Federation believe it is essential to not only examine performance but also factor in actual staffing costs of officers and staff over a period of time such as training, overtime and turnover.

The research states: “We are aware of no example where a force has offered definitive proof, substantiated by detailed and accurate analysis being data over a sufficient period of time.”



Saving time: some police staff roles help free up officers for the frontline but others are ‘superfluous’

Simon Reed, vice-chairman of the Federation, said: “We need to evaluate all these roles people are being employed to do in the police service in view of the economy and public finances, it is crucial they are involved in helping the police not in roles that are superfluous.”

Another knock-on effect of modernisation is that forces are actually reducing police officer posts to fund ‘cheaper’ police staff posts in order to become more efficient but there is little evidence to say whether this has actually been effective in improving service to the public. The report cites the

Overall there are potential dangers to the very nature of policing by consent, by allocating certain tasks to non-warranted staff forces risk a less flexible workforce and working in silos. The research states: “PFEW is particularly concerned about this because we fear that if officers ultimately only perform roles that require warranted powers this will largely consist of tasks that entail conflict with members of the public.”