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Will there be any change left after spending cuts?

Finally the General Election has been held and by the time this article is published we should know who holds the reigns of power.

As a serving Dorset police officer I am already pondering the question, what will the change we are promised deliver for Dorset Police? We are told that change is continuous, and during the past 27 years I think I have witnessed this statement in action more times than I can recall. But on this occasion I don't think any of us would be too cynical in seeing change as being anything other than driven by cost efficiencies or cuts.

Any party who secures power in Dorset will be driven by their political leaders in London to sing a song about public sector waste, and how they can do more with less. Financial constraints are nothing new to us, as we have been underfunded for several years. However, through good local management we have always managed to maintain and even improve the service we have provided to our local communities. This has led to the current high public confidence figures that we achieve.

Unfortunately, the changes already being muted will see a shortfall of several million pounds in our budget over the coming years, which as a force who has already undergone a sweeping review, will inevitably mean attempting to get more out of less, with the focus being on cost over service delivery.

So how are we to reach the changes we are being asked to achieve? It seems that most of the changes being spoken of are well advanced, and dare I say some are nothing new.

Staff cuts are inevitable to achieve the budget reductions we are to achieve. Officer numbers have reduced by 50, but the good news is we are promised there will be no more, at this time. The force has however announced a reduction of 150 members of police staff over the next year.

Collaboration, removing unnecessary back room functions and reducing bureaucracy seem to be three other initiatives already being grappled with. They are wise words and all come with lengthy documents as guidance but just what any of them mean is yet to be seen.

And at the same time as we have to make these cuts, planning is going ahead for the Olympic Games 2012. These games will see our force having to police the longest single event of the games – the sailing events at Weymouth.

I think we all know that this election will bring change and that savings need to be made, but my hope is that any such change is introduced with an eye on policing sense, and perhaps a move 'back to basics'. There is an opportunity to reduce expenditure, whilst improving service delivery. However, I fear that the drive for change will be focussed wholly on the balance sheet which will leave those left behind having to work in an environment where they feel unsupported, unsupervised and isolated.