

PM pledge to maintain police numbers

Prime Minister Gordon Brown has said there is 'no reason' why police numbers should fall based on current government budgets.

Mr Brown challenged police authorities around the country to 'match' their commitment to frontline policing, at a speech in Reading this month where he pledged to protect police spending.

He makes the call at a time when police forces around the country are 'freezing' police officer recruitment and an NPIA (National Policing Improvement Agency) ten-year discussion paper outlines plans to cut officer numbers by 28,000.

The Prime Minister called on police authorities to commit to protecting frontline policing and he added that police numbers were currently at an 'all time high'.

Paul McKeever, chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales, says: "Whilst we are delighted that the Prime Minister sees the importance of maintaining police officer numbers and policing resources, it is important chief officers and police authorities implement and utilise this investment wisely to ensure the public gets what it expects; more police officers on the streets."

He added: "Our concern is that with 32 forces already reporting a recruitment freeze, combined with the natural loss of officers leaving and retiring, it seems more likely we will see a dip in officer numbers. We would therefore be interested to hear a more precise projection on what figures the government believes provides the resilience needed, particularly with the 2012 Olympic games not too far in the future and with the clear link given that the current level of police officer numbers is proving successful in keeping crime rates down."

Mr Brown also stated that the police would be 'protected, not politicised'.

Key points from Gordon Brown's speech on policing

- **Accountability:** HMIC (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary) will publish online report cards of police performance and the public will have the right to petition online for meetings with senior police officers
- **Fear of crime:** the public fear crime is higher when police are not seen patrolling the streets and if they thought the police were not capable of dealing with the issues they faced
- **Time on the beat:** He said that neighbourhood policing teams should be spending 80 percent of their time on the street
- **Anti-social behaviour:** There should be early intervention for families where there were issues and neighbourhood police would be able to report problem families to the Family Intervention Programme which will be expanded next month

Federation response:

- Alongside the need for a projection on officer numbers as forces continue to freeze recruitment, the Federation said that the criminal justice system needed to be looked at the whole of the criminal justice system to ensure targets between agencies don't clash, that there are clear communication lines and that excessive and unnecessary bureaucracy does not hinder the process.
- The Federation calls for 'tougher sentencing' and a 'commitment to having a visible and warranted police officer presence on the streets' to boost confidence

Gordon Brown: protect police numbers



Photography: PA Photos

Out and about: neighbourhood teams need to be on the streets



Photography: Andrew Carruth