



Mark Botham, chairman of North Yorkshire Police Federation

Policing by numbers

It is a matter of public record that the police service is facing a funding crisis. The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 for the funding period to 2010/2011 is still being considered, but the Home Office is not likely to offer any increase in the budget beyond inflation.

In the document *Sustainable Policing - An overview of the APA/ACPO approach to the spending review* it is made quite clear that the funding gap represents a significant proportion of the overall police budget and poses a very real risk to maintaining current services and capability. As over 80 percent of the police budget is accounted for by officer and staff costs, such a deficit would inevitably impact on the level of service the police can provide to communities.

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We are mindful that there may be a pressure to reduce staff to address these issues. We would strongly urge caution – can we look for efficiency savings elsewhere? We are no strangers to cuts; in 1999 our overall strength in North Yorkshire was down to 1,308. The constable figure was down to 1011, an overall reduction of 48 and 32 respectively on the previous year. The consequence of this was that by 2001/2002 North Yorkshire Police was approaching 50 percent of operational officers assaulted in any one year.

It is a matter of fact that since April 2000 police officer strength in North Yorkshire Police has increased by 27 percent to 1,633 federated ranks by December 2006. This rate of workforce growth; 58 percent overall, including staff, has required speedy and sustained investment in recruitment, training and management support resources. Perhaps that explains why the human resources department has grown alongside the superintendent ranks.

So why this fixation with numbers? Well it is evident that, with the record number of resources, we are performing in North Yorkshire Police. There has been a return on investment. We are ranked first within our group of most similar forces for public confidence and have an increase of 5.2 percent in sanction detections for the period April 1 to December 31, 2006, compared to the same period in 2005. Most telling of all the force has just been ranked 13th of 43 police forces in England and Wales – just 4 percent lower than the force ranked first.

But it will be difficult for North Yorkshire or any other force to sustain these levels if we cut officer numbers. We need a meaningful national and local dialogue looking at the impact of the new licensing laws on policing, the findings of the Police Federation’s 24/7 report, the impact of police reform and the proposals for workforce modernisation and all in real time.

Otherwise I fear the debate will be hijacked by those who believe cutting numbers and tinkering with shift systems is the easy way to address funding issues. Perhaps it is because I prefer my glass half full whilst theirs is half empty?