

## No commitment given on police numbers

The Home Secretary has refused to give assurances that police numbers would be maintained.

Jacqui Smith was put on the spot during oral questions when David Ruffley, Shadow Minister for Police Reform asked her to 'unambiguously pledge to the public and the police that police numbers would not be cut'.

In response, Ms Smith said: "We are increasing the resources available to support revenue funding for policing by 2.9 per cent both next year and the following year. We are providing the resources necessary for chief constables to make the required decisions about their force's staffing levels of police officers and others."

She also endorsed Sir Ronnie Flanagan's review which says police numbers are not sustainable.

Mr Ruffley said the Home Secretary's view offered 'little reassurance' for a police service 'expected to deal with rising levels of anti-social behaviour and violent crime, and for the public who want to see a greater police presence on their streets'.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Police Federation of England and Wales, said the Federation was 'bitterly disappointed' that a fall of 647 police officers was recorded over a six month period to September 2007. The number of CSOs has increased by 80 per cent between October 2006 and September 2007. Ring-fenced funding for CSOs has been extended by another year.

"We had predicted this, but take no pleasure being proved right. However the real kick in the stomach comes from our chief officers, who instead of demanding no decline in police officer numbers, trumpet an increase in police personnel.

"They may be prepared to sell police officers down the river, but we will fight to ensure that the politically independent multi-skilled police constable remains at the heart of policing," said Mrs Berry.

## Workforce modernisation plans are still 'unproven'

Plans to civilianise police roles as part of the workforce modernisation agenda have been deemed a success before they are even tried out, according to the Police Federation.

Jan Berry was responding to the publication of Sir Ronnie Flanagan's review of policing last month which supported the idea that many roles currently carried out by police officers could be civilianised.

But Mrs Berry said there was an assumption that workforce modernisation programmes which advocate a mix of officers and support staff in operational roles provide greater efficiencies, flexibility and resilience. She argued that it was 'premature' to reach such a conclusion as the demonstration sites to trial the idea were not all due to start until the spring and were, as yet, untested.

"This government has a tendency of declaring pilots a success as soon as they launch them. This report assumes they are a success before they have even started."

Mrs Berry said the report failed to provide assurances that the constable will be at the heart of operational policing in the future.

"Only a police officer with full powers can provide the visible reassurance and effective deterrent that the public demand," she added.

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Photography: PA Photos

Premature: Civilianisation proposed by Sir Ronnie Flanagan has yet to be tested



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