

Police budgets sliced by £1 billion

The Police Federation has warned that a funding gap of nearly £1 billion in police budgets over the next three to four years is likely to see the numbers of police officers plummeting further.

Nick Herbert, shadow police minister, told a parliamentary debate on police authority funding in Greater Manchester Police, that ACPO and the Association of Police Authorities predicted the huge funding shortfall by 2010 to 2011 in forces nationally.

Jan Berry, chairman of the Police Federation, said police authorities needed the funding to maintain police officer numbers and failure to do so will have a catastrophic effect on the service to the public, with 999 calls taking longer to answer.

However, Tony McNulty, police minister, said that in relation to efficiencies being made in the service he would 'not accept' the notion that 'there is no more to be squeezed out of the lemon'.

This comes as the government's official figures, released at the end of last month, show a drop in police officer numbers for the first time since 2001.

At its peak, police officer strength was up by 3,429 but the most recent figures, for September 2006, show police officer number down at minus 173 officers.

Numbers of community support officers have risen by more than third in 12 months, 34.7 percent, from September 2005 to September 2006 fuelling concerns that chief officers are seeking a cheaper equivalent to police officers.

Mrs Berry has already hit out at the government for relaxing the Crime Fighting Fund, which was ring-fenced cash for recruiting police officers.

"Police numbers will fall as chief officers hire cheaper alternatives, and then attempt to give them greater powers."

24/7 response officers under pressure to work nights

Nearly half of response officers' working time in Northumbria could end up being night shifts if a new working pattern is approved with CSOs covering dayshifts.

Russ Watson, chairman of Northumbria Police Federation, told delegates at their annual meeting this month that the force is looking to change shifts because of the government's and public's expectation.

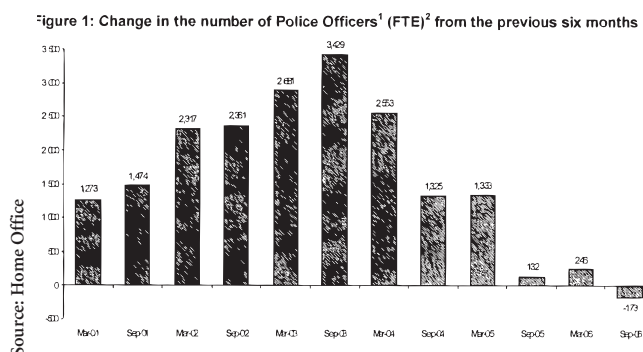
The change will mean officers working a more flexible shift pattern with different start and finish times – meaning 46 percent of the average response officer's time will be on nightshifts.

He added: "Where is the work/life balance in such an agreement? CSOs replacing police officers with limited powers to carry out the daytime role, releases police officers to carry out a nighttime role.

"With police officer numbers falling our current strength of 4041 is a reduction of 99 officers from 18 months ago, with a commitment to workforce modernisation, the poor 24/7 response officer is having to support the reform package, with the ever increasing workload."

**What do you think?
Are you losing officers in your force?
email: slund@jcc.polfed.org**

Police numbers are down



The numbers of CSOs are on the increase



Photography: Howard Sayer