

Police chiefs fear cuts

EXCLUSIVE DAVID LEASK INVESTIGATIONS REPORTER

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THREE out of four of Scotland's leading frontline officers have claimed in a poll the SNP cannot meet its key manifesto pledge on police numbers.

First Minister Alex Salmond won this month's Holyrood poll after promising to keep on all of the extra 1000 men and women in uniform delivered during its first administration.

But an electronic poll of 50 members of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents (Asps) yesterday found that 76% believed it was not feasible to retain the current roll of 17,234 officers across Scotland.

It raised serious concern about the SNP majority government's ability to meet its commitment in the face of sizeable public sector spending cuts.

The survey came as senior policing figures fear that forces' ruling boards of councillors will be tempted to cut numbers for civilian staff instead of officers.

I am now looking for the proponents of a single force to answer those questions and allay those fears, hopefully

Chief Superintendent David O'Connor, Asps president, said: "A balanced workforce is all about the right people with the right skills in the right jobs.

"It would denude the frontline if we start taking highly confident and experienced police officers and putting them in to office jobs."

Mr O'Connor was last night sceptical about maintaining headline officer figures. He add-ed: "My take on it is that something has to give. If we are going to see cuts of 2.5% plus inflation in future years the mathematics speak for themselves."

Some senior officers have previously criticised the Government for fixating on a single target number for officers rather than funding for the service in the round.

Kevin Smith, the chief constable of Central Scotland Police, told the gathering near Peebles that keeping up numbers was feasible, although he added: "Is it desirable?"



The SNP said it was confident of maintaining the numbers of officers and stressed that it had raised the size of Scotland's police service during difficult economic times.

A spokesman said: "The SNP has recruited 1000 extra police officers on to Scotland's streets, helping drive down crime to a 32-year low and the re-elected SNP Government is totally committed to maintaining these record numbers of officers to keep our communities safe."

Mr O'Connor and his members yesterday gave a warm welcome to Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill at the event near Peebles, despite their scepticism about his core pledge.

Mr MacAskill and the Government have long made it clear that the current eight forces was no longer sustainable. He yesterday gave renewed hints that all eight would be merged in to one, rather than the alternative option of three. A nationwide consultation recently ended. He said: "I think the case for a single force is strengthening.

"It is not simply a saving in back office in terms of eight different procurement departments, HR departments, it is also an improvement of service in areas like motorbikes, firearms and ballistics.

"There are still worries and concerns that people have about governance and accountability and about centralisation and about independence from political interference. I am now looking for the proponents of a single force to answer those

concerns and allay those fears ... hopefully."

“

What do you think?

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Brian Nicholson, Dumfries

A strange story to say the least. The police are polled about police numbers and respond by indicating that they do not have confidence in maintaining the numbers because they fear the local councillors will cut the numbers. Somehow this answer is turned into an attack on the Scottish government who have made it clear that they will keep the numbers.

The obvious solution here is the removal of police administration from local councils and to have it directly administered from Holyrood.

A single Scottish police force, with strong local accountability to preserve service levels, would allow taxes to be spent where best needed in maintaining and possibly expanding frontline officers.

Andrew McMillan, Scotland

I agree with Brian Nicholson that this is a strange article. Whether it is just that it is badly written or that the writer has become confused I do not know. If the point about a single force is accurate and is the Scottish Government's decided plan then I believe this will undermine local community policing, will reduce local accountability and will

put to much power into one pair of hands.

Michael Dooo, stoke

Brian Nicholson, you are quite correct a single force would save the most amount of money, my region of England has 3 police forces (Leicester, Nottingham, Darbyshire) yet there is only 1 East Midlands Ambulance Service, the amount of senior managers and high paid officers that could be done away with plus the combined pooled resources would probably mean in the event of 1 force an increase in front line officers at a saving on today's costs for all forces.

jane affleck, Auld Reekie

The usual shroud waving from the police. I voted SNP but Holyrood cannot be allowed absolute rule. There need to be checks and balances which are the purpose of local government.

Cuts in police numbers will be down to Westminster and Westminster alone and the sooner we get shot of them the better

Rab Dickson

Firstly, I have no axe to grind, I am not a police officer.

The idea of a single police force may or may not have merit, I don't know what the numbers are.

Therein lies the problem, neither does anyone else.

Nobody to date has done a definitive cost benefit analysis, including the government.

We are basing assumptions on a 'less forces bigger savings' premise that has yet to be proven. Having spoken to people who would be involved in this analysis (Not from within the forces), I know about the lack of work on it so far, it is a fact.

The single force may well save money in the long term, but we have no idea of the drawbacks, if any, yet.

We need to know what we are talking about here and not just spouting knee-jerk reactions based on simplistic viewpoints.

As to the points made in the article, I say.....well they would say that wouldn't they?

I believe the SNP government will stick to the front-line numbers they committed to.

The ranking officers of the police service have a long and proud tradition of trying to scaremonger and put pressure on governments.

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