



Police Bill passes Stage 1

May 2012

The Police and Fire Reform Bill passed the first stage of the parliamentary process known as ‘the general principles’ on 10 May. The lead committee, in this case Justice, produces a report on the Bill highlighting issues that it believes the Scottish Government should consider. The Bill is then debated in the chamber and then returns to the Justice Committee for detailed consideration at Stage 2.

While a majority of the committee supported the centralisation of police services, there was support for strengthening and securing the local authority role. In UNISON’s view this will inevitably be cosmetic given the powers of the Minister and Chief Constable, but any strengthening of local democratic accountability is an improvement. They also recommended a larger SPA board to provide greater breadth of knowledge and stronger parliamentary scrutiny, both of which we would support. Kenny MacAskill did admit that a single force was not his first choice and this solution was forced on him by the cuts. First reactions are often the right one!

The Justice Committee gave full consideration to two of our major concerns in the Outline Business Case. The impact of the 17,234 police officers target on police staff numbers and the liability for VAT, costing at least £30m with a consequential impact on jobs. The report highlights the evidence given by UNISON’s Dave Watson and others that police civilian posts are being substituted by police officers now and that will increase rapidly in the new force. There was wide support for a balanced staffing structure. The committee noted these concerns and sought “clarification as to the impact of the projected redundancies of civilian posts on the front line”.

The Minister also admitted that the Full Business Case won’t be finished before the Bill is passed. This reinforces concerns that this Bill is being rushed through without adequate scrutiny.

On the VAT liability the committee urged the Government to pursue with HM Treasury an exemption as in Northern Ireland or involve local authorities in the funding of policing to meet the s33 requirements. Of course, as we have highlighted, this loss could be avoided if the new national force was constituted as a local government body. But of course that would mean less ministerial control. The Scottish Government is also hiding behind blanket exemptions to Freedom of Information requests on this issue and this reinforces concerns that they have not been straightforward on this issue. UNISON has lodged an appeal to the Information Commissioner.

UNISON has highlighted a range of detailed concerns about staffing aspects of the Bill that impact on police staffs. We are discussing these through the Scottish Government’s Bill Sounding Board. We will press for these concerns to be addressed in amendments to the Bill at Stage 2.

You can read the full Justice Committee report at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/50170.aspx>

You can read the official report on the Stage 1 debate at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/OfficialReport.aspx>

UNISON Scotland’s published briefings and press releases are at:

<http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/police/index.html>

Keep Writing!

UNISON believes that the new Scottish Police Authority should be able to decide on a balanced staffing structure free of cosmetic political targets for police officer numbers that were set before the new single force was proposed. That is the proper best value approach.

We need members to get that message over to MSPs over the next few weeks. Many of you have already done this – well done! Please get your colleagues and friends to do the same. It couldn't be easier. Just visit the web page and click away. <http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/police/messagetoMSPs/index.html>

Some, mostly SNP MSP's, are replying to members that the Bill doesn't allow the Minister to direct the SPA on this. Sorry, but this is nonsense. The Minister is currently directing police boards by ring fencing council grants on condition of maintaining 1000 extra officers. This isn't an 'operational matter' as set out in the Bill.

The Scottish Government's response to the Justice Committee report also seeks to duck the issue of a balanced workforce. Its only explanation is that, "Removing duplication will, of course, mean fewer staff are required". The current business plan means up to 3000 police staff posts will go. There isn't that much duplication!

Posters, badges and leaflets are also available from your branch.

Finally, a short video on the award winning Central Police investigation unit.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79rfENtFrY>

A great example of innovation with a balanced staffing team. Warmly welcomed by Kenny MacAskill at the time. Now it is being cut. How times change!



Don't take policing back to the 1970s

We all enjoy Life on Mars – and repeats of The Sweeney on TV. But they are not a good model for a modern police force.

Yet thousands of police staff jobs are under threat because of targets for cost savings and for police officer numbers. This would just take us back in time to the bad old days of policing.

We need a modern, balanced police team – with the right people doing the right jobs – for a better, safer Scotland.

UNISON
Scotland

PUBLIC WORKS:



Useful UNISON police staff links

- [UNISON Scotland police staffs webpage](#)
- [Briefing on Police Reform Bill](#)
- [Evidence to Justice Committee](#)
- [Stage 1 debate press release](#)

UNISON Scotland's key campaigns

- [Public Works](#)
- [Protect Our Pensions](#)
- [UNISON Scotland website](#)

For more information contact Bargaining and Campaigns team on 0141 342 2811, or email [Dave Watson](#) Scottish Organiser, or [Gerry Crawley](#) Regional Organiser.

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