

SOUTH WALES POLICE FEDERATION

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Established by Act of Parliament

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Cuts Have Consequences

South Wales Police, in line with every other police force in the country, has had to make swingeing cuts to its budget over the last 5 years or more. To date, our budget has been cut by £48,000,000 and, over the next 4 years, we will see it cut by a further £22,000,000 to give a total budget shortfall of £70,000,000 by 2019.

These cuts have taken a dramatic toll on our operational efficiency and the suggestion that frontline services have not been affected is inaccurate.

Since 2007 we have lost 502 police officers from our establishment, the equivalent of 15% of our sworn officers. Such a massive loss of staff is impossible to sustain without an impact on our public service delivery.

We now only have two police stations that are open throughout the day and night and the vast majority of others have closed their doors to casual visitors. This raises questions over our ability to engage with our communities and, often more importantly to the public in those communities, how they may engage with the police. Neighbourhood policing teams have been decimated by the cuts and the concept of neighbourhood policing is now very much in peril.

Police officers rarely patrol on foot due to the huge demands placed on their time so if you can no longer speak face-to-face with a police officer on the street and you can no longer call into a police station to report a matter, how do you actually engage with the police service other than over a telephone or via the internet? Public engagement is central to retaining confidence in the police and the concept of policing by consent so this is a matter of the utmost concern.

Most other organisations within the public sector have, of course, faced massive cuts to their own budgets but this has simply created a greater demand on our policing services as our partner agencies seek to mitigate their own resourcing issues by referring their obligations to us. We are the first and last emergency service and, as a result, our officers regularly convey patients to hospital when no ambulances are available and are often required to care for vulnerable children when the Social Services have no out-of-hours capability. All agree that a police cell is not a suitable place of safety for such vulnerable individuals yet we are being required to use them for this purpose all too frequently. 72% of

our officers' time is now taken up in dealing with non-crime matters so any suggestion that the role of the police is to deal with crime and nothing else exposes a shocking naivety towards the requirements of the modern police service.

Sir Robert Peel once extolled the virtues of the prevention of crime by saying: "The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it."

However, the fact is that we are now a reactive force rather than a proactive service and simply react to calls rather than seeking to prevent crime. Officers simply do not have the time to stop and search suspects or to submit intelligence logs on known offenders to the extent they once did and our efficiency is affected accordingly. Likewise we rarely have the opportunity to patrol the streets in order to deter criminal activity.

The fact that we now have to make yet more swingeing cuts over the coming years is extremely damaging and the real fear is that such cuts would place the sustainability of an efficient service in jeopardy. Cuts can go too deep and it is our belief that we now need to take a pause and properly reflect upon the impact of the cuts on the service to date before pushing ahead with measures that could result in unexpected and unwanted consequences. The British Police Service is a national institution that is the envy of the world and should be protected. Cuts have to be made but not to the extent that our service-provision becomes untenable.

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