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**NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING**

**FACING EXTINCTION AS A RESULT OF GOVERNMENT POLICE CUTS**

**A UNISON REPORT**

**NOVEMBER 2015**

1. **Introduction**

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are the backbone of neighbourhood policing. In March 2010 there were 16,900 PCSOs patrolling the beat and keeping communities in England and Wales safe. PCSOs made up 75 per cent of neighbourhood policing teams.

In March 2015, after five years of savage police cuts under the coalition government, PCSO numbers had dropped to 12,300 – a reduction of 27 per cent in the workforce. UNISON warned of the impact of these cuts in two reports, published in 2014 and prior to the election in May 2015.

But now things are set to get even worse, as the Conservative government gets ready to cut into the very backbone of British policing. Some forces are warning that the 2015 comprehensive spending review settlement for policing could remove PCSOs from their streets altogether. This possibility was well trailed before the 2015 election, but perhaps the voters didn’t really believe that a incoming Conservative government would really abolish neighbourhood policing. But that is what could shortly happen. Let no-one say that they were not warned.

1. **Synopsis**

This paper is split into the following sections:

* PCSO cuts 2010 to 2015
* Plans for future PCSO cuts

1. **PCSO cuts 2010 to 2015**

The table set out at Appendix A shows just how hard the PCSO workforce has already been cut. The only respite from these cuts was for the people of Wales, where the Welsh Assembly government made a positive pledge to its electorate to protect neighbourhood policing, and has actually increased the number of PCSOs on patrol.

The following trends emerge from the table:

* The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has been the most enthusiastic cutter of PCSOs, in his role as Police and Crime Commissioner for the capital. He is responsible for a 61 per cent fall in PCSO numbers in London.
* If we take out the increase in PCSO numbers in the four Welsh forces, the actual decline in PCSOs in England goes up to 30 per cent.
* This 30 per cent figure compares badly with the background cuts to Home Office grant of 20 per cent to forces between 2010 and 2015. The disparity in these figures shows that the cuts have been felt disproportionately in operational policing.

1. **Plans for future PCSO cuts**

As if the cuts set out above were not bad enough, since the May election, the government has been planning to cut policing over the course of this parliament. Estimates for the cuts range from 25-40 per cent. The Home Office, including policing, is not a protected department, so can expect to feel the full weight of the Chancellor’s austerity zeal.

Previously, the government has tried to claim: ‘What matters is how officers are deployed, not how many of them there are’ (Damian Green, Police Minister May 2014). Perhaps Damian Green could not envisage a scenario in which PCSOs would disappear altogether in some forces as a result of his government cuts. But this is now a real possibility. If a police force ends up with no PCSOs at all, considering how best to deploy won’t be an option, however imaginative a police minister somone might be.

So here is the grim reality for many police forces in relation to their PCSO workforces:

* **Bedfordshire Police** has announced plans to cut PCSO numbers from 108 to 46. UNISON Bedfordshire Police Branch Secretary Sarah Crowe has warned: “This unprecedented plan to drastically reduce police staff numbers in vital front line roles is a direct result of cuts in funding imposed by the government. UNISON believes the reductions in police staff will result in fewer police officers being available to help the public because they will be carrying out the work of police staff who have been made redundant.”
* **Essex Police** Force announced in October that it would be cutting its PCSO workforce from 258 to 60 by April 2016. UNISON Regional Organiser Tracey Sparkes said: “If these drastic cuts are implemented, it will be a devastating blow to the police staff who will lose their jobs, and to the communities they serve.

“These cuts are a genuine worry for public safety. PCSOs do a vital role in the community deterring crime and increasing public confidence. They are the public face of the police, walking the streets of every town in Essex. These services are what the people of Essex pay for through their taxes and they deserve to feel safe in their neighbourhood, and to have a local police station to visit when they need to.”

Essex Police Branch Secretary John Watts said: “This decision is based purely on cost alone and is not in the best interests of the people of Essex. Such severe cuts can only be detrimental to the safety of the public. This will undermine morale and the professional service our members provide.”

* **Lancashire Police** Chief Constable Steve Finnigan has warned: “I am going to explain to you the potential operational impact if these cuts go ahead. There is a significant sum of money to find, and these sums need to add up. I believe that we will have to lose all our neighbourhood policing teams – including community beat managers, police community support officers, early action workers and all supervision posts. We will become a reactive police force and have to move all front line resources into response policing.”

Maureen Le Marinel, UNISON Lancashire Police Branch Secretary, echoes the warning of the Chief Constable when she says “A failure to properly resource neighbourhood policing will take us back to the 1970s, with police in panda cars chasing crimes that have already happened. There would be less support for victims of crime, the public would feel more vulnerable, and our communities would be less safe. PCSOs are accessible front line staff and are there for people to turn to. They are trusted by their communities and we cannot afford to lose them.”

* **Leicestershire Police’s** actual PCSO establishment is 224. The force is planning to lose PCSO posts by natural wastage to take numbers down to 180.
* **Merseyside Police** The Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside Police Jane Kennedy has warned that all 364 of the force’s PCSOs face losing their jobs if the government’s cuts go ahead. Bill Burton, UNISON Merseyside Police Branch Secretary: “If we lose this resource I believe that the important element of neighbourhood policing will be a thing of the past. PCSOs are our connection to local communities and a valuable source of intelligence. Their role has changed substantially over the period since their inception in 2002. They carry out many vital duties, including victim support, single points of contact to children’s homes, supporting vulnerable people, engaging with youth programmes and other areas of work too numerous to list. With their loss, the force will not have the resources to deliver these services. This view is held by many police officers within our force who are worried about their ability to maintain even a semblance of neighbourhood policing into the future. I believe we will be left with a force that will only have the ability to be reactive, without any preventive capability.”
* **Metropolitan Police** has proposed axing some or all of its remaining PCSOs to save money. But a spokesman said no decision would be made until after the government's November spending review. In March, Met police Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe said "hard choices" had to be made about whether the number of PCSOs which has already dropped from 5,000 to 1,800 could be maintained.
* **Norfolk Police** plans to reduce its PCSOs from 175 to 120 by 2017. Neighbourhood policing would cease to exist, as PCSOs are its backbone.
* **Nottinghamshire Police** has cut 72 PCSO posts in 2015, which represented a 25 per cent reduction in the number of PCSOs patrolling the streets of this county. The UNISON Nottinghamshire Police Branch and UNISON East Midlands Region ran a high profile public and media campaign against the cuts. Over 21,000 people signed a petition to oppose the cuts, which have had a very detrimental impact on neighbourhood policing in the county.UNISON Branch Secretary Ashley Morley said “These cuts will leave most of Nottinghamshire with up to half their current PCSOs, which will have a huge detrimental effect on local community policing.”

### **South Yorkshire Police** 65 PCSO posts are at risk of redundancy in the next financial year as a result of government funding cuts.The force has declared every one of its PCSO jobs at risk following a recommendation to slash numbers.

### **South Yorkshire Police**currently has 285 PCSOs, who do the neighbourhood policing which was traditionally done by ‘beat bobbies’ and they have been protected from cuts during the last five years. But now force bosses are acting on a recommendation to reduce numbers by almost half, including the scrapping all of the supervisor roles, with 65 scheduled to go by the end of March and another 25 each year in the following three years.

UNISON which represents PCSOs, believes the same will happen with those staff, who have until now worked as small teams based in specific areas where they have formed relationships with the communities. UNISON Branch Secretary Ian Armitage said: “I am not being melodramatic when I say it would be the death of neighbourhood policing.”

He has spent years working as a PCSO in the Athersley district of Barnsley and if the recommendations are adopted it will mean the town’s quota of 54 PCSOs being reduced to 34, including the loss of four supervisors. (Yorkshire Post: 31.08.2015).

* **West Midlands** Major cuts are anticipated as part of the force’s planning for the likely cuts to come during this parliament. It is anticipated that a significant number of PCSOs will lose their jobs. Jill Harrison, UNISON West Midlands Police Branch Secretary has said: “Policing has been under attack with all parts of the service being hit. The government is allowing neighbourhood policing roles to be decimated, so much so that if these proposals go ahead by September 2016 the West Midlands may only have 349 PCSOs left, this is down from 550 currently. The slashing of this public facing community based role continues with a further reduction to 119 by 2020.” The branch believes that these cuts would significantly reduce the capability of the force with neighbourhood policing being restricted to high crime areas only in future.
* **West Yorkshire** - since late 2014 the force has stopped recruiting PCSOs. The intention of the force is to reduce current numbers to 323 full time equivalent posts by 31 March 2017 for police funded PCSOs, with negotiations underway with local authority and other PCSO funding partners as to their ability to continue to fund the remainder of the workforce. This will lead to neighbourhoods suffering, because it is simply not possible to offer the same level of service with 50 per cent fewer staff. The UNISON West Yorkshire Police Branch has commented: “Fundamentally we believe that neighbourhoods will suffer. You can’t continue with the same level of service with over 50 per cent fewer staff and something will have to give. Either the role changes, or we stop what we do now.”

**APPENDIX A (Official Home Office Police Strength Figures)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Police Force** | **PCSOs March 2010** | **PCSOs March 2015** | **Change from 2010 to 2015** | **% Change** |
| Avon & Somerset | 430 | 331 | -99 | -23.02% |
| Bedfordshire | 116 | 105 | -11 | -9.48% |
| Cambridgeshire | 209 | 148 | -61 | -29.19% |
| Cheshire | 237 | 225 | -12 | -5.06% |
| Cleveland | 193 | 123 | -70 | -36.27% |
| Cumbria | 111 | 86 | -25 | -22.52% |
| Derbyshire | 181 | 163 | -18 | -9.94% |
| Devon & Cornwall | 363 | 346 | -17 | -4.68% |
| Dorset | 164 | 163 | -1 | -0.61% |
| Durham | 175 | 157 | -18 | -10.29% |
| Dyfed-Powys | 83 | 147 | 64 | 77.11% |
| Essex | 445 | 262 | -183 | -41.12% |
| Gloucestershire | 148 | 128 | -20 | -13.51% |
| Greater Manchester | 842 | 804 | -38 | -4.51% |
| Gwent | 143 | 185 | 42 | 29.37% |
| Hampshire | 347 | 302 | -45 | -12.97% |
| Hertfordshire | 262 | 210 | -52 | -19.85% |
| Humberside | 317 | 273 | -44 | -13.88% |
| Kent | 387 | 352 | -35 | -9.04% |
| Lancashire | 428 | 331 | -97 | -22.66% |
| Leicestershire | 233 | 234 | 1 | 0.43% |
| Lincolnshire | 149 | 138 | -11 | -7.38% |
| Merseyside | 468 | 353 | -115 | -24.57% |
| Norfolk | 275 | 197 | -78 | -28.36% |
| North Wales | 157 | 243 | 86 | 54.78% |
| North Yorkshire | 198 | 196 | -2 | -1.01% |
| Northamptonshire | 164 | 122 | -42 | -25.61% |
| Northumbria | 438 | 211 | -227 | -51.83% |
| Nottinghamshire | 268 | 318 | 50 | 18.66% |
| South Wales | 335 | 411 | 76 | 22.69% |
| South Yorkshire | 328 | 314 | -14 | -4.27% |
| Staffordshire | 237 | 208 | -29 | -12.24% |
| Suffolk | 173 | 167 | -6 | -3.47% |
| Surrey | 224 | 123 | -101 | -45.09% |
| Sussex | 377 | 325 | -52 | -13.79% |
| Thames Valley | 500 | 459 | -41 | -8.20% |
| Warwickshire | 138 | 86 | -52 | -37.68% |
| West Mercia | 279 | 209 | -70 | -25.09% |
| West Midlands | 811 | 620 | -191 | -23.55% |
| West Yorkshire | 763 | 625 | -138 | -18.09% |
| Wiltshire | 126 | 129 | 3 | 2.38% |
| Total | 12,222 | 10,529 | -1,693 | -13.85% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Metropolitan Police | 4,645 | 1,787 | -2,858 | -61.53% |
| London, City of | 52 | 11 | -41 | -78.85% |
| Total | 16,919 | 12,327 | -4,592 | -27.14% |