

Initial Reaction to the Winsor Review – Humberside Police Federation

Whilst there's immense detail still to absorb and interpret, the first point to make is that this is an interim report and the recommendations, are just that, recommendations, which need to be scrutinised and debated before they can be implemented. Not all of them will survive the process and the Home Secretary needs to think very carefully about all impacts, including the likely negative impacts on the workforce, not just about the theoretical financial savings. The first duty of Government is to protect the public and the first tool at their disposal to do so, is the police service.

Contrary to the popular political mantra, the police are not the last unreformed bastion of the public service, we have been modernised almost beyond recognition in the last 30 years and the pace of reform has particularly accelerated in the last decade. However in a time when massive savings have to be made to redress the excesses of the banking sector, (which caused the crisis in the first place), it's the police service and moreover individual police officers, who are being hardest hit. Don't lose sight of the fact that as police officers, we are almost unique in not having the right to strike and therefore we have no redress, other than persuasion, to avert the most damaging attack on our pay and conditions in history.

Police officers don't get excessive wages, that's a myth and with the impact of a 2 year pay freeze, inflation running at 5% and rising, fuel and VAT higher, likely increases to our pension contributions, when we pay the highest rate in the public sector anyway, the loss of benefits recommended by Winsor, will devastate hard working members and their families. Police officers perform a difficult and dangerous job anyway and deserve proper recognition and reward to prevent regression to the bad old days of the late 1970's. Before Edmond Davies, the service had a huge recruitment and retention problem, which compromised the quality of recruits and therefore the quality of service to the public. The expectations of the public, as a result of massive performance improvements, has never been higher, hence the mix of making the service less attractive to the best recruits, whilst meeting the needs of the public, who are better informed about policing than they ever were, is a very tall order.

The Home Secretary said last week we can either have our terms and conditions and lose numbers on the streets, or vice versa, but we can't have both. This is a hollow pledge, when the Force budgets have already been cut by 20% and the truth of the matter is, she wants to cut back drastically on both. There will inevitably be a double whammy on morale and on workloads, with a loss of capacity likely to lead to an increased opportunity for crime and yes, you've guessed it, a higher workload still.

Police officers in years gone by, rarely have got into serious financial difficulty, but that is starting to happen with alarming and increasing frequency. The Winsor report needless to say isn't going to help and this isn't an issue the Government can just bury their heads in the sand on and pretend it's somebody else's problem.

A major concern additional to the explicit recommendations, is what the report doesn't say. It puts timescales on various changes, which Winsor must know can't be achieved, such as 31st August 2011 for the abolition of CRTP and SPP. The Home Secretary, if she wishes to accept the recommendations, has to submit them to PNB in time for a working party on the 6th April, before the statutory meeting to decide matters on the 14th April. Owing to the contentious nature for staff side, the likelihood is there will be a failure to agree registered at some point, before a Police Arbitration Tribunal can be convened and evidence gathered for both sides. Following the ruling of P.A.T. the Home Secretary would then have to start the legislative process, before Police Regulations can be changed. Less than 5 months from start to finish, is most unlikely, but that's not intransigence, that's called considering all the issues and making sure that properly conceived regulation results. However I fear that's not how Government will view it and they will be keen to take power away from PNB, by replacing it with a pay review body which makes it easier to override proper consultation.

In her first major speech as Home Secretary, at the Federation annual conference last May, Ms May promised to listen to the voice of the service. Her early track record on that front doesn't look promising, accusing the Federation of scaremongering when we've highlighted legitimate concerns, but now is the time she needs to pin back the lug holes and listen very carefully before she dismantles the fabric of the finest police service in the world.

In Humberside, we have a very good relationship with our Chief Officers and I've already spoken with Mr Griffin about the initial concerns, which he largely shares. I strongly encourage members to follow the updates on the website (www.humberpolfed.org) and on Twitter (@humberpolfed) and to share your concerns with us, so we can make your voices heard in the most effective way possible.

NB Please also note the Hutton review of public sector pensions is due to report tomorrow (10.3.11) and further updates will appear as soon as they're available

Thank you

Steve Garmston

Chairman

Humberside Police Federation

9.3.11