



Fighting austerity: care for our cops, protect our city



April 2019 · Unmesh Desai AM for City & East

Less Government Money, Fewer Officers

By 2023 the Metropolitan Police Service will have been forced to make £1 billion of savings [Mayor of London]. This follows almost a decade of austerity, pursued by the Government. These cuts come at a time when the population of London has continued to grow, meaning there are more people for our police service to keep safe with less resources to do so.



Unmesh Desai AM on the beat with local police officers, second from right

Police spending per head in London has fallen faster in the Metropolitan Police Service than in any other police service. In 2012/13, £423 was spent per head of population. By 2016/17 this had fallen to £337 [Mayor of London].

At every turn resources are stretched. Crime, and the complexity of it, is rising in London and across the United Kingdom. More crimes are committed online resulting in a rise in digital evidence to gather. There has been an increase in reporting of historic sexual offences, the threat of terrorism has grown and there is an increasing demand on police officers dealing with people with mental health problems. There is also a rise in hidden crimes, such as modern-day slavery offences.

On top of this, the Met faces a unique set of challenges as a direct consequence of serving a capital city. The Met protects Parliament and the monarchy, polices major football matches and has responsibility for ensuring that demonstrations pass peacefully and safely. They provide

diplomatic protection, facilitate state visits and much more. Due to these additional burdens on the Met, the National and International Capital Cities Grant (NICC) is provided by central Government. In 2015, the Home Office's Executive Scrutiny Panel concluded that the Met should receive £281.1million. However, the Met received just £185.3m [London Assembly]. This means that London's police service is underfunded by £95 million a year and ordinary Londoners are left to pick up the tab.

The consequence of these cuts means that officer numbers have fallen. In March 2010, the Met had 33,367 officers policing a population of just over eight million people. By December 2018 this had fallen to 29,693 officers for a population that had grown to 8.8 million [Office for National Statistics].

There are worrying signs that the growing stress and strains of the job has taken a toll on the morale and well-being of officers.

Rising Caseloads and Cancelled Rest Days

Due to the decline in police numbers, officers are having to take on more work than they should. It is clear that having police officers carry a higher than recommended number of cases is something which should concern us all. The rise in online crime and distressing images, such as child pornography, places an immense level of stress on officers, and if the level of work which is being given to officers is almost double the amount which has been deemed reasonable, this poses a risk to their wellbeing. Moreover, over-worked officers are more likely to miss investigative opportunities which may result in offenders escaping justice. There could be serious implications for both the safety of Londoners and the wellbeing of police officers.

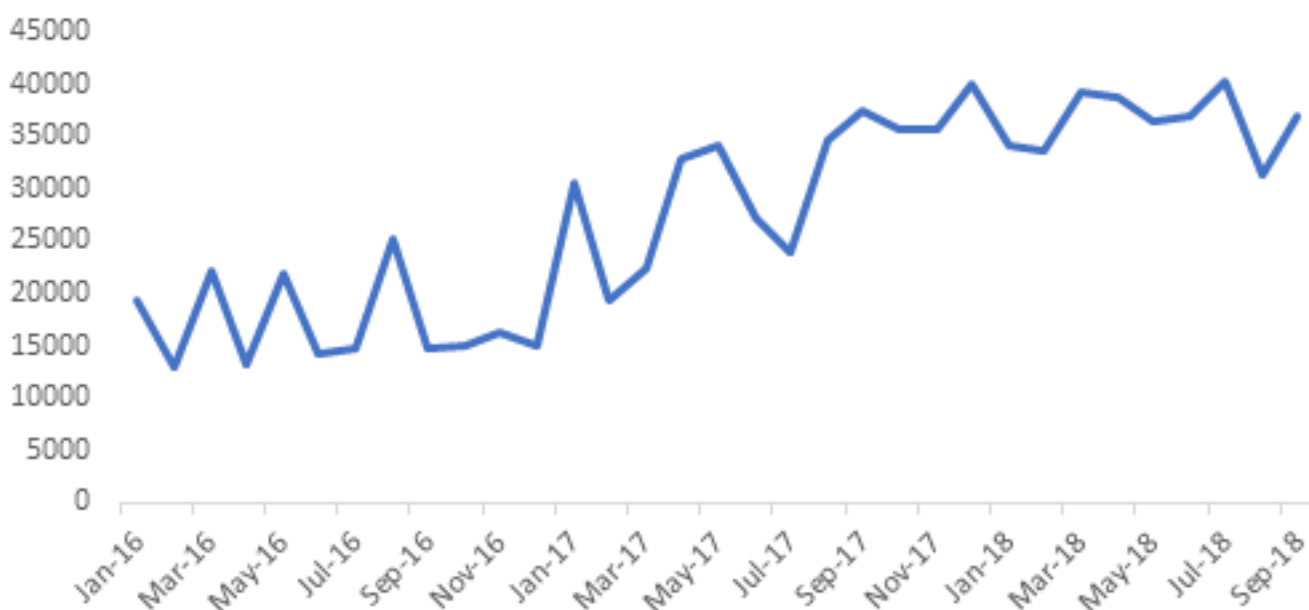
The lack of police also means that those police officers we do have are increasingly asked to work longer days and having their rest days cancelled. In the immediate aftermath of serious incidents such as a terrorist attack or knife crime incident, we often hear stories of more police officers being placed into key locations to help keep the peace. However, it is important to bear in mind that these are not newly hired police officers. Rather, they are

often long-serving police officers who are having their shifts extended or their rest-days cancelled to keep the public safe. As part of the research I have undertaken for this report, I have found that cancelled rest days are becoming more common as the Met struggle to cope with the demands being placed on them.

Between January and September 2018, 328,010 rest days allocated to Metropolitan Police officers were cancelled. In 2016, the total number of cancelled rest days was 214,929 and in 2017 the total number of cancelled rest days was 375,012 [Mayor's Question Time].

We expect our police officers to protect the public by being alert at all times to signs of danger and to run towards incidents that most of us would run away from. Cancelled rest days mean police officers don't have the time to rest, placing a massive strain on their wellbeing. There are worrying signs that the level of cancelled rest days is becoming a 'new normal' as police budgets shrink. This should not be allowed to happen. We need the resources to hire more police officers so that the demands of the job are manageable and realistic.

Figure 4 - Cancelled Rest Days Jan 2016 - September 2018



Stress and long-term leave

In London, 73% of officers said there weren't enough officers to manage the demands faced by their team or unit and 62% of respondees said their workload was either too high or much too high [Police Federation].

This may explain why the number of voluntary police officer resignations has grown at a staggering rate since 2010. Only 294 officers undertook voluntary redundancy in 2010 but by 2017 that figure more than doubled to 653. In total, 4,386 police officers have voluntarily resigned from the Met since 2010 [Mayor's Question Time].

The Met have made some progress in offering appropriate support to police officers and staff. A Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed and the organisation has partnered with Optima Health to deliver wellbeing support and counselling. However, an end to austerity policies and adequately funding the Met to enable an increase in police officer numbers is required to support existing officers' with their health and wellbeing.

What needs to happen

The Mayor is doing everything he can to protect the number of frontline police officers on London's streets by investing £234m extra in the Met Police in the coming year. London Assembly Members are also putting pressure on the Government to give the police the resources that it needs. In February 2019, the London Assembly unanimously passed a motion which I proposed calling on the Government to give the Met a fair deal when it comes to police funding, in addition to motions on fair police pay and pensions.

The Metropolitan Police Service must be properly funded so that it has the number of officers required to look after a city of 8.8 million people. They must have manageable caseloads. This will not happen if the Government persists with austerity policies that damage our most important public services. These must be reversed, and that must happen immediately.

Policing London During Austerity

£1 billion

The total amount of savings the Met need to make by 2023

Over 375,000

Cancelled rest days for officers in 2017

£234 million

Being invested in policing by the Mayor of London

LONDON
ASSEMBLY
LABOUR

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