



WHO PAYS THE PIPER?

Financing major investigations: now and the future

The recovery of human remains from the house in Cromwell Street, Gloucester was the start of a complex and demanding investigation. Whilst the media concentrated on the more visible aspects of the case, behind the scenes there was equally important and demanding work being undertaken to provide the overall support management of the investigation and the accompanying infra-structure. This support enabled the investigators to investigate, without having to be concerned about, for example, where the next load of reinforcing concrete was coming from.

A critical element of this supporting infra-structure was the financial management. It is the responsibility of police management to attempt to predict the unpredictable and have a financial contingency to respond. Unfortunately, if the contingency is too small, chief constables are criticised for a lack of foresight, and if part of the contingency remains unspent at the end of the financial year, the chief constable is criticised for not fully funding his services. Even if it was possible to predict the number of

major incidents and investigations in a year, the difficulty of predicting the exact expenditure would remain, because of the unique nature of these investigations.

In April 1995, new funding arrangements will apply to police forces when budgets will be cash limited. The new formula has yet to be decided, but the current work is over reliant on inadequate data and a limited understanding of the complexities of police work and the unpredictable nature of the demands. For example, research has tended to show the connections between factors in the urban environment which seem to be associated with the amount of recorded crime, but because rural deprivation and its consequential demand on police services has not been so adequately researched, there is an artificial under estimation of resources required in the rural environment. There is a serious danger of underfunding predominantly rural police forces which would exacerbate the difficulties of responding to an investigation of the size of Cromwell Street.

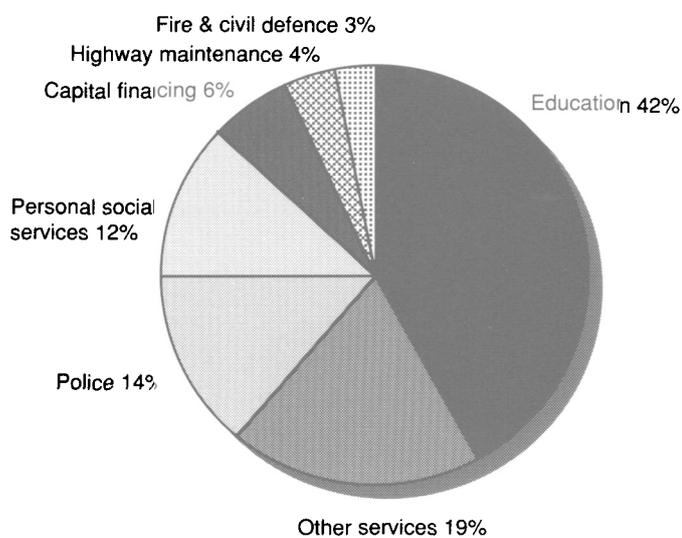
A further new element in the financial planning equation is the introduction of the Policing Plan. From April 1995, each police authority is required by law, to publish a policing plan for its area. The draft will have been prepared by the chief

constable, but the Home Office apparently sees the plan as the way in which it can make the police authority do its job. The equal partnership of the existing tripartite structure seems to be developing into central control and a hierarchical relationship. Of equal concern is the extent to which the policing plan is attempting to make the police authority responsible for the detailed allocation of resources. Home Office Circular No. 27/1994: Policing Plans, encourages police authorities to develop plans which give details of the allocation of resources involved in police operations. This proposal seems to fly in the face of the clear operational independence of chief constables and also creates a dangerous illusion because the courts have concluded that chief constables cannot have their responsibilities to make operational decisions constrained by financial controls.

Paradoxically, the notion of police reforms promoted by the government could, in the future, potentially exacerbate the financial difficulties caused by an investigation of the scale and complexity of Cromwell Street.

A J P Butler is Chief Constable of the Gloucestershire Constabulary.

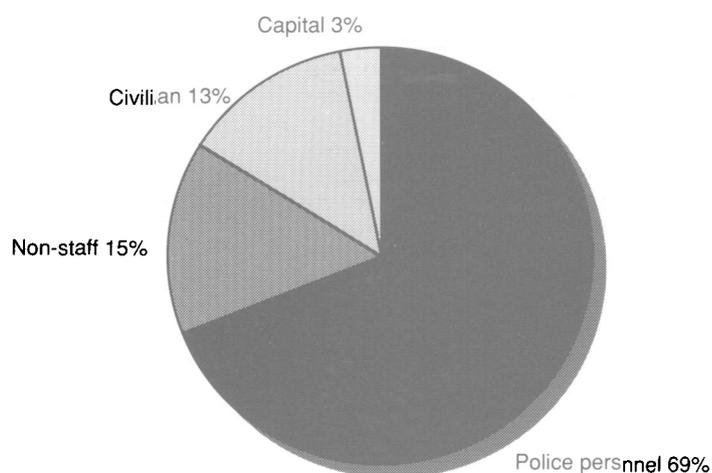
Total Standard Spending 1993/94 (local authority)



Total expenditure £40.6 billion

Source: DOE Tables 1993/94 (England including London)

Expenditure on the police 1993/94



Total gross expenditure £6.09 billion

Source: CIPFA Police Statistics 1993/94 Estimates (England and Wales including London)